PARSHAS TOLDOS

Titen Emes L'Yaakov

How do we know what Hashem wants of us?

Rabbi Yossi Michalowicz

Based on Rav Shimshon Pinkus, *Tiferes Shimshon* on Bereishis, Toldos pp. 305–311 and Vayigash pp. 425–427.

PART 01

What do we know about Yaakov?

What do we know about Yaakov Avinu? If I had to give you one word, it would be *emes*. *Titein emes l'Yaakov*. "You will grant truth to Yaakov." That's what the Navi singles out about him.

Look at Source 3 for the words of the Navi.

> **SOURCE 3 · The promise of emes**
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> **Michah 7:20**
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> תתן אמת ליעקב חסד לאברהם אשר נשבעת לאבתינו מימי קדם
>
> *You will grant truth to Yaakov and kindness to Avraham, as You swore to our fathers in days of old.*

If he's such a truthful person, let's take a look. Esav comes in expecting a brachah from his father and finds out that Yaakov has already received it. Listen to what Esav says.

Listen to Esav's words in Source 2.

> **SOURCE 2 · Esav's accusation**
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> **Bereishis 27:36**
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> ויאמר הכי קרא שמו יעקב ויעקבני זה פעמים את בכרתי לקח והנה עתה לקח ברכתי ויאמר הלא אצלת לי ברכה
>
> *He said, "Is that why he was called Yaakov? He has outmaneuvered me these two times. He took my birthright, and now he has taken my blessing." And he said, "Haven't you kept a blessing for me?"*

Nebach, Esav. His brother took the birthright, and now his brother has walked into his father's room and taken the brachah. If this were the story you heard, wouldn't you say Esav has a point? In Esav's eyes, Yaakov is a liar. How can this be the man the Navi singles out for emes?

Look at the echo of Yaakov's name in Source 4.

SOURCE 4 · The same root in a warning about deception

Yirmiyahu 9:3 in Hebrew numbering (9:4 in many English editions)

איש מרעהו השמרו ועל כל אח אל תבטחו כי כל אח עקוב יעקב וכל רע רכיל יהלך

Each of you, beware of your neighbor, and put your trust in no brother. For every brother will surely outmaneuver you, and every neighbor will go about carrying tales.

Yirmiyahu's words *akov yaakov*, "he will surely outmaneuver," echo Yaakov's name. Esav makes the same play with *vaya'akveini*, "he outmaneuvered me." Keep the force of that accusation in mind as we hear the cases.

Rachel's question

Listen to Rachel's question in Source 5.

SOURCE 5 · May a tzaddik use deception?

Bereishis 29:12

Yaakov told Rachel that he was her father's kinsman and that he was Rivkah's son. She ran and told her father.

Megillah 13b · The question

Rachel tells Yaakov that Lavan is a deceiver. Yaakov says he knows how to deal with him. Rachel asks him, "Are tzaddikim permitted to use deception?"

Let Rachel's question hang. If emes is Yaakov's middah, what is he saying he is prepared to do?

The bowl and the birthright

Go back to the first thing Esav complains about. He comes in exhausted from the field and asks for food. What does Yaakov ask in return?

Look at Source 6 for the sale of the birthright.

SOURCE 6 · The sale of the birthright

Bereishis 25:29–34

29. Yaakov was cooking stew when Esav came in from the field, exhausted. 30. Esav said to Yaakov, “Let me gulp down some of that red, red stuff, for I am exhausted.” That is why he was called Edom.

31. Yaakov said, “Sell me your birthright as of this day.” 32. Esav said, “Look, I am going to die, so what use is the birthright to me?” 33. Yaakov said, “Swear to me as of this day.” He swore to him and sold his birthright to Yaakov. 34. Yaakov gave Esav bread and lentil stew. He ate, drank, rose, and went away. Esav treated the birthright with contempt.

Your brother comes in exhausted and says, ‘I’m going to die.’ What would you do? You’d give him something to eat. But Yaakov says, ‘Sell me your birthright.’ And before he gives him the food, he makes him swear. That is shrewd. But how honest is it to press someone into a sale when he feels he’s about to die? If you watched this happen to your own brother, wouldn’t you say, ‘That’s a terrible thing to do’?

In Yitzchak’s tent

Now look at the second thing Esav complains about. Rivkah takes Esav’s choice garments and puts them on Yaakov. Yaakov walks into Yitzchak’s room. His father asks him who he is.

Look at Source 7 for Yaakov’s words.

SOURCE 7 · What Yaakov actually said

Bereishis 27:19

ויאמר יעקב אל אביו אנכי עשו בכרך עשיתי כאשר דברת אלי קום נא שבה ואכלה מצידי בעבור תברכני נפשך

Yaakov said to his father, “I am Esav your firstborn. I have done as you told me. Please get up, sit, and eat of my game, so that your soul may bless me.”

Yitzchak asked who had come in. If your father asked who you were and you answered with your brother’s name, what would you call that? How could Yaakov say those words?

The morning after the wedding

Look at Source 8 for leah turns the question around.

> **SOURCE 8 · Leah turns the question around**
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> **Bereishis 29:23–25**
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> *23. In the evening Lavan took Leah his daughter and brought her to Yaakov, and he came to her. 24. Lavan gave his maidservant Zilpah to Leah his daughter as a maidservant. 25. In the morning, there she was, Leah. He said to Lavan, "What have you done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I worked for you? Why did you deceive me?"*
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> **Bereishis Rabbah 70:19**
>
> *All that night he called her Rachel, and she answered him. In the morning, there she was, Leah. He said to her, "You deceiver, daughter of a deceiver! Didn't I call you Rachel all night, and you answered me?" She said to him, "Is there a teacher without students? Didn't your father call you Esav, and you answered him?"*

In the Chumash, Yaakov asks Lavan, "Why did you deceive me?" Now listen to what Leah says in the Midrash. In effect, she says, "You called me Rachel and I answered. Your father called you Esav and you answered. ***Where do you think I learned it?***"

> **In Leah's eyes, Yaakov himself had lied. That's what makes her answer sting. The man we call the man of emes is hearing that charge from Leah, in his own home.**

Lavan's flocks

Yaakov's wages will be animals with particular markings. An animal he keeps that falls outside the agreement counts as stolen. Listen to what happens after they make the deal.

Look at Source 9 for the agreement and the rods.

> **SOURCE 9 · The agreement and the rods**
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> **Bereishis 30:31–43**
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> *31. Lavan asked, "What shall I give you?" Yaakov said, "Give me nothing. If you will do this for me, I will again pasture and guard your flock."*
>
> *32. Yaakov asks to go through the flock and remove the speckled and spotted animals, dark sheep, and spotted or speckled goats. That will be his wage.*
>
> *33. When Lavan inspects his wages, any goat that is neither speckled nor spotted and any sheep that is not dark will count as stolen. 34. Lavan says, "Agreed. Let it be as you say."*

35. That day Lavan removed the striped and spotted he-goats and all the speckled and spotted she-goats, everything with white on it, and all the dark sheep. He put them in the care of his sons.

36. He set a three days' journey between himself and Yaakov. Yaakov tended the rest of Lavan's flock.

37. Yaakov took fresh rods of poplar, almond, and plane, and peeled white stripes in them, exposing the white on the rods. 38. He set the peeled rods in the channels, in the watering troughs where the flocks came to drink, in front of the flocks. The animals mated when they came to drink. 39. The flocks mated by the rods and gave birth to striped, speckled, and spotted young.

40. Yaakov separated the lambs and faced the flock toward the striped and dark animals in Lavan's flock. He kept his own herds apart and did not mix them with Lavan's flock. 41. When the stronger animals mated, Yaakov placed the rods in the channels before their eyes so they would mate by the rods. 42. When the animals were weak, he did not put them there. The weak ones went to Lavan and the strong ones to Yaakov. 43. The man prospered greatly. He had abundant flocks, maidservants and servants, camels and donkeys.

If you saw Yaakov put those rods in front of the flock, what would you think he was doing? The weaker animals go to Lavan and the stronger ones to Yaakov. How does that look from Lavan's side?

Leaving without a word

Look at Source 10 for yaakov leaves without telling Lavan.

SOURCE 10 · Yaakov leaves without telling Lavan

Bereishis 31:20–21

Yaakov stole the heart of Lavan the Aramean by failing to tell him that he was fleeing. He fled with all he had, crossed the river, and set his face toward the hill country of Gilad.

Why leave in secret? The Torah itself calls it stealing Lavan's heart. How do we understand that from the man of emes?

The road to Seir

Look at Source 12 for the road Yaakov said he would take.

SOURCE 12 · The road Yaakov said he would take

Bereishis 33:12–17

12. Esav said, “Let us set out and go, and I will go alongside you.” 13. Yaakov said to him, “My lord knows that the children are tender and that I have nursing sheep and cattle to care for. If they are driven hard for one day, all the flocks will die. 14. Please let my lord go ahead of his servant. I will move on slowly, at the pace of the livestock before me and the pace of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir.”

15. Esav said, “Let me leave with you some of the people who are with me.” Yaakov said, “What need is there for that? Let me find favor in my lord’s eyes.” 16. Esav returned that day on his way to Seir. 17. Yaakov went to Sukkos. He built himself a house and made shelters for his livestock. That is why the place was called Sukkos.

Esav goes to Seir. Yaakov goes to Sukkos. But he told Esav, “Until I come to you in Seir.” Did Yaakov ever keep his word? Let’s hold that question until the end.

Shechem

From Sukkos, Yaakov goes on to Shechem. After Shechem violates Dinah, the brothers tell him and his father that the families can join only if the men of the city are circumcised. Then comes the third day.

Look at Source 11 for what the brothers did and what Yaakov said.

SOURCE 11 · What the brothers did and what Yaakov said

Bereishis 34:13–17, 25–31

13. Yaakov’s sons answered Shechem and his father Chamor with guile. They spoke that way because he had defiled their sister Dinah.

14. They said, “We cannot do such a thing, to give our sister to an uncircumcised man, for that would be a disgrace to us. 15. Only on this condition will we agree to you: that you become like us by circumcising every male among you. 16. Then we will give you our daughters and take your daughters for ourselves. We will live with you and become one people. 17. But if you do not listen to us and become circumcised, we will take our daughter and go.”

25. On the third day, while the men were in pain, two of Yaakov’s sons, Shimon and Levi, Dinah’s brothers, each took his sword. They came upon the unsuspecting city and killed every male. 26. They killed Chamor and his son Shechem by the sword, took Dinah out of Shechem’s house, and left. 27. Yaakov’s sons came upon the slain and plundered the city because their sister had been defiled.

28. They took their sheep, cattle, and donkeys, and whatever was in the city and in the field. 29. They carried off all their wealth, all their children, and their wives, and plundered everything in the houses. 30. Yaakov said to Shimon and Levi, "You have brought trouble upon me by making me odious to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanite and the Perizzite. My numbers are few. If they gather against me and attack me, I and my household will be destroyed." 31. They said, "Should he treat our sister like a prostitute?"

Bereishis 49:5–7

5. Shimon and Levi are brothers. Their weapons are instruments of violence. 6. Let my soul enter no council of theirs. Let my honor join no assembly of theirs. For in their anger they killed men, and at their pleasure they hamstrung an ox. 7. Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their fury, for it is harsh. I will divide them in Yaakov and scatter them in Yisrael.

Put yourself in his sons' place. You've just heard your father tell Esav he'll come to Seir and then take a different road. You know how he got the brachah from Yitzchak and how he slipped away from Lavan. Now you speak with guile at Shechem, and he rebukes you. You could ask him, "If you can do it, what's wrong when we do it?" Where does Yaakov draw the line?

PART 02

What you see and what you trust

To hear these questions properly, start with two phrases we say every day. After Shema in the morning we say *Emes v'yatziv*, true and firm. After Shema at night we say *Emes ve'emunah*, true and trustworthy.

Look at Source 13 for the Gemara's morning and evening distinction.

SOURCE 13 · Morning and night after Shema

Berachos 12a

Anyone who does not say "Emes v'yatziv" in the morning and "Emes ve'emunah" in the evening has not fulfilled his obligation, as it is said, "To declare Your kindness in the morning and Your faithfulness at night."

Tehillim 92:3

להגיד בבקר חסדך ואמונתך בלילות

To declare Your kindness in the morning and Your faithfulness at night.

Picture the same people at the same sea, a little while apart. Before the sea opens, the Egyptians are behind them and the water is in front of them. Moshe says that Hashem will fight for them, and Hashem tells them to go forward. The water is still there. ***They have Hashem's word to go on***, so they go forward while the way through is still hidden. That is *Emes ve'emunah*.

Look at Source 14 for before and after the sea opens.

> **SOURCE 14 · Before and after the sea opens**
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> **Shemos 14:13–16**
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> *13. Moshe said to the people, "Do not fear. Stand firm and see the deliverance Hashem will perform for you today. For the Egyptians you have seen today, you will never see again. 14. Hashem will fight for you, and you shall be silent."*
>
> *15. Hashem said to Moshe, "Why do you cry out to Me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward. 16. And you, raise your staff, stretch out your hand over the sea, and split it. The children of Israel will go into the sea on dry ground."*
>
> **Shemos 14:30–31**
>
> *30. On that day Hashem saved Israel from the hand of Egypt, and Israel saw Egypt dead on the shore of the sea. 31. Israel saw the mighty hand that Hashem had wielded against Egypt. The people feared Hashem and believed in Hashem and in Moshe His servant.*

On the other shore, the Torah says they saw two things. They saw the Egyptians defeated, and they saw the mighty hand of Hashem in their rescue. That is *Emes v'yatziv*. ***Hashem's word was already true on the first shore.*** On the second shore they could see that truth for themselves.

Look at Source 15 for the Gemara's picture of this world as night.

> **SOURCE 15 · This world resembles night**
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> **Tehillim 104:20 and Bava Metzia 83b**
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> *"You bring darkness, and it becomes night. In it all the beasts of the forest stir." Rabbi Zeira expounded: "You bring darkness, and it becomes night" refers to this world, which is like night. "In it all the beasts of the forest stir" refers to the wicked in this world, who are like the beasts of the forest.*

That's what Chazal mean by night. We can see what happened and still be in the dark about where it is leading or how Hashem's hand is at work in it. ***We can know what Torah asks of us now while the outcome is still hidden.***

That's emunah in practice. ***Hashem's word is true in the dark***, and we can live by it before we see how things turn out. Even when we can't see why things are unfolding this way, we can trust Hashem's wisdom in how He is guiding

them. Keep that in mind when we go back to Yaakov. Other people could see what he did. We still have to ask what Hashem was asking of him.

The Rambam takes us one step deeper. We look around and the world seems to be there on its own. What gives it its existence?

Look at Source 16 for the truth of Hashem's existence.

> **SOURCE 16 · The truth of Hashem's existence**
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> **Rambam, Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 1:1–4**
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> *1. The foundation of foundations and the pillar of wisdoms is to know that there is a First Being who brings every existing thing into existence. All beings in heaven and on earth and between them exist only by virtue of the truth of His existence.*
>
> *2. If it were supposed that He does not exist, no other thing could exist. 3. If it were supposed that none of the beings besides Him existed, He alone would still exist and would not cease to be with their disappearance. All beings need Him, and He, blessed is He, needs none of them. The truth of His existence is therefore unlike that of any one of them.*
>
> *4. This is what the prophet says, "Hashem God is truth." He alone is truth, and nothing else has truth like His truth. This is what the Torah says, "There is nothing else besides Him," meaning that there is no true existence apart from Him that is like His.*

A person asks, "Do I really exist?" Yes. You really exist because Hashem wills you to exist. The ceiling, the floor, the light, space and time, you and me. All of it depends on Him.

Rav Pincus gives a mashal. A driver in an unfamiliar neighborhood lowers his window a little and asks a stranger who looks intimidating how to get to a certain street. The stranger tells him to go straight and turn right at the second street. The driver follows those directions without a second thought. Why does he trust him?

Rav Pincus says that human beings naturally have an appreciation for truth. Our neshamah comes from Hashem, and Hashem is emes. When we act in accordance with His will, we act in line with what is real.

That instinct does not mean we always see the world clearly. Listen to what Rav Yosef tells his father when he comes back.

Look at Source 17 for a world seen clearly.

SOURCE 17 · A world seen clearly

Pesachim 50a · Rav Yosef son of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi

Rav Yosef son of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi fell ill and recovered. When he returned, his father asked him, "What did you see?" He answered, "I saw an upside-down world. Those who are above were below, and those who are below were above." He said to him, "My son, you saw a clear world." He asked, "And where are we?" He answered, "Just as we are here, so we are there."

He said, "I heard them saying, 'Fortunate is the one who comes here with his learning in his hand.' I also heard them saying that no creature can stand in the place of those put to death by the authorities."

What looked upside down to Rav Yosef was the clear world to his father. Now think about Yaakov. Everybody can see him walk into Yitzchak's room wearing Esav's clothes. But how did Yaakov learn to see what was really at stake? The Torah calls him an *ish tam, yoshev ohalim*, a wholehearted man who dwelled in the tents of Torah. That's where he learned to judge what he saw.

Look at Source 18 for ish tam and tamim tihyeh.

SOURCE 18 · Ish tam and tamim tihyeh

Rashi on Bereishis 25:27

"A wholehearted man." He was not expert in all these things. What was in his heart was in his mouth. A person who is unskilled in deceiving is called tam. "Dwelling in tents." The tent of Shem and the tent of Ever.

Devarim 18:9–14

תמים תהיה עם ה׳ אלהיך

9. When you enter the land that Hashem your God is giving you, do not learn to act according to the abominations of those nations. 10. There shall not be found among you anyone who passes his son or daughter through fire, a diviner, a soothsayer, an augur, a sorcerer, 11. a charmer, one who consults a ghost or a familiar spirit, or one who inquires of the dead.

12. Whoever does these things is an abomination to Hashem, and because of these abominations Hashem your God is dispossessing them before you. 13. Be wholehearted with Hashem your God. 14. For these nations that you are dispossessing listen to soothsayers and diviners. As for you, Hashem your God has assigned you no such thing.

Rashi on Devarim 18:13

Walk with Him wholeheartedly, put your hope in Him, and do not probe the future. Whatever comes upon you, accept wholeheartedly. Then you will be with Him and be His portion.

Rashi gives us two aspects of temimus. The first is that what is in Yaakov's heart is in his mouth.

Now our opening question is sharper. How does a man whose heart and mouth agree come to say, "I am Esav, your firstborn"?

The second aspect of temimus is how Yaakov walks with Hashem when he can't see what's coming. ***He can take the next step before he knows where it will lead.*** He has Hashem's word to go on.

The bone that endures

There is a familiar teaching about Melaveh Malka. The luz derives nourishment only from that meal, and from it the body will be rebuilt at *techiyas hameisim*. The Zohar gives this bone a surprising name, Besuel the deceiver.

Look at Source 19 for the bone from which the body is rebuilt.

> **SOURCE 19 · The bone from which the body is rebuilt**
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> **Zohar, Midrash HaNe'elam, Toldos 137a**
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> *Rav Huna said, "That is not so. I was in the towns by the sea, and I heard them call that bone of the spine, the one that remains in the grave out of the entire body, 'Besuel the deceiver.' I asked about it. They said it was like the head of the serpent, which is a deceiver, and that bone is more deceptive than all the other bones."*
>
> *For Rabbi Shimon taught, "Why does that bone endure more than all the other bones? Because it is a deceiver and does not take in the taste of human food as the other bones do. Therefore it is stronger than all the bones and will be the root from which the body is rebuilt." This is what is written, "The daughter of Besuel the Aramean." Rabbi Shimon taught that it is a deceiver and has always been a deceiver, like the evil inclination, which is a deceiver. This is what is written, "The daughter of Besuel the Aramean," the deceiving bone.*

Look at Source 20 for what overeating does.

> **SOURCE 20 · What overeating does**
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> **Rambam, Hilchos De'os 4:15**
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> *Overeating is like poison to anyone's body and is the principal cause of all illnesses. Most illnesses that come upon a person come either from harmful foods or because he fills his stomach and eats excessively, even of good foods. This is what Shlomo said in his wisdom, "One who guards his mouth and tongue guards his soul from troubles" (Mishlei 21:23). That is, he guards his mouth from harmful food or from eating to satiety, and his tongue from speaking anything other than what he needs.*

A man was put on a diet and complained, “You could die eating so little!” His doctor turned the joke back on him. “From the way you’ve been eating, I’m more worried about the other direction.”

You would think the luz would be the first bone to wear away. It lives on Melaveh Malka and fasts from Shabbos to Shabbos. In the mashal, the very bone you expected to disappear is the one that endures.

What the duck sees

Imagine a farm where the farmer raises all kinds of animals. In one place there are ducks. He feeds them a great deal. Meanwhile, there are a horse and a cow that are getting very little to eat.

They look at each other, and the duck says proudly, “My own strength and the might of my hand have brought me all this success. Look how much food I get. And you, the horse and the cow, are practically starving!”

The duck can see exactly how much food he’s getting. What he can’t see is what the farmer is raising him for. The farmer is fattening the ducks for slaughter. There is no reason to fatten the horse and the cow.

The duck sees the food and draws the wrong conclusion. That’s where we’re standing with Yaakov. We hear him say “I am Esav” and think we know the whole story. Now look at the two pictures. Yaakov can say, “I am Yaakov.” And he can say, “I am Esav,” if that is what Hashem wants him to say. For Yaakov, either can be emes. What matters is what Hashem wants him to say in that moment. But that brings us to a harder question.

> **When I have something to gain, how do I know whether I’m doing what Hashem wants or using His name to justify what I want?**

PART 03

Why did Yaakov say Shema?

Think of a hard conversation you keep putting off. You tell yourself, “I’m doing it for shalom.” Maybe you are. ***Whose discomfort are you trying to spare?*** We can be just as sure we know what somebody else felt. Let’s see what happens when we try to explain Yaakov.

Start with Source 21. Watch what each one does at the reunion.

After all those years, Yosef falls on his father’s neck and cries. Rashi says Yaakov is saying Shema. Put yourself there. ***Why doesn’t Yaakov hug his son back?*** Why say Shema at the very moment they’re finally together?

The answer we usually hear

Imagine that for twenty-two years you thought your son was gone. Then you hear he's alive. Now he's standing right in front of you. What would you do? You'd put your arms around him. You might hardly be able to say a word.

Here's the familiar answer from the baalei avodah. All those years of longing come rushing back as love and joy. ***At the very height of that joy***, Yaakov says *Hashem Echad*. He takes the love he feels for Yosef and gives it over to Hashem. You can understand why people love that answer. Imagine being able, in a moment that powerful, to turn everything you feel into ahavas Hashem.

Reb Chaim's objection

Now look at Reb Chaim in Source 22.

When that answer was brought to Reb Chaim, he objected. The way it's told in *Tiferes Shimshon*, he said, "***You're dressing Yaakov Avinu in your own clothes.***" What does that mean? For you, the first thing would be the rush of love for your son. Then you'd have to stop and ask yourself how to direct that feeling toward Hashem. For you that would be a tremendous act of avodah. What gives you the right to assume that's what went on inside Yaakov?

Think about what the answer assumes. It assumes that Yaakov first felt a love for Yosef on its own and then had to hand that love over to Hashem. Reb Chaim asks, can you speak that way about the Avos? Their love for their children already came out of their love of Hashem. Yaakov loved Yosef deeply. Reb Chaim is asking where that love began.

Why Yaakov was obligated right then

Source 23 gives you the two pieces of Reb Chaim's answer.

So why did he say Shema then? And if it was time for Shema, why was Yosef free to embrace him? Reb Chaim starts with the trip itself. Hashem tells Yaakov, "Do not fear going down to Egypt." That sounds like reassurance. But the Haggadah calls the descent *anus al pi hadibbur*, compelled by Hashem's word. Yaakov was on the road to fulfill a mitzvah.

The Gemara in Sukkah reads the words "when you go on the way" in Shema. On your own journey you're obligated. When you're occupied with a mitzvah, you're exempt from another mitzvah. As soon as Yaakov reached the border of Egypt, his mission was complete and ***he was obligated to say Shema right then.*** And Yosef? He had been obligated at the usual time and had already said it. One din answers both sides of the scene.

Now listen to the Maharal

Now turn to the Gur Aryeh in Source 24.

The Maharal first gives a halachic answer of his own. Yosef was also saying Shema and could interrupt out of reverence for his father. Yaakov continued. The Maharal also asks how Chazal knew Yaakov was saying Shema specifically. He could have been davening. What was it about that moment that called for *Shema*?

Listen to the Maharal's words. "When Yaakov came and saw his son Yosef as a king, love and awe of Hashem entered his heart." After years of grief, Yaakov sees his son alive and ruling Egypt. He sees Hashem's goodness in what had happened to them. The Maharal says this is what chassidim do when good comes to them. That very good draws them closer to Hashem. So what does Yaakov say? The words that declare Hashem's kingship and speak of loving Him. That's why it was Shema, and why it was Yaakov, the father who had lived through that grief.

> **Now what is Reb Chaim doing here? He tells the person who brought him the familiar answer, "You're dressing Yaakov Avinu in your own clothes." But open the Gur Aryeh and you find the Maharal also explaining Yaakov's Shema through what happened in his heart. There's a difference in the wording. The Maharal says the sight of Yosef awakened love of Hashem itself. Still, how does the Maharal know what happened inside Yaakov? Why would Reb Chaim's objection apply when we read Yaakov that way and, as Rav Pinkus suggests, leave room for the Maharal to do it?**

What the Maharal could trust

Rav Pinkus answers in Source 25. Look especially at the third paragraph on page 427.

Hashem gave us the Torah, and Hashem created human nature. Mishlei says Hashem founded the earth with wisdom. Tehillim says the heavens were made by His word. If you really know a part of human nature as Hashem made it, that too comes from His word. Rav Pinkus says it can carry the weight of a pasuk in Chumash. A din Torah applies to Yaakov and to us. Something genuinely part of the nature Hashem created can tell us something about Yaakov as well.

Now listen to the distinction on page 427. The Maharal and the other great Acharonim were already far removed from the Avos. Yet they could still recognize the natural qualities Hashem put into a human being. ***A person who can recognize that nature as Hashem made it has something real to draw on when he reads about the Avos.***

Reb Chaim was speaking about us. We say, “Of course that’s how anyone would feel.” How do we know? A lifetime of habits, imagination and self-interest can go into that reaction, and it can feel as natural as anything. That’s why Reb Chaim insists on explaining Torah through Torah. Other gedolim held that even in our time we can still recognize something of that original nature. Rav Pinkus locates their disagreement right there. How much of the nature Hashem created can we still identify with confidence?

Now go back to the cases. We were so sure what it meant when we saw Yaakov walk into Yitzchak’s room. What did we actually know? Let’s see what the Torah gives us to work with.

PART 04

Back to the questions

Who is Esav?

The first time through, we heard Esav’s side. Nebach. His brother took advantage of him when he was hungry and then walked off with his brachah. Now that we’ve talked about what we see and what we can miss, let’s ask something we left open. Who is this Esav?

