

The Torah Sparks

SHABBOS COMPANION

PARSHAH OVERVIEW

Yaakov leaves Be'er Sheva, and he experiences a vision at Moriah; the ladder dream. Yaakov meets Rachel by the well and removes the heavy rock. Yaakov wants to marry Rachel, and works for seven years for Lavan (her father). Lavan deceives Yaakov, and substitutes Leah for Rachel. Yaakov marries both Rachel and Leah (and Bilha/Zilpah) and the shevatim (tribes) are born. Yaakov builds his family, prospers, and ultimately flees from Lavan.

QUICK VORT

There are three symbols of Avodas Hashem (service of the Divine) that were manifested by the three Avos: Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov.

Avraham connected to Hashem through a הר, a mountain. Yitzchak connected to Hashem through a שדה, a field. And Yaakov connected to Hashem through a בית, a home.

Our Sages tell us that the preferred method for Avodas Hashem is the בית, a home.

Rav Moshe Shternbuch shlit"א points out an amazing thing. Whereas a mountain is hard to climb and a field can be tough to cross, a home is relatively simple and easy to open up and go inside.

If you think about it, a mountain and a field are things that you can walk on. But only a home, בית, is something that you can walk inside! In Avodas Hashem, we want to be able to "go inside" and experience Hashem directly!

HOLINESS IS THE SPACE WE MAKE FOR G-D.
(RABBI J. SACKS ZT'L)

PARSHAH STATS

148	2021	7512	0
Pesukim	Words	Letters	Mitzvos

GEMATRIA

There are 148 pesukim in the Parshah. 148 is the gematria of קמח, which means flour. Our Sages teach us that: *אם אין קמח אין תורה* - without flour, there is no Torah. One way to understand this is that without "flour" - i.e., parnassah - someone will not be able to learn Torah. Another way to understand this, though, is that Torah is our flour; Torah provides us sustenance.

In our Parshah (see Rashi), we are told that Yaakov studied in the Yeshiva of Shem/Ever for 14 years. Surely, it was these formative years which provided him true sustenance and vitality!

CHASSIDUS

Yaakov Avinu is blessed *ופרצת*, which connotes spreading forth without limits.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe says that this ability to break beyond all the physical parameters and constraints is the inheritance of Yaakov Avinu!

Usually, inheritance is limited to whatever physical "items" are being given over. However, imagine being given over a spiritual inheritance that knows no bounds? Yaakov got this type of inheritance.

On some level, each of us - as *yidden* - also have this spiritual inheritance!

DID YOU KNOW?

The rock, which is normally *דומם*, lifeless, became a *מדבר*, a speaker, as we know it *said* "The Tzadik should rest on me" (Sefer Lehoros Nossan).

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Contained in the words *מבאר שבע* are *שם*, *עבר*, *ארבע*, *עשר*, alluding to the 14 years which Yaakov studied in the Yeshiva Shem V'Ever (R' Moshe Ahron Friedman).

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Hearing good news makes you run quicker (see Rashi 29:1)

INSPOGRAPHIC CORNER



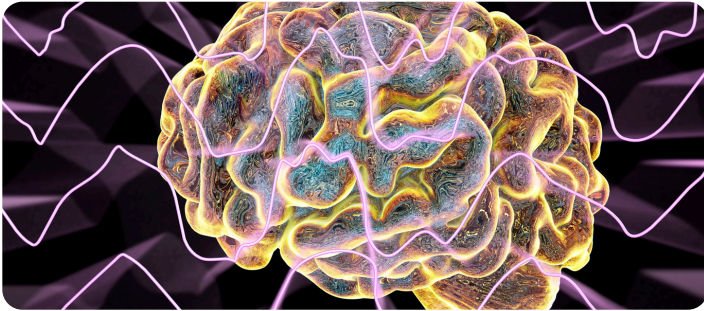
Dvar Torah for Parshas Vayitzei

“Brain Rot”



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The Apt Word of the Year



The 2024 Oxford University Press Word of the Year, the word or expression that reflects a defining theme from the past year, is “brain rot.”

“Brain rot” is a noun, which means: *Supposed deterioration of a person’s mental or intellectual state, especially viewed as a result of overconsumption of material (now particularly online content) considered to be trivial or unchallenging.*

Between 2023 and 2024, the term “brain rot” gained new prominence, increasing in usage frequency by 230%.

According to Oxford University Press, the first recorded use of “brain rot” actually goes back to 1854, in Henry David Thoreau’s book *Walden*, in which he discusses his experiences of living a simple lifestyle in the natural world. He criticizