Rabbi Pinches Friedman
Parshas Vayeitzei 5787
Translation by Dr. Baruch Fox

"He set it as a pillar, and he poured oil on its top"

Eliphaz Reincarnated into Onkelos Who Translated the Entire Torah

This week's parsha is parshas Vayeitzei. We will focus on the two miracles that were performed for Yaakov Avinu when he was on Har HaMoriah, the future site of the Mikdash, on his way to Charan to build the house of Yisrael. The first miracle involved the stones that he placed around his head; HKB"H transformed them into a single stone. The second miracle involved the oil that he poured on top of the pillar.

Here is the text related to the first miracle (Bereishis 28, 10): **"ויצא יעקב מבאר שבע וילך חרנה, ויפגע במקום וילן שם כי בא השמש ויקח מאבני המקום וישם מראשותיו וישכב במקום ההוא". And Yaakov departed from Be'er Sheva and went to Charan. He encountered the place and spent the night there, because the sun had set; he took from the stones of the place, and he placed them around his head and lay down in that place.** Rashi comments: **"And he placed them around his head": He arranged them like a gutter-pipe around his head, because he feared the presence of wild animals. The stones began to quarrel with one another. This one would say, "Upon me shall the tzaddik lay his head"; and this one would say, "Upon me shall he lay his head." Immediately, HKB"H made them into one stone. This is implied by the words** (ibid. 18)**: "And he took the stone** (singular) **that he placed around his head."**

Here is the text related to the second miracle (ibid. 18): **"וישכם יעקב בבוקר ויקח את האבן אשר שם מראשותיו וישם אותה מצבה ויצוק שמן על ראשה". Yaakov arose early in the morning and took the stone that he had placed around his head and set it up as a monument; and he poured oil on its top.** Here is a translation of a pertinent passage in the Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer (Chapter 35):

Yaakov took twelve stones from the stones of the mizbeiach upon which his father Yitzchak had been bound. He placed them around his head in that very same location to let him know whether or not twelve tribes were destined to descend from him. They all became one stone informing him that they were all destined to become one nation in the land . . . Yaakov returned to gather up the stones, and he found that they were all part of a single stone. He placed it as a monument in that place. Then oil descended from the heavens and he anointed it.

Twelve Gates of Tefilah: One for Each of the Twelve Shevatim

Why were these two miracles necessary? After all, as a rule, HKB"H does not perform miracles and alter the laws of nature unnecessarily. Let us begin by referring to what Rabbi Yehudah teaches us in a Midrash (B.R. 68, 11):

Yaakov took specifically twelve stones, representing the twelve tribes that HKB"H decreed that he would establish. He (Yaakov) **said, "Avraham did not establish them; Yitzchak did not establish them. As for me, if these twelve stones unite with one another, then I will know that I am destined to establish the twelve shevatim." Since the twelve stones united with one**

another, he understood that he would establish the **twelve shevatim.**

We learn from this Midrash that these were no ordinary stones. Yaakov Avinu took great care in selecting these twelve stones. They were meant to correspond to the future twelve tribes that would constitute the foundation of the nation of Yisrael for the remainder of time. Moreover, he established a sign and a test for himself: If the twelve stones joined together as one, he would know that he was the one destined to establish the twelve tribes. Accordingly, HKB"H granted his request; thus, notifying him that he would indeed be the one to establish the twelve tribes.

This enlightens us as to the quarrel that ensued among the twelve stones. For, they represented all the future neshamos of Yisrael that would be divided up among the twelve tribes. As such, each would have its own unique way of serving Hashem. Moreover, the Chasam Sofer (Shoftim) cites the Arizal and teaches us a tremendous chiddush:

We know from the Ar"i that there are twelve heavenly gates for the customs of the twelve tribes of Yisrael. Each one's tefilah ascends through its particular gate. Likewise, divine influence and speculative knowledge associated with Torah-study descend through these gates. Each tribe has its own gate and conduit for bringing down its divine influence, in keeping with the notion of "and grant us our portion in Your Torah" (from the middle berachah of the Shabbas tefilah).

With this in mind, we can explain the quarrel that ensued among the twelve stones. Since each one represented one of the future shevatim, each one yearned for Yaakov Avinu to endorse his way of serving Hashem and observing the Torah.

Notwithstanding, Yaakov realized via "ruach hakodesh" that the ideal was for the twelve tribes to unite as one in the service of the one true G-d—regardless of their unique paths and philosophies. The Torah expresses this fact as follows (Bamidbar 15, 16): **"תורה אחת ומשפט אחד יהיה לכם"—one Torah and one judgment will apply to you.** Therefore, Yaakov made a sign for himself: If the twelve stones united as one, he would know that he was destined to establish the twelve tribes. For, it is fitting for the offspring of Yisrael to unite and serve the one true G-d.

This explains marvelously the rationale for the first miracle. HKB"H transformed the twelve distinct stones into one to provide Yaakov Avinu with moral support and encourage him in his mission to build the house of Yisrael comprised of twelve shevatim. Additionally, it reflected the will of HKB"H that the entire house of Yisrael unite as one person with one heart, as they were at Matan Torah (Shemos 19, 2): **"ויחן שם ישראל"—and Yisrael encamped there.** Rashi comments: **As one man with one heart.** This comment is based on the fact that the passuk here employs the singular term **"ויחן"** rather than **"ויחנו".**

This explains very nicely the directive Yaakov Avinu delivered to his sons before passing away (Bereishis 49, 1): **"ויקרא יעקב אל בניו ויאמר האספו ואגידה לכם את אשר יקרא אתכם באחרית הימים"—Yaakov called for his sons and said, "Gather together and I will tell you what will happen to you at the end of days."** They expounded in the Midrash (B.R. 98, 2): **He commanded them regarding disputes; he said to them, "You should all be one united group." . . . if all of Bnei Yisrael will band together as a single unit, they will have prepared themselves for the geulah.**

The Pa'aneiach Raza Reveals the Miraculous Qualities of the Oil Yaakov Poured on the Pillar

Proceeding along this enlightening path, we will now focus on the second miracle performed on behalf of Yaakov Avinu, the miracle involving the oil. In the sefer Pa'aneiach Raza (Vayeitzei), one of the preeminent Rishonim, Rabeinu Yitzchak ben Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi, z"l, teaches us an incredible chiddush. The passuk says: **"He** (Yaakov) **took the stone that he had placed around his head and set it up as a monument; and he poured oil on its top."** Rashi (Bereishis 29, 11) cites the Midrash: **Eliphaz, Eisav's son, pursued him at his father's command, to kill him. He overtook him; but since Eliphaz grew up under Yitzchak's influence, he withdrew his hand. He said** (to Yaakov)**, "What should I do concerning my father's command?" Yaakov responded to him, "Take that**

which is in my hand; for, a poor person is considered to be like a dead person."

If Eliphaz relieved Yaakov of all his earthly possessions, where did the oil that he poured on the top of the pillar come from? He answers that Yaakov was left with his staff, as it is written (ibid. 32, 11): "**כי במקלי [עברתי את הירדן הזה]**"—**with my staff** [I crossed this Yarden]**." It was hollow; for he always brought a full supply of oil with him, so that he would have what to light to learn Torah.** This coincides with the teaching in the Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer that oil came down to him from the heavens to fill his staff, because he had used up his supply of oil while studying Torah before he went to sleep that night on Har HaMoriah. This is deduced from the words (ibid. 28, 16): "**ויקץ יעקב משנתו**"—**Yaakov awoke from his sleep.** They expounded in the Midrash (B.R. 69, 7): **Rabbi Yochanan said** "**ממשנתו**"—**from his learning.** In Tiferes Yehonatan, the great Rabbi Yehonatan Eibuschutz, zy"a, explains that this means that he was learning Torah before he fell asleep.

The Rambam Emphasizes the Importance of Studying Torah at Night

It is my great honor to now explain the profound intent of Yaakov Avinu for anointing the pillar. We have learned from the Pa'aneiach Raza that Yaakov Avinu used the oil that he always kept concealed in his walking staff to study Torah in the darkness of night. Regarding the importance of nighttime Torah-study, we have learned (Berachos 19, 14): "**אמר ריש לקיש, מנין שאין דברי תורה מתקיימין אלא במי שממית עצמו עליה, שנאמר זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל**". **Reish Lakish said: From where do we learn that words of Torah are not retained except by one who sacrifices himself for her sake? For it is stated** (Bamidbar 19, 14)**: "This is the Torah of a man who dies in a tent."** According to the Rambam (Hilchos Talmud Torah 3, 12) this means self-sacrifice and devotion to the study of Torah by minimizing one's sleep. Here is a translation of the passage:

The words of Torah will not be retained by a person who applies himself feebly to obtain them, and not by those who study amid pleasure and an abundance of food and drink. Rather, one must give up his life for them, constantly straining his body to the point of discomfort, without granting sleep to his eyes or slumber to his eyelids. The Sages alluded to this concept: "This is the Torah, a man should he die in a tent..." The Torah can only be retained by a person who gives up his life in the tents of wisdom.

Regarding his assertion that self-sacrifice for the sake of Torah implies going **"without granting sleep to his eyes or slumber to his eyelids,"** he provides the following clarification in the very next halachah (ibid. 13): **Even though it is a mitzvah to study during the day and at night, it is only at night that a person acquires most of his wisdom. Therefore, a person who desires to merit the crown of Torah should make the most of all his nights, not wasting even one of them with sleep, eating, drinking, idle chatter, or the like. Rather,** (they should be devoted to) **the study of Torah and words of wisdom.**

This Applies Especially to the Study of Torah She'b'al Peh

We find a variation on this theme in the Midrash Tanchuma (Noach 3). Concerning the teaching of Reish Lakish that Torah is only retained "**במי שממית עצמו עליה**", it applies this specifically to toiling in the study of Torah she'b'al peh. Here is a translation of the inspirational, sacred words of the Midrash:

Blessed be the name of the King of Kings, HKB"H, Who chose Yisrael from among the seventy nations, as it is written (Devarim 32, 9)**: "For the portion of Hashem is His people Yaakov, the lot of his inheritance." He gave us Torah she'b'chsav, which alludes to hidden and obscure teachings, and explained them in Torah she'b'al peh, which He revealed to Yisrael . . . of (Torah) she'b'al peh it is written** (Iyov 11, 9)**: "Its measure is longer than the earth and wider than the sea."**

It is also written (ibid. 28, 13)**: "It cannot be found in the land of the living." . . . It means that you will not find Torah she'b'al peh among those who pursue the pleasures of this world—its passions, its glory, or its greatness—but only among those who sacrifice themselves for its sake, as it states: "This is the Torah**

of a man who dies in a tent." (Avos 6, 4) **"This is the way of the Torah: To eat bread with salt, to drink water in small amounts, to sleep upon the ground, to live a life of hardship, and to toil in the Torah." For, HKB"H only established His covenant with Yisrael on account of Torah she'b'al peh . . . This refers to the Torah she'b'al peh, which is difficult to learn and it involves considerable anguish.**

Now, let us consider how the Midrash arrived at the conclusion that "**זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל**" refers to the study of Torah she'b'al peh. It is accepted that there are 36 masechtos in Torah she'b'al peh affiliated with Talmud Bavli. We find a source for this in the Derashos Chasam Sofer (part 2, p. 411, column 2). He explains why the sages of the Talmud chose to conclude Talmud Bavli with the statement: "**תנא דבי אליהו כל השונה הלכות בכל יום מובטח לו שהוא בן עולם הבא, שנאמר הליכות עולם לו.**" **The Academy of Eliyahu taught: He who studies "halachos" every day is assured that he will be an inhabitant of Olam HaBa, as it states: "The ways ('halichos') of the world are His (ל"ז).** This statement alludes to the fact that the world exists—**"halichos olam"**—and endures in the merit of the study of the **ל"ז** (36) masechtos of Torah she'b'al peh—"**הליכות עולם לו**".

We can now suggest that this is the "remez" in the passuk "**זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל**", on which Reish Lakish expounded that Torah is only retained by someone who is willing to sacrifice himself on her behalf. Furthermore, according to the Midrash, this refers specifically to Torah she'b'al peh, which functions like an "**אהל**"**—a tent**—for Torah she'b'chsav by clarifying and covering all the issues that are not expressed explicitly therein. This is alluded to by the gematria of **אה"ל**, which is **36**—the number of masechtos in Torah she'b'al peh.