Imagine Esav is here today. You have two men in front of you. One looks like a Hells Angels biker. The other looks like a Chassidic Rebbe in a beautiful long white coat. If you had to point to Esav just from appearances, whom would you pick?

Will the real Esav please stand up?

In this mashal, it’s the man in the white coat. The Yehudi HaKadosh of Peshischa reads Esav’s fine garment as the impression he created before his father. One Chassidic telling even puts him in a shtreimel, bekeshe, and white socks. Picture Esav entering his father’s room looking dignified and princely. What did Yitzchak hear when his son opened his mouth?

Nifla’os HaYehudi · Chassidic telling, p. 11

Look at Source 1. Notice what Esav’s questions led Yitzchak to believe about him.

> **SOURCE 1 · The field, the tents, and Esav’s garments**
>
> **Bereishis 25:27**
>
> *The boys grew up. Esav became a man skilled at hunting, a man of the field. Yaakov was a wholehearted man, dwelling in tents.*

Rashi on Bereishis 25:27

He knew how to trap and deceive his father with his mouth. He would ask him, "Father, how do you tithe the salt and straw?" His father thought he was meticulous in observing the mitzvos.

Bereishis 27:15–16

Rivkah took the choice garments of Esav, her older son, which were with her in the house, and dressed Yaakov, her younger son, in them. She put the skins of the young goats on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck.

The Sfas Emes, Toldos 5631, takes up this exact example. Esav wanted Yitzchak to think that even out in the field he could raise ordinary material things toward kedushah. That is what made the question sound so convincing.

Read the Sfas Emes in Hebrew

Think about that question. "Father, how do I take maaser from salt?" Yitzchak hears a son who cares about the finest details of a mitzvah. Rashi hears someone who knows exactly how to deceive his father. Now hear Esav back in the kitchen. Rashi hears "Let me gulp down" as "I'll open my mouth, and you pour a lot into it." Put those two scenes together. Now we can ask what Yaakov was trying to keep out of Esav's hands.

What was at stake in the birthright?

The Torah says, *vayavo Esav min hasadeh vehu ayef*. Esav came in from the field, exhausted. What was he so tired from? Go back to Source 6. The Gemara in Bava Basra says that on that very day Esav committed five aveiros.

SOURCE 6 · What Esav did that day and what the birthright meant

Bava Basra 16b · Rabbi Yochanan

חמש עבירות עבר אותו רשע באותו היום — בא על נערה מאורסה, והרג את הנפש, וכפר בעיקר, וכפר בתחיית המתים, ושט את הבכורה.

Esav had relations with a betrothed young woman, killed a person, denied Hashem, denied techiyas hameisim, and treated the birthright with contempt.

Rashi on Bereishis 25:31–32

"Sell me as of this day" means that the sale should be as clear as the day. Since the sacrificial service belonged to the firstborn, Yaakov said that this wicked man was unfit to offer sacrifices to Hashem. On "I am going to die," Rashi first explains that the birthright was not permanent, for the service would ultimately pass to the tribe of Levi. He then gives another explanation. Esav asked about the nature of the service. Yaakov told him of its prohibitions, punishments, and liabilities to death, such as serving after drinking wine or with unkempt hair. Esav said, "I am going to die through it. If so, what use is it to me?"

Rashbam on Bereishis 25:32

I go out hunting dangerous animals every day, and they may kill me. Why should I wait for the share of the birthright that will come only after our father dies?

Listen to that list. He had relations with a betrothed woman. He killed someone. He denied Hashem. He denied that the dead will rise. And he treated the bechorah with contempt. The Gemara hears the exhaustion of someone who has killed in that one word, *ayef*. Now put that Esav next to the man asking his father how to take maaser from salt.

We heard a hungry man say he was going to die. Rashbam hears Esav talking about the dangers of the life he chose and whether he will outlive his father. Rashi asks us to look at what the firstborn would receive. The firstborn had the avodah, the right to bring korbanos. Yaakov had to ask whether Esav was fit to serve Hashem in that role. What sounded like a bargain over a bowl of food was a decision about whose hands the avodah would be in. ***That is what was at stake in the bechorah.***

Now hear the question from Yaakov's side. Is this the man who should have the avodah? And is this the man who should receive the brachos and wield the power they confer? Esav knew how to look like the most religious man in the room. Yaakov could see the man behind that appearance.

Where does the pause go?

Say the words aloud. Where would you put the pause in *Anochi Esav bechorecha*?

Return to Source 7 for how Rashi reads the words.

SOURCE 7 · How Rashi reads the words

Rashi on Bereishis 27:19

"I" am the one bringing it to you, and Esav is your firstborn. "I have done" means that I have done several things that you have told me to do.

Rashi hears two clauses. "I am the one bringing it to you. Esav is your firstborn." That tells us how Yaakov could say those words. But why was it right for him to walk in dressed as Esav in the first place?

Stay with Source 7 for Rivkah's instruction and what was at stake in the brachah.

SOURCE 7 · Rivkah's instruction and the stakes of the brachah

Bereishis 25:23 · Hashem's words to Rivkah

The older will serve the younger.

Bereishis 27:8, 13 · Rivkah's words to Yaakov

"Now, my son, listen to my voice and do what I command you." When Yaakov fears a curse, Rivkah says, "Let your curse be upon me, my son. Just listen to my voice and go get them for me."

Onkelos on Bereishis 27:13

"It was told to me in prophecy that curses would not come upon you, my son."

Bereishis 27:29 · From Yitzchak's brachah

"May peoples serve you and nations bow down to you. Be master over your brothers, and may your mother's sons bow down to you."

Imagine the ruling mullahs of Iran coming to Yitzchak for a brachah that would give them dominion over other nations. If somebody could keep that power out of their hands, would you call that stealing or would you call it a mitzvah? That's the mashal. When you look only at who got the brachah, Esav looks like the one who was wronged. Look also at what the brachah would put in his hands.

Now here is the decisive point. Knowing who Esav was tells you what was at stake. What told Yaakov that he should be the one to go in and do this? It was Rivkah who sent him. Hashem had told her that the older would serve the younger. Onkelos reads her reassurance to Yaakov as grounded in nevuah. So Yaakov hears his mother's instruction in light of the dvar Hashem she received. That's what he follows into Yitzchak's room. The Sfas Emes reads the stratagem in light of the emes it served.

For Yaakov, emes means doing the ratzon Hashem. You can watch him put on Esav's clothes and think you've seen the whole story. You still have to ask what Hashem wanted him to do.

Read the Sfas Emes in Hebrew

Return to Source 5 for Yaakov's answer to Rachel.

SOURCE 5 · Rachel's question, and Yaakov's answer

Megillah 13b · II Shmuel 22:27

Megillah 13b asks how Yaakov could call himself Lavan's brother. He was the son of Lavan's sister. When Yaakov asked Rachel to marry him, she warned that her father was a deceiver. Yaakov said he could match him in deception. Rachel asked, 'Are

tzaddikim permitted to use deception?' He said, 'Yes. With the pure You show Yourself pure, and with the crooked You act shrewdly.'

Rachel explained that Lavan would marry off her older sister first. Yaakov gave Rachel signs by which he could recognize her. That is the Gemara's setting for the verse in II Shmuel 22:27. What changes when you hear that verse against the particular danger Rachel warned him about?

Listen to what Yaakov is saying to Rachel. Lavan can present himself as a father making an honest agreement and still plan to give Yaakov someone else. Yaakov gives Rachel the signs so that Lavan's deception won't decide whom he marries. Here, acting with emes means taking steps to stop a dishonest man from getting his way.

And here's how the Gemara finishes the story. On the wedding night, ***Rachel gave Leah the signs so that her sister would be spared humiliation.*** That's why Yaakov didn't discover the substitution until morning. Now go back to Leah's challenge in Source 8. "Your father called you Esav and you answered. You called me Rachel and I answered." What do we say to that?

We've just seen why Yaakov went into Yitzchak's room. He understood that getting the brachos was what Hashem wanted of him. Now hear what Leah may be saying to him. "You let your father think you were Esav because you understood that the brachos were meant for you. Look at what happened here with the same eyes. You were meant to marry Rachel, and you were meant to marry me too."

On this reading, Leah is asking Yaakov to see that her deception, too, served an emes he couldn't yet see. She had a place in the family Hashem was building through him.

Lavan still broke his word. The Gemara tells us that Rachel gave the signs to spare Leah humiliation. And Leah's challenge asks Yaakov to look past Lavan's conduct and see what her marriage might mean. We'll come back to that when we hear how Yaakov speaks about Leah at the end of his life.

The rods and the flight

Return to Source 9 for the rods and Lavan's changing wages.

SOURCE 9 · The rods and Lavan's changing wages

Bereishis 31:7–12

7. "Your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not let him harm me. 8. When he said, 'The speckled will be your wage,' the whole flock gave birth to speckled young. When he said, 'The striped will be your wage,' the

whole flock gave birth to striped young. 9. God took your father's livestock away and gave it to me.

10. At the time the flock mated, I looked up and saw in a dream that the males mounting the flock were striped, speckled, and mottled. 11. The angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Yaakov.' I said, 'Here I am.' 12. He said, 'Lift up your eyes and see. All the males mounting the flock are striped, speckled, and mottled, for I have seen everything Lavan is doing to you.'"

