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Parsha

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Vayeitzei

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Gematria on the Parshah:

Why 12 Stones?

By: Moshe Herskovits



In Parshas Vayeitzei, Yaakov Avinu has the famous dream of the ladder. Before lying down in the makom, the future site of the Beis HaMikdash, he surrounds his head with twelve stones to protect himself from wild animals. Why does he surround only his head, and why twelve stones?

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, quoting the Midrash, explains that Yaakov had just left the yeshivah of Shem and Ever after fourteen years and was now heading toward Lavan's house, leaving a purely spiritual environment and entering a world of challenge. Beautiful gematriot allude to this:

612 = עבר + שם, the gematria of תלמידי חכמים, and 369 = יד שנה, the gematria of ה' אלקינו מלך העולם. After fourteen years, Yaakov internalized ה' אלקינו מלך העולם, preparing him to enter physical life.

Yaakov protected his head because while we must engage with the physical world, the mind must remain guarded. According to Sefer Yetzirah, the "stones of creation" are letters of Torah and Tefillah. Surrounding his head with stones symbolizes filling the mind with Torah and prayer throughout all our physical daily interactions. Rebbe Nachman teaches in Likutei Moharan I:4 that whenever we see a problem, we should immediately turn to Hashem in prayer. It isn't enough to pray 3 times a day, the entire day should be a dialogue with the Ribono Shel Olam.

There is a beautiful gematria connection here. The phrase אבני המקום has the gematria 254, the same as ברוך ה'. While we usually say Baruch Hashem as praise, the deeper meaning is that Hashem is the source of everything that happens to us. Just as Yaakov surrounded his head with stones, we should surround our day with constant gratitude, recognizing that every moment comes from Him and connecting back to our Source

even while operating in the physical world.

The Chiddushei HaRim explains that the twelve stones represent the twelve tribes of Yisrael. The Avos understood Maasei Avos Siman LiBanim — that whatever they do in their life will affect all their future descendants. By arranging twelve stones, Yaakov performed a spiritual unification with the future tribes and reminded himself that guarding his mind affects not only him but future generations. Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar teaches that a mitzvah done out of yirah influences a thousand generations, and one done out of ahavah influences two thousand. We must keep the same concept in mind, protecting our mind, will bring blessing to our generations.

The Megaleh Amukot adds another explanation: the verses ברוך שם כבוד ושמע ישראל ה' אלקינו ה' אחד contain twelve words. Before lying down, Yaakov established the Maariv prayer, which includes the Shema. Surrounding his head with twelve stones symbolizes surrounding his consciousness with the Shema, reminding us that all creation expresses Hashem's Oneness.

The combined gematria of the verses Shema and Baruch Shem equals 2476, the same as: ויעבוד יעקב ברחל שבע שנים ויהיו בעיניו כימים אחדים באהבתו אותה — "Yaakov worked for Rachel for seven years, and in his eyes they seemed only a few days because of his love for her." Even with Lavan's deception, Yaakov's love kept him in joy, seeing every moment as a reflection of Hashem's love, living in constant Shema-consciousness.

Rav Abdallah Somekh, the Rebbe of the Ben Ish Chai, would pause during the day and quietly say the Shema, especially in places lacking spiritual clarity. Just as Yaakov surrounded his head with twelve stones to guard his mind, we too can surround our thoughts and actions with Shema-consciousness. By remembering that every moment, challenge, encounter, and emotion

comes directly from Hashem, we create a spiritual "stone" of awareness around ourselves. That awareness strengthens us to live each situation with intention and to elevate the physical world according to His Will.

Finding Light in Lavan's House

By: Rabbi Joshua Kaller



I want to share a thought that often gets overshadowed in this week's parsha. Everyone talks about the ladder and the dream, but I want to highlight a different theme in Vayeitzei—one that speaks directly to the realities of work, difficult people, and the spiritual purpose hidden inside our daily struggles.

Think about Yaakov Avinu. Here is a pure, honest, humble soul—the embodiment of integrity. And where does Hashem send him? Straight into the home of Lavan, one of the most notoriously deceitful individuals in all of Tanach. A master manipulator. A professional trickster. The last person a tzaddik would ever choose to work for.

You have to ask yourself: Hashem, why? Why does a tzaddik have to go through this? Why does Yaakov have to deal with someone like Lavan? And by extension—why do we have to deal with the "Lavans" in our own lives?

Sometimes the hardest part of work is the work itself. Sometimes the hardest part is the people we work with. And sometimes the hardest part is the people we think we work for—or who think they work for us. Those dynamics can be draining, confusing, and exhausting.

But our sages teach that Yaakov's journey to Lavan wasn't a punishment or an accident. It was intentional. It was spiritual mission work. Chazal call it birur nitzotzot—the extraction and refinement of the sparks of holiness hidden in dark places. Yaakov wasn't just "surviving" Lavan. He was clarifying, uplifting, and redeeming spiritual energy embedded in that environment.