Combining the Explanations of the Midrash and the Rambam

According to the Midrash, Torah is only retained by someone who deprives himself for the sake of Torah she'b'al peh. According to the Rambam, Torah is only retained by someone who deprives himself of sleep by studying Torah during the night. Now, the Midrash Tanchuma (Ki Sisa 36) teaches in relation to the passuk (Shemos 34, 28): "**ויהי שם עם ה' ארבעים יום וארבעים לילה**"**—he was there with Hashem for forty days and forty nights. How did Moshe know when it was day? When HKB"H would teach him Torah "b'chtav," he knew it was day; and when He would teach him "ahl peh"—Mishnah and Talmud—he would know that it was night.** This coincides fantastically with these two explanations. According to the Rambam, the majority of a person's chochmah is attained at night. Hence, as the Midrash emphasizes, that is the most fitting time to study Torah she'b'al peh, since it clarifies through in-depth analysis and dialectic all the mitzvos mentioned in Torah she'b'chsav.

Thus, we learn a valuable principle. Someone who learns Torah at night is guaranteed that his learning will be retained, in keeping with the Gemara's statement: "**שאין דברי תורה מתקיימין אלא במי שממית עצמו עליה**"—as it is interpreted by the Rambam. We can now understand why it was crucial for Yaakov Avinu, the pillar of Torah, to keep a constant supply of oil in his staff. By depriving himself of sleep and always studying Torah during the night, he ensured that the Torah would be retained by him and all of his future descendants.

Yaakov Did Not Sleep at Night during His Fourteen Years in the Study Hall of Eiver

This explains magnificently why Yaakov went and immersed himself in the Beis Midrash of Eiver before actually going to Charan to lay down the foundation of the people of Yisrael. He remained there for fourteen years studying Torah day and night. Rashi teaches us this fact in him commentary (Bereishis 28, 11): "**וישכב במקום ההוא**"**—he lay down in that place: This expresses exclusion; in that place he lay down; however, during the fourteen years that he served in the house of Eiver, he did not lay down at night, because he engaged in Torah-study.**

As we know from the opening words of the Torah (ibid. 1, 1): "**בראשית ברא אלקים**"—the people of Yisrael were created to study and devote themselves to the Torah. Rashi expresses this fact in his commentary on the word "**בראשית**"**: For the Torah, which is called** (Mishlei 8, 22) "**ראשית דרכו**"

and for Yisrael who are called (Yirmiyah 2, 3) **"ראשית תבואתו".** Therefore, before embarking on his mission to begin the family of Yisrael, he made a crucial detour. He spent fourteen years sacrificing himself for the sake of the Torah in the Beis Midrash of Eiver to pave the way for all of his future descendants. Thus, he ensured that the Torah would never be forgotten from Yisrael.

The profound intent of Yaakov Avinu is now quite clear: **"He took the stone that he had placed around his head and set it up as a monument; and he poured oil on its top."** HKB"H assisted him by sending down a supply of heavenly oil with which to fill the hollow cavity in his staff. The Gemara emphasizes the importance of olive oil to the study of Torah (Horayos 13b): **"אמר רבי יוחנן כשם שהזית משכח לימוד של שבעים שנה, כך שמן זית משיב לימוד של שבעים שנה"—Rabbi Yochanan said: Just as the olive causes the forgetting of seventy years of Torah-study; similarly, olive-oil restores seventy years of Torah-study.**

Thus, we have an explicit source teaching us that oil is essential for Torah-study; it is a "segulah" for memory and retention. We can suggest that Rabbi Yochanan was not referring only to the consumption of olive oil but also to its vital function of illuminating the night for the sake of Torah-study. We have already discussed the importance of nighttime Torah-study; it is part of the self-sacrifice required for retaining the Torah a Jew has learned and preserving the Torah in Yisrael: **"זאת התורה אדם כי ימות באהל".**

At this point, let us connect the two miracles HKB"H performed for Yaakov Avinu at the site of the Mikdash after devoting himself to the study of Torah day and night without sleep in the Beis Midrash of Eiver: (1) the twelve stones amalgamated beneath his head into one providing Yaakov with a definite sign that Hashem wanted him to succeed in establishing the house of Yisrael comprised of twelve shevatim united as one, unique people on earth. (2) Eliphaz left him his walking staff containing oil concealed within, which Yaakov used to study Torah at night. Additionally, with that special oil—which is a "segulah" for memory—he libated the monument formed from twelve quarreling stones that united as one. This was a symbolic gesture indicating that the people of Yisrael, originating from twelve shevatim, would preserve the Torah forever. Thus, the two miracles go hand-in-hand magnificently.