Ramban on Bereishis 31:10

This happened after Lavan changed his wages. That is why the angel said that he had seen everything Lavan was doing to Yaakov. The angel showed him in the dream that the males mounting the flock were all striped, then all speckled, and then all mottled. He told him that he saw the wrong Lavan was doing by changing his wages and that the young would be born with the markings Yaakov needed. From then on Yaakov would no longer use rods, for one who trusts in Hashem will be protected.

We began by watching what Yaakov did with the rods. Now hear his account of what Lavan was doing to his wages. The Ramban reads the malach's words as explaining why Yaakov no longer needed the rods. Lavan kept changing the terms to take back wages Yaakov had earned. Seen from that side, the rods were a way of protecting what was owed him. Then the malach showed Yaakov that Hashem had seen what Lavan was doing. Once Hashem would see to the flock, the Ramban says Yaakov stopped using the rods.

Return to Source 10 for the instruction to return, and the reason for leaving secretly.

SOURCE 10 · The instruction to return, and the reason for leaving secretly

Bereishis 31:3, 13

Hashem said to Yaakov, "Return to the land of your fathers and to your birthplace, and I will be with you." The malach tells him, "Now arise, leave this land, and return to the land of your birth."

Bereishis 31:26–31

26. Lavan said to Yaakov, "What have you done, stealing my heart and driving my daughters off like captives of the sword? 27. Why did you flee secretly and steal away from me without telling me? I would have sent you away with joy and song, with drum and lyre. 28. You did not let me kiss my sons and daughters. You have acted foolishly.

29. It is in my power to do you harm, but the God of your father spoke to me last night and said, 'Be careful about speaking to Yaakov, whether good or bad.' 30. Now you have left because you longed for your father's house. Why did you steal my gods?" 31. Yaakov answered Lavan, "Because I was afraid. I thought you might take your daughters away from me by force."

We can separate the two questions. ***Why did Yaakov go? Hashem told him to go.*** Why did he leave without telling Lavan? Yaakov says he feared Lavan would take his daughters by force.

PART 05

Two tents and one life

This is what I was trying to bring out in *Are You Only Human?* Think about the difference between having a middah and being ruled by it. A person who is naturally gentle may give in when he ought to stand firm. A person who is naturally strong may fight when a quiet word would do more good. What do you do when the right response goes against the one that comes naturally to you?

Rashi names two tents, the tent of Shem and the tent of Ever. The plural gives us a way to picture Yaakov. He can learn in one tent and in another. He can draw on the chesed we associate with Avraham and the gevurah we associate with Yitzchak. In *Are You Only Human?* we call that capacity *Tiferes*. You have more than one strength available, and Torah teaches you which strength to use now.

That's why the Ramak connects Tiferes to learning Torah and warns the learner about arrogance in the very same passage. If I'm sure my first instinct is always right, what can Torah teach me? ***Yaakov can change his response without changing whom he serves.***

Look at Source 26 for the Ramak on Tiferes and learning.

SOURCE 26 · Tiferes and learning

Ramak, Tomer Devorah 7:1

How should a person accustom himself to the qualities of Tiferes? The quality of Tiferes is undoubtedly occupation with Torah. But a person must take great care against becoming haughty in words of Torah, for that causes great harm. Just as he grows haughty, he causes Tiferes, which is Torah, to rise above and withdraw, God forbid. Whoever lowers himself in words of Torah causes Tiferes to descend and lower itself to impart its influence to Malchus. Below Tiferes there are four sefiros, and they have three qualities.

Bereishis Rabbah 76:1

Rabbi Pinchas said in the name of Rabbi Reuven: Two people received assurances from Hashem and were afraid, the choicest of the Avos and the choicest of the prophets. The choicest of the Avos was Yaakov, and the choicest of the prophets was Moshe.

Are You Only Human?, pp. 151–152 · Teaching connection

The discussion of Tiferes is the basis for the connection to Yaakov's two tents and his ability to respond differently as circumstances change.

Go back to the morning Yaakov wakes up and discovers Leah. His question is to Lavan. “Why did you deceive me?” He had worked for Rachel and had every reason to be angry at what Lavan had done. Now jump ahead to the end of Yaakov’s life. He names the people buried in Me’aras HaMachpelah, Avraham and Sarah, Yitzchak and Rivkah. Then he says, “There I buried Leah.”

Listen to the difference. On that first morning Yaakov is dealing with Lavan’s wrong. At the end of his life he speaks about Leah as the wife he himself buried with the Avos and Imahos. ***She has a place of honor there.*** That’s where you can hear Leah’s point again. The marriage began with Lavan breaking his word, and by the end we can see the place Leah had in the family. Yaakov can ask what Hashem wants of him in the life he actually has, even when it began so differently from the life he planned.

Look at Source 27 for the pesukim about Leah and Rashi on meeting Esav.

> **SOURCE 27 · Leah and the encounter with Esav**
>
> **Bereishis 29:25–30**
>
> *25. In the morning, there she was, Leah. He said to Lavan, “What have you done to me? Was it not for Rachel that I worked for you? Why did you deceive me?” 26. Lavan said, “That is not done in our place, to give the younger before the firstborn.”*
>
> *27. “Complete this one’s wedding week, and we will give you the other one too, for the service you will perform for me another seven years.” 28. Yaakov did so and completed her week, and Lavan gave him Rachel his daughter as a wife. 29. Lavan gave his maidservant Bilhah to Rachel his daughter as a maidservant. 30. Yaakov came to Rachel as well, and he loved Rachel more than Leah. He served Lavan another seven years.*
>
> **Bereishis 49:31**
>
> *There they buried Avraham and Sarah his wife. There they buried Yitzchak and Rivkah his wife. And there I buried Leah.*
>
> **Rashi on Bereishis 32:9**
>
> *It will escape against his will, because I will fight him. Yaakov prepared for three things, for a gift, for prayer, and for war. For a gift, “The gift passed on ahead of him.” For prayer, “God of my father Avraham.” For war, “The remaining camp will escape.”*

Go back now to the night before Yaakov meets Esav. Rashi says he prepares three things. First, a gift. If there is a way to calm Esav and prevent bloodshed, Yaakov is prepared to pay for it. Then tefillah. He asks Hashem to save him because he knows where his protection comes from. And he prepares for war. If Esav attacks, Yaakov has a responsibility to defend the people with him.

These are three responses to the same danger. Giving the gift takes the humility to reach out. Preparing for war takes the resolve to fight if he has to.

Through both, the tefillah tells you whom Yaakov is relying on. That's the Tiferes we're talking about. Yaakov has the range to do what Hashem asks in each circumstance. A person with only one response ready is liable to make every situation fit that response.

Another way out

Look at Source 28 for how Yaakov spared Eliphaz.

> **SOURCE 28 · How Yaakov spared Eliphaz**
>
> **Rashi on Bereishis 29:10–11**
>
> *Like someone removing the stopper from the mouth of a flask. The Torah teaches you that he had great strength.*
>
> *He wept because he foresaw by the holy spirit that she would not be buried with him. Another explanation is that he came empty-handed. He said, "Eliezer, my grandfather's servant, had rings, bracelets, and gifts in his hands, but I have nothing in mine."*
>
> *This was because Eliphaz, Esav's son, had pursued him on his father's orders to kill him and had caught up with him. But because Eliphaz had grown up in Yitzchak's care, he held back. He said to Yaakov, "What shall I do about my father's command?" Yaakov answered, "Take what I have." A poor person is considered as though dead.*
>
> **Rashi on Bereishis 32:8**
>
> *He was afraid that he might be killed and distressed that he might kill others.*

Think of the stone at the well. Yaakov had the strength to try to fight. Instead he saw another way to save his life. He could give Eliphaz everything he had. ***It would leave him penniless and leave Eliphaz alive.*** That was a price he was prepared to pay. That's the reading in *Tiferes Shimshon*, Vayishlach, reproduced in *Moreshet Yaakov*.

Keep that distinction in mind. The same Yaakov who prepared for war could see what force would cost when there was a way around it. We'll need that when we return to Shechem.

The news Yaakov wanted to believe

Go back one scene before the Shema. The brothers come home and tell Yaakov that Yosef is alive and rules Egypt. Is there anything he wants to hear more? And the Torah says he did not believe them.

Look at Source 29 and notice what finally makes Yaakov believe the news.

> **SOURCE 29 · What the wagons proved**
>
> **Bereishis 45:26–27**
>
> *26. They told him, "Yosef is still alive, and he rules the whole land of Egypt." His heart went numb, for he did not believe them. 27. They told him all the words Yosef had spoken to them. He saw the wagons Yosef had sent to carry him, and the spirit of their father Yaakov came alive.*
>
> **Rashi on Bereishis 45:27**
>
> *He gave them a sign of the subject he was studying when he parted from Yaakov, the passage of the heifer whose neck is broken. That is why it says "he saw the wagons Yosef had sent," naming Yosef instead of Pharaoh.*
>
> **Gur Aryeh on Bereishis 45:27**
>
> *When Yaakov accompanied Yosef on the road, Yosef asked him to go back. Yaakov told him how great the duty of accompanying a traveler is, and taught him the passage of the heifer whose neck is broken. The elders say that their hands did not shed the victim's blood. Would anyone think they had killed him? Rather, they attest that they did not send him away without provisions or let him leave without escort. That was the subject they were studying when they parted.*

There's a story told about the Vilna Gaon. A man claimed to be a woman's missing husband. He knew enough about the household to sound convincing. Picture a father-in-law turning to the man who claims to be his son-in-law, pointing into the shul and saying, "Sit in your usual seat." If this really was the man who davened there, he'd know where to go. All the ordinary details he had prepared couldn't tell him that.