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And here's the key: Hashem places us in difficult environments for the same reason.

We're in the month of Kislev now—a time of long nights, cold weather, and physical darkness. And it's not a coincidence. Kislev teaches us that holiness isn't only found in the Beis Midrash or in the Kollel. Hashem specifically places us in the middle of winter spiritually and physically to remind us: light is meant to be revealed in the dark, not away from it.

Holiness exists in every workplace, even the ones that feel devoid of it—in government offices, in financial systems, on construction sites, in paperwork, in stress, and in the messy realities of daily life. Hashem is telling us: "Don't miss the holiness hidden right where you are. I put you there for a reason."

And when we face frustration—when someone wrongs us, annoys us, or creates friction—we tend to ask, "Why is this person doing this to me?" But the shift—the spiritual breakthrough—is to ask: "Hashem, why are You doing this for me?"

Because each point of friction is a chisel. It shapes us. Or maybe it shapes the other person. Or both. But it is never meaningless.

The truth is, when we're in the moment, we almost never think this way. When we're outside the moment, maybe—maybe—ten percent of the time we can reframe it. But the goal is to slowly learn to reclaim those moments and say: I am not a victim. I am an opportunist. This is a spiritual tikkun. There is something here for me to uplift.

So may Hashem bless us to be okay in the moment—to remember that He is doing this for us, not to us. And may we find the light hidden in our own Lavan moments, discovering the sparks we were uniquely placed in this world to elevate. **אחדים באהבתו אותה** — "Yaakov worked for Rachel for seven years, and in his eyes they seemed only a few days because of his love for her." Even with Lavan's deception, Yaakov's love kept him in joy, seeing every moment as a reflection of Hashem's love, living in constant Shema-consciousness.

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From Exile to Elevation

By: Rabbi Adam Law



"ויצא יעקב מבאר שבע וילך חרנה"

This week's parsha begins with Yaakov Avinu fleeing from his birthplace and his parents' home from Esav, his brother. Yaakov had taken his brother's bechora (first-born status) and finally their father's blessing. Despite these spiritual gains, Yaakov was in a lot of trouble. His brother hated him — he was a hunted man and fled with nothing.

Yet, at this difficult time, Yaakov received the foundational dream of the ladder spanning heaven to earth. G-d spoke to him of his mission and told of his descendants' incredible destiny:

"I am G-d, the G-d of your Fathers, and I give this land to you and your descendants. You will spread over the Earth and everyone will be blessed through you. I am with you and will guard you, and you will come back to this land. I will not give up on you."

The Torah explains that when Yaakov experienced this prophecy, he was resting his head upon a rock. The Kedushas Levi here has a profound elaboration of why the Torah tells us this detail. This was no ordinary rock. It was the Even Hashasiya, the foundation stone of all creation, the place of Divine Unity. When Yaakov rested his head, it means he meditated on this concept.

While the Torah explicitly explains what G-d promised Yaakov, this pasuk is hinting that Yaakov first made a mental leap towards the holy. Just as Avraham didn't simply receive prophecy, but first grasped the concept of monotheism through a spiritual search —

so too Yaakov first "rested his head on the rock," i.e. he contemplated the Divine unity. "The Rock" is the primary reason of creation — the reishit. At the top of the ladder of the spiritual worlds is the foundational idea: a nation called Israel which would bring Divine unity into this world. Yaakov saw and desired to bring that concept into reality.

Ultimately, Yaakov is successful. G-d confirms it when he is blessed with the name Yisrael. Much suffering would come along with that. Yaakov saw all the exiles, both personal and national. However, his mission and purpose would comfort him through the dark times.

In the end, he got G-d's reassurance that everything would be okay, and Yaakov would come home in the end.

The Beauty of Yishuv HaDaas

By: Rabbi Avraham Gislason



Daas is not just knowledge. It is the ability to live with an internalized recognition of the reality that "yesh Elokim shalit ba'aretz". That the Ribbono Shel Olam is orchestrating and mercifully providing me with all of my experiences, physical and spiritual. Elohim is gematria "hateva", meaning that every aspect of existence is brought into creation and orchestrated by Hashem. Living and breathing with the concept that every moment of my life is directly supervised and provided by Hashem, and that every one of those moments is a connection to Hashem, is what daas really is.

When we don't have daas, we behave in a reactive instinctual manner. When we get stressed or angry we go into fight or flight modalities, and we rush into responses. Fools rush in where people of daas never go. Yishuv HaDaas is when I as a person am settled. I live with the calm confidence of emunah because I know that every movement is choreographed with immense beauty and precision by the Creator. I can calmly think and decide the best course of action. I can react to people with compassion and empathy and try to see where they are coming from instead of fleeing or attacking. I am settled in a state of Yishuv HaDaas, living and breathing with the hasghgacha pratis of HaKadosh Baruch Hu. Ashreinu!