Eliphaz the Son of Eisav Reincarnated into Onkelos the Convert

I would now like to focus on the wonders of divine supervision and orchestration. Hashem reincarnates neshamos from generation to generation to afford them an opportunity for tikun and to reward those who are deserving. In the words of the Gemara (B.K. 38b): **"אין הקב"ה מקפח שכר כל בריה אפילו שכר שיחה נאה"—HKB"H does not withhold the reward of any creature, even the reward for refined speech.** We will now apply this concept to our current discussion. HKB"H rewarded Eliphaz for sparing Yaakov's life and for allowing him to keep his staff, which as we have learned housed the oil he needed for his nighttime Torah-study.

To explain Eliphaz's reward, we will begin by introducing the incredible story of Onkelos as told in the Gemara (Gittin 56b). Onkelos the son of Kalonikos was the nephew of the Roman Caesar Hadrian; he wished to convert. Using sorcery, he raised the Caesar Titus (who had been dead for many years) from the dead. He asked him who is important in that world—i.e., the afterlife. Titus replied that Yisrael are important. Onkelos asked if he should join them. Titus replied that they have many mitzvos and he would not be able to abide by them; instead, torment them in this world, and you will become a leader, as it is written (Eichah 1, 5): **"היו צריה לראש"—her tormentors have become leaders.** All those who torment Yisrael become leaders.

In the sefer Gilgulei Neshamos (1, 12), authored by the divine kabbalist, the Rama of Pano, he teaches us something fascinating. Eliphaz, the son of Eisav, reincarnated into Onkelos HaGer (the convert) as an "ibur." The wicked Titus, who destroyed the Beis HaMikdash, was a gilgul of Eisav. This prompted Onkelos to use necromancy to raise Titus from the dead to seek advice—should he convert or not? He figured that perhaps now that he was suffering the torments of Gehinnom, he would encourage him to

convert. Nevertheless, Titus, the gilgul of Eisav, remained steadfast in his wickedness; he counselled Onkelos not only not to convert but to torment and make life miserable for the Jews.

Onkelos HaGer Translated and Interpreted Torah She'b'chtav as It Was Taught to Him by Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua

Thus, we are privy to an exalted, esoteric idea. As a reward for not obeying his father Eisav's order to kill Yaakov, Eliphaz reincarnated into Onkelos who also neglected to obey the counsel of the wicked Titus, his father Eisav's gilgul. Instead, Onkelos converted and was privileged to learn Torah from Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua and to translate the entire Torah. As we are taught in the Gemara (Megillah 3a): **"תרגום של תורה אונקלוס הגר אמרו מפי רבי אליעזר ורבי יהושע"—the Targum of the Torah was composed by Onkelos the "ger," who learned it from Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua.**

Furthermore, not only was Eliphaz rewarded by reincarnating into Onkelos HaGer, but his "targum" is an inseparable part of Torah she'b'al peh. In fact, we are taught in the Gemara (Berachos 8a): **"לעולם ישלים אדם פרשיותיו עם הצבור שנים מקרא ואחד תרגום"—a person should always complete the Torah portion** (of the week) **with the congregation, reading the** (Hebrew) **text twice and the Targum once.** In other words, a Jew is obligated to review Targum Onkelos on the parsha every week.

So, let us explain why Eliphaz, the son of Eisav, merited this distinction. Firstly, he disobeyed his father's command and allowed Yaakov, the pillar of Torah, to remain alive knowing that Eisav was a murderer and was liable to kill him for this offence. Secondly, he left the staff with the concealed oil in it in Yaakov's possession; this enabled Yaakov to continue studying Torah she'b'al peh at night. On account of that merciful act, the Torah has endured through Yaakov and his descendants, the people of Yisrael, for all time. Therefore, Eliphaz was rewarded "midah k'neged midah"—measure for measure—by reincarnating into Onkelos HaGer, who translated and interpreted the entire Torah exactly as it was transmitted orally to Moshe at Sinai.

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