The shul seat exposed what the man did not know. The wagons showed Yaakov what Yosef did know. He recognized a sign rooted in the Torah they had learned together, a *siman shel davar shebikdushah*. ***He wanted to believe the news, and he waited for a reason to believe it.***

And that tells you what mattered most to Yaakov. The brothers had told him that Yosef was alive and that he ruled Egypt. The sign answered a deeper question. ***Was the Yosef who ruled Egypt still the son who had learned Torah with him?*** Years in Egypt had passed, and Yosef sent his father a sign from the Torah they had learned on the day they parted. Yaakov could hear his son in it. That is when the Torah says his spirit came alive.

When it's our turn to live by emes

Now bring that down to our own lives. Imagine a relative you love invites you to a same-sex wedding. A rabbi is going to officiate. You know what your family will

say if you stay home. “How can you do this? Family comes first.” And you can feel what it will cost you to disappoint them.

So what do you do? Ask your rav. Tell him what the invitation is for, who is involved, and what the relationship means to you. Ask him the question straight. *What does Hashem want me to do here?* If he tells you that you can’t attend, you still have to make that phone call. You can say it simply and kindly. “***I love you. I’m sorry, but I can’t come to the wedding.***”

They may think you’re a terrible person. They may say you’re using religion as an excuse. That’s where it takes strength to be like Yaakov. You can care what your family feels, speak with warmth, and still have the courage to do what you’ve been told Torah asks of you.

> **You can be called a liar while you’re trying to live by emes. Tell the truth about your reasons, and don’t let fear of what people will call you decide what you do.**

PART 06

What the report leaves out

We’ve been looking at what it costs to be misunderstood. Now turn it around. ***How quickly do we decide we know somebody else’s motives when all we have is a report?***

A person used to live in his own *daled amos*, among a few neighbors and his beis midrash. Now you can hear about something happening across the world while it’s happening. The question is where you turn to understand what it means.

Open the newspaper. It says, “Our forces returned fire.” What are you seeing? You’re seeing what the reporter tells you happened. Now ask yourself, *Have I seen the whole truth of what happened?* Who fired and when may be clear. What Hashem is doing through those events is still hidden from me. If I take the account on the page for the whole story, ***I can have my eyes wide open and still be looking into darkness.***

So read the report carefully. Ask what it actually establishes and what the writer is asking you to assume. Then take the next step. Ask what the Torah tells you is at stake, and what Hashem asks of you in light of what you’ve read. ***You can recognize His hand even when you can’t explain His reasons.*** That’s emunah. Think back to the first shore. Hashem was already there while the water still stood in front of them.

Now open Devarim. Open Yeshayahu. Listen to Ha’azinu. That’s where we learn to see what the report alone can’t show us.

Look at Source 30 for remember the days of old.

SOURCE 30 · Remember the days of old

Devarim 32:7

זכר ימות עולם בינו שנות דר ודר שאל אביך ויגדך זקניך ויאמרו לך

Remember the days of old. Consider the years of generation after generation. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders and they will say to you.

What does the name Yisrael ask of us?

Look at Source 31 for yisrael, yashar El.

SOURCE 31 · Yisrael, yashar El

Bereishis 32:29

לא יעקב יאמר עוד שמך כי אם ישראל כי שרית עם אלהים ועם אנשים ותוכל

He said, “Your name shall no longer be called Yaakov, but Yisrael, for you have striven with divine beings and with men and have prevailed.”

Kli Yakar on Bereishis 32:29

He reads Yisrael as yashar El. He first takes yashar in the sense of seeing, as in “I behold him, but he is not near.” The angel conceded that Yaakov sees the face of God and that he had been unable to blind Yaakov to God’s existence.

In saying “you have striven with divine beings,” he removed the name Yaakov, which evokes the crookedness of the heart. Yisrael evokes a straight path, as in “the crooked shall become straight.” It means a path that appears straight to God and man. By the uprightness of his deeds, Yaakov could prevail. That is Yisrael, yashar El, a straightness apparent even in God’s eyes.

Now bring this home. Israel calls itself a Jewish state. But the state was founded on a national claim, and its policies are set by secular civil authority. Look at the Declaration in Source 32. Where does it say that Hashem gave us our independence so that we could serve Him and bring glory to His Name? That’s what I’m looking for when I hear the name *Yisrael*.

SOURCE 32 · Israel’s Declaration of Independence

May 14, 1948

The Declaration grounds statehood in the Jewish people’s natural and historic right and the United Nations resolution. It closes by placing trust in the “Rock of Israel.” It gives no explicit statement that the state exists to serve Hashem.

Read the Declaration

Who gave us the victory?

Then there's a war, and you hear the victory speech. You hear about the army, the pilots, and the planning. Look at Source 33. Where do you hear, plainly, "Hashem gave us the victory"?

> **SOURCE 33 · A public victory address**
>
> **Netanyahu's June 24, 2025 address**
>
> *Netanyahu credited Israel's military effort, the United States, and those who fought. He quoted Mishlei on military strategy.*

June 24, 2025 address

> **What can our eyes see? The army fought. That's the visible side, the realm of *emes v'yatziv*. What does *emes ve'emunah* tell us? Hashem wins the wars. The army is the means through which He can give us the victory.**

Now you can understand what happens when the subject turns to Charedim. If all you count is what you can see, you look at a young man in the beis midrash and say, "My son is defending the country. What is your son doing?" The Charedi father sees his son's Torah as part of what protects Klal Yisrael. He also believes that keeping his son's life rooted in Torah can mean staying out of an army that sees itself as a secular melting pot. That's a different understanding of what Hashem asks of him.

> **SOURCE 34 · The voice of Yaakov and the defense of Klal Yisrael**
>
> **Rav Yitzchak Isaac Herzog · Letter to David Ben-Gurion, 1958**
>
> *Rav Herzog describes the voice of Torah rising from the batei midrash as a shield against the hands of Esav and Yishmael.*

Rav Herzog's Hebrew letter

And what do people call him? A cheat. A shirker. In some of the talk you hear, Charedim are made out to be monsters. Now go back to our opening. Esav looks at Yaakov and says, "You're a liar." We spent the shiur asking what that verdict left out. Ask the same question here. Have you heard what this man believes Hashem wants of him? Have you even counted what he believes his Torah does for the people he's being accused of abandoning?

> **Living like Yaakov means asking what Hashem wants of you and having the courage to do it, even when people looking from the outside call you a cheat.**

It’s easier to say that when someone else is taking the criticism. What if it’s your good name on the line, and you have a way to clear it? Let me tell you a story.

PART 07

The woman who could clear his name

I want to finish with Rav Chaim Chizkiyahu Medini. You know him by the name of his sefer, the Sdei Chemed. Think about the sort of mind it takes to write that work. He could gather halachic discussions from sefarim of every kind, remember where they were, and put them in order so somebody else could find them. And when he spoke about where his own ability to learn came from, he went back to a story from his youth. It began with someone trying to ruin him.

A fellow in the kollel was jealous of the young Rav Medini. He paid the woman who cleaned the beis midrash to say that Rav Medini had attacked her. When the accusation spread, people demanded that the man who ran and supported the kollel throw him out.

The patron went into the beis midrash and saw Rav Medini sitting at his Gemara while the room was in an uproar. ***He stood by him, made clear that he was staying, and dismissed the woman. The room quieted down.*** Even after that, some people still wondered whether there was something to the story.

Later, the woman came to Rav Medini in tears. The money was gone and she had lost her livelihood. She admitted that she had been paid to make up the accusation. She offered to tell everyone what had really happened, hoping he would help get her job back.

> **Think about that moment. You still have your place in the beis midrash. You know that some people there still look at you differently. Now the one person who can put an end to the suspicion is offering to speak. What would you do?**

At first he was glad. Of course he wanted people to know the truth. Then he asked himself what else they would learn if she spoke. They would learn that a man who sat and studied Torah in that beis midrash had paid someone to ruin another person’s name. In his judgment, making that public would cause a terrible chillul Hashem.

He asked her to leave the story private and went to speak to the patron on her behalf. He persuaded him to give her back her job. Think about that. The woman got her livelihood back. ***The Sdei Chemed had the chance to clear his name in public, and he let it go.***

In the telling Rav Shlomo Aviner brings, as Rav Medini left the patron's house, he felt a new clarity in his learning. He later connected that gift to the choice he had made.

> **What would Hashem want me to do with the truth now that I have it?**

Look at Source 35 for the account of the false accusation.

> **SOURCE 35 · The account of the false accusation**
>
> **Rav Shlomo Aviner, Silence Does Not Constitute Admission**
>
> *Machon Meir's Vaera sheet cites Rav Shalom Mordechai Schwadron, She'al Avicha Veyagedcha, vol. 1, p. 257, and Rav Stern, Gedolei HaDorot, p. 870. In this telling, the kollel's patron stands by Rav Medini and the suspicion still lingers.*

Rav Aviner's retelling

Look at Source 36 for the change in his Torah learning.

> **SOURCE 36 · The change in his Torah learning**
>
> **JDN · The Sdei Chemed, Hebrew account**
>
> *This Hebrew telling also relates how the patron stood by him and how Rav Medini associated his decision with a new clarity in Torah learning.*

Hebrew retelling

PART 08

Shechem and the road to Seir

One last question before Seir

Why could Yaakov act shrewdly himself and still rebuke his sons? We've seen him protect the avodah, follow Rivkah's instruction, and stop Lavan from having his way. In each case, ask what Hashem wanted done. That gives us a way to hear the Ramban at Shechem.

Return to Source 11 for what Yaakov authorized at Shechem.

> **SOURCE 11 · What Yaakov authorized at Shechem**
>
> **Ramban on Bereishis 34:13**
>
> *The question is that the brothers seem to have answered with their father's knowledge and consent. He was present and knew they were speaking with guile, so why did he become angry? It is also impossible that he wanted his daughter to marry the Canaanite who had defiled her. All the brothers gave this answer with guile, yet Shimon and Levi alone carried out the deed, and their father cursed their anger alone.*
>
> *The answer is that the guile was in demanding the circumcision of every male. They thought the townspeople would refuse. If the townspeople obeyed their leaders and were circumcised, the brothers would come on the third day while they were in pain and take their daughter from Shechem's house. This was the plan of all the brothers, with their father's permission. Shimon and Levi wanted to take revenge and killed all the men of the city. It may be that Yaakov cursed their anger because they killed townspeople who had done him no wrong. On this suggestion of the Ramban, Shechem alone was liable to be killed.*
>
> **Ramban on Bereishis 49:5**
>
> *In my view, "Shimon and Levi are brothers" means they were alike in counsel and action. Yaakov was angry with them for killing the townspeople, who had done them no harm. The townspeople had entered a covenant and been circumcised. Perhaps they would have returned to Hashem and all become part of Avraham's household, like the souls they had made in Charan.*

According to the Ramban, Yaakov agreed to a plan to free Dinah. If the men refused circumcision, the brothers would take her and go. If they agreed, the brothers could go into the city on the third day, bring her out, and go home. Once they could take Dinah out, why kill all the men of the city? The Ramban calls that revenge. Now we can hear why Yaakov rebuked them. Yaakov was prepared to do what was needed to stop the wrong and bring Dinah home. Once she could be saved, what would killing the whole city serve? Emes demands that we act when

someone is using his power to do wrong, and it demands that we stop when what we are doing ceases to serve the ratzon Hashem.

Why Yaakov took a different road

Go back to Source 12. Esav says, “Come with me. I’ll walk alongside you.” Yaakov’s first words are, “My lord knows that the children are tender.” He tells Esav he has to travel at the children’s pace. Then Esav offers to leave some of his men with him. Yaakov turns that down too.

Why turn down even that offer? Before they met, Yaakov had davened, “Deliver me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esav” (Bereishis 32:12). Now Esav is offering to walk beside him as a brother. Think of what that would mean for the children. Who would they be spending their days with? Whose ways would they grow up seeing as normal?

> **Yaakov understood that the will of Hashem was to raise his children away from Esav’s influence. That’s why he had to take his family on a different road.**

So he says, “Until I come to you in Seir,” and goes to Sukkos. *Isn’t that a lie?* He let Esav think he would follow him there, and he had no intention of going there on that journey. Yaakov understood that what Hashem wanted from him then was to get his children safely onto their own road. Now listen to Rashi. There is a time when Yaakov’s words will come true.

Look at Rashi’s answer in Source 37.

> **SOURCE 37 · Rashi’s answer**
>
> **Rashi on Bereishis 33:14**
>
> *He gave himself a longer road, for he intended to go only as far as Sukkos. He said that if Esav intended to harm him, let him wait until Yaakov came to him. Yaakov did not go. When will he go? In the days of Mashiach, as it says, “Deliverers will ascend Mount Zion to judge the mountain of Esav.” There are many Midrashic readings of this passage.*

Esav could hear, “I’ll be there soon.” On Rashi’s reading, ***those words will be fulfilled in the days of Mashiach***. So look at both parts of the emes. Yaakov did what Hashem asked of him then, and what he told Esav will be fulfilled at the time Hashem has set.

We have offers of help that come with an invitation to walk somebody else’s road. Before we say yes, ask what that company will teach our children and what it will teach us. Sometimes keeping our distance is how we give the next generation

room to grow up with Torah. That is our part in bringing closer the day when Hashem's kingship will be clear.

How do I know what Hashem wants?

Yaakov could hear the dvar Hashem Rivkah had received. When the time came to leave Lavan, Hashem told him to go. And the Torah shows us where Yaakov learned to see, in the tents of Shem and Ever. We have to start where Reb Chaim taught us to start. What does the Torah actually ask of me here? When I'm unsure, have I told my rav the whole story, including the part that makes me look bad? ***Would I still call it the ratzon Hashem if it cost me something I wanted?***

Esav called him a liar. The Navi calls him the man of emes. That is the question Yaakov keeps asking all the way to Seir. What is the ratzon Hashem when I want this brachah? What is the ratzon Hashem when I'm afraid of Esav? What is the ratzon Hashem when Esav offers to walk beside me? Once you've done the work to hear the answer, have the courage to take that road. And when will we meet in Seir?

Return to Source 37 for the last words of Ovadiah.

> **SOURCE 37 · The last words of Ovadiah**
>
> **Ovadiah 1:21**
>
> ועלו מושיעים בהר ציון לשפוט את הר עשו והיתה לה׳ המלוכה
>
> *Deliverers will ascend Mount Zion to judge the mountain of Esav, and the kingship will belong to Hashem.*

> **We'll see you when Mashiach comes.**

REFERENCE

Full texts for Sources 21–25

These are the longer readings for Part 3. Use the numbered cues in the spoken text to find the passages.

SOURCE 21 · Yaakov’s renewed life and his Shema

Bereishis 45:27 and 46:29

45:27. They told him all the words Yosef had spoken to them. He saw the wagons Yosef had sent to carry him, and the spirit of their father Yaakov came alive.

46:29. Yosef harnessed his chariot and went up to Goshen to meet his father Yisrael. He appeared before him, fell upon his neck, and wept upon his neck for a long time.

Rashi on Bereishis 46:29

The expression means abundant weeping. Likewise in Iyov 34:23, “For He does not place upon a man more,” the word means an increase: He does not add accusations beyond the person’s sins. Here too Yosef wept more than usual. But Yaakov did not fall on Yosef’s neck or kiss him. Our Sages said that he was reciting the Shema.

Tiferes Shimshon, Vayigash, p. 425 · Two readings

The explanation appears to be that the foundation of reciting Shema is giving up one’s life for the sanctity of His name, meaning handing over one’s very vitality to Hashem. Earlier it says, “The spirit of their father Yaakov came alive,” meaning that he received new vitality. That vitality was completed here when he saw Yosef, and so he hurried to give this vitality too to the Holy One, blessed is He.

Why did Yaakov recite Shema precisely now? The baalei avodah explained that when Yaakov saw Yosef, his joy and love for Yosef at that moment were boundless. The people of Israel and its entire future had now become complete forever. At that very moment, when Yaakov was about to take boundless delight in seeing Yosef, he recited Shema to give that precious moment to the oneness of the Holy One, blessed is He.

SOURCE 22 · Reb Chaim Brisker’s objection and his answer

Chiddushei HaGri”z al HaTorah, Hosafos, Vayigash, p. 6 (ו)

ויאסר יוסף מרכבתו ויעל לקראת ישראל אביו וכו׳ ויבך על צואריו עוד (מו, כט). ופרש״י אבל יעקב לא נפל על צוארי יוסף ולא נשקו, ואמרו רבותינו שהיה קורא את שמע. וצ״ע דאם הגיע זמן ק״ש למה לא קרא גם יוסף ק״ש.

“Yosef harnessed his chariot and went up to meet his father Yisrael … and he wept on his neck for a long time” (Bereishis 46:29). Rashi explains that Yaakov did not fall on Yosef’s neck or kiss him, and that our Sages said he was reciting Shema. This needs explanation. If the time for Shema had arrived, why did Yosef not recite it too?

וא׳ אמר לפני מרן הגר״ח זצ״ל בשם רב א׳, דמה שקרא יעקב אז ק״ש, הוא מפני שאת יוסף אהב יותר מכל שאר בניו ואחרי שלא ראהו כ״ב שנים, נתעוררה בקרבו אהבתו אל יוסף ביתר שאת בשעת פגישתו עמו, ואת האהבה הגדולה הזאת רצה למסור להקב״ה, ולכן קרא אז ק״ש כדי לחזק בלבו את אהבת ה׳.

Someone said before Reb Chaim in the name of a rav that Yaakov recited Shema just then because he loved Yosef more than all his other sons. After twenty-two years without seeing him, his love for Yosef welled up with even greater force when they met. He wished to give that great love over to the Holy One, blessed is He, so he recited Shema then to strengthen the love of Hashem in his heart.

והגר״ח לא קיבל זאת ואמר, שמדבר על יעקב אבינו כאילו יעקב אבינו היה עומד במדרגתו. הוא מרגיש על עצמו שאצלו זהו נסיון, ודבר גדול לעשות כן, וכי על האבות הקדושים ניתן לומר שהיתה להם אהבה נפרדת לבניהם שאותה היו צריכים למסור להקב״ה, והרי כל אהבתם לבניהם היתה רק מתוך עבודת ה׳ ואהבתו יתברך.

Reb Chaim did not accept this. He said that the speaker was talking about Yaakov Avinu as if Yaakov Avinu were on the speaker's own level. The speaker feels that for himself this would be a test, and that it would be a great thing to do. But can one say of the holy Avos that they had a separate love for their children which they needed to hand over to the Holy One, blessed is He? Their entire love for their children arose out of the service and love of Hashem.

ואמר הגר״ח דמה שקרא יעקב ק״ש באותה העת, הוא משום דירידתו למצרים היתה בציווי ה׳ שאמר לו אל תירא מרדה מצרימה כי לגוי גדול אשימך שם, והיה אנוס עפ״י הדיבור, וממילא היתה ההליכה אצלו מצוה, והיה פטור ממצוה אחרת משום הדין דעוסק במצוה פטור מן המצוה כדיליף בסוכה (כה ע״א) ובולכתך בדרך בלכת דידך הוא דמחייבת הא בלכת דמצוה פטור, ולכן כל עוד שהיה בדרך היה מחוייב במצוה זו ללכת שמה, והיה פטור אז ממצות ק״ש, אבל כשהגיע לגבול מצרים וקיים מצותו שוב מיקרי זה בדרך דידך ולא דרך של מצוה, ממילא נתחייב תיכף בק״ש, וע״כ קרא אז ק״ש. אבל יוסף שהיה חייב בק״ש גם קודם, כבר קרא ק״ש מיד בזמנה.

Reb Chaim said that Yaakov recited Shema at that moment because his descent to Egypt was at Hashem's command. Hashem said, "Do not fear going down to Egypt, for I will make you a great nation there." He was compelled by the divine word, so the journey was a mitzvah for him. He was exempt from another mitzvah under the law that one occupied with a mitzvah is exempt from another mitzvah. Sukkah 25a derives this from "when you go on the way": you are obligated when going on your own way, but exempt when going on a mitzvah journey.

As long as Yaakov was on the road he was occupied with the mitzvah of going there and was exempt from Shema. Once he reached the border of Egypt and fulfilled his mitzvah, it was once again called his own way, no longer a mitzvah journey. He became obligated in Shema immediately and recited it then. Yosef, who had been obligated earlier as well, had already recited Shema promptly at its proper time.

Tiferes Shimshon, pp. 425–426 · The clothing formulation

הנכם מלבישים את יעקב אבינו בבגד שלכם

They relate that when these words were said to Reb Chaim, he took exception and said, "You are dressing Yaakov Avinu in your own clothes! Even if, from your standpoint, it would have been fitting to recite Shema at that moment, should Yaakov Avinu have done so as well?"

SOURCE 23 · The mitzvah to go down to Egypt

Bereishis 46:3

He said, "I am God, the God of your father. Do not fear going down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there."

Pesach Haggadah, Maggid · Devarim 26:5

וירד מצרימה אנוס על פי הדיבור

"He went down to Egypt" means compelled by the divine word.

Sukkah 25a · Mishnah and Gemara

Those traveling on a mitzvah mission are exempt from sukkah. The sick and those attending them are exempt from sukkah. One may eat or drink casually outside the sukkah.

How do we know this? The Sages taught that "when you sit in your house" excludes one occupied with a mitzvah, and "when you go on your way" excludes a bridegroom.

SOURCE 22 · The method behind the explanation

Tiferes Shimshon, Vayigash, p. 426 · Achein

Indeed, this is Reb Chaim's approach to learning Torah. We cannot interpret the holy Torah according to our intellect and feelings, for we are far from true understanding. Our feelings belong to us. The people mentioned in the Torah had an entirely different existence, and we have no grasp of them at all. How much more so, with regard to the Torah's own reasoning, can we neither determine it nor even explain it by force of our intellect. We must therefore explain the words of Torah specifically through words of Torah, for only the Torah itself understands and explains the Torah.

Thus, when we come to answer a difficult Rambam or a sugya in Shas, we cannot explain it according to what we find in our own reasoning, since it is so far removed from the Torah. Only the Torah itself can explain the matter.

For that reason Reb Chaim also objected to explaining Yaakov's conduct on the basis of a moral feeling or a feeling of avodah, even one that is sweet and beautiful. He wanted to explain it solely on the basis of a law of Torah, which applies to Yaakov Avinu as well.

SOURCE 24 · The Gur Aryeh's two answers

Gur Aryeh on Bereishis 46:29

Our Sages said that Yaakov was reciting Shema. They asked why Yosef did not recite Shema if it was the time to recite it. It is difficult to say he recited it earlier or later, since the diligent perform mitzvos as early as possible and the time is the same for everyone. Further, how do we know Yaakov recited Shema? Perhaps he was praying. One can answer that Yosef did recite Shema. We follow Rabbi Yehudah, who says that in the middle of a section one may interrupt to greet out of reverence. That includes reverence for his father. Yosef therefore interrupted his recitation, while Yaakov did not interrupt and continued reciting Shema.

We still need to know the meaning of the Shema that Yaakov was reciting. This will also explain why Yosef was not reciting Shema. When Yaakov came and saw his son Yosef as a king, love and awe of the Holy One, blessed is He, entered his heart. He saw how good and perfect His ways are and how He gives good reward to those who fear Him. This is the way of the pious: when good comes to them, they cleave to the Holy One, blessed is He, for the goodness and truth He has shown them.

That is the meaning of reciting Shema, in which we declare the oneness of His kingship and love for Him. It was fitting to recite Shema when Yosef came to Yaakov after the great pain Yaakov had suffered over him. Now that he saw him as a king, he loved the Holy One, blessed is He, who had done this for him, and accepted His kingship, love, and awe. This is clear to one who understands.

Devarim 6:4–5

Hear, Israel, Hashem is our God, Hashem is One. You shall love Hashem your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.

Berachos 13a · Two opinions on interruption

Between sections one may greet a person out of honor and respond. In the middle of a section one may greet out of reverence and respond. These are the words of Rabbi Meir. Rabbi Yehudah says that in the middle one may greet out of reverence and respond out of honor. Between sections one may greet out of honor and respond to anyone.

SOURCE 25 · What part of human nature can explain Torah?

Mishlei 3:19 and Tehillim 33:6

Hashem founded the earth with wisdom and established the heavens with understanding. By the word of Hashem the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host.

Tiferes Shimshon, Vayigash, pp. 426–427

In fact, this explanation is mentioned by great Acharonim. See the Gur Aryeh, who wrote something similar. It appears that Reb Chaim would have had no complaint against them. But what is the difference? They too were very far from Yaakov Avinu. How could they explain Yaakov on the basis of what they saw in themselves? Perhaps what they considered a fine feeling was different for Yaakov Avinu.

The point is that the very nature of the world comes from Hashem, just as the Torah itself does. As it is written, “Hashem founded the earth with wisdom.” The earth too is Hashem’s wisdom. And it says, “By the word of Hashem the heavens were made.” Nature itself is the word of Hashem just as the Torah is. If so, just as we can explain the deeds of the Avos through a law of Torah because Hashem’s word applies to Yaakov Avinu and to us alike, so too a feeling or reasoning that belongs to a person’s created nature is like a verse in Chumash and applies to Yaakov Avinu and to us alike.

Reb Chaim’s objection was to us, the later generations. Our generations have declined so far that we can no longer tell whether our feelings are natural as God made them, or whether they are our own creations. So many changes have come over us with the decline of the generations. All kinds of imaginings and selfish traits have become so intertwined with us that we mistakenly think they are human nature itself.

לעומתנו, גדולי חכמי התורה, אפילו גדולי האחרונים אע״פ שגם הם התרחקו מהאבות מאוד, מ״מ עדיין היתה חלות חפצא של אדם בתכונות הטבעיות שלהם, לא כן אנחנו שכבר אין אתנו יודע מהו הרגש טבעי הנעשה ע״פ דבר ה׳ ומהו הרגש של המידות הנעשה בידי אדם

Compared with us, the great Torah sages, even the great Acharonim, though they too were very far removed from the Avos, still retained the substance of the human being in their natural qualities. As for us, who can still tell which feeling is natural, formed by Hashem’s word, and which feeling comes from traits formed by human hands?

This is Reb Chaim’s approach to Torah. Other great Torah authorities disagreed and held that we can still explain Torah using our human understanding. The disagreement seems to come down to whether, small as we are, we can still recognize the pure points of nature made by Heaven, in which case they have the standing of words of Torah, or whether other things have become so mixed into them that we cannot tell what is nature and what is acquired traits. On that view, Torah can now be explained only through the Torah itself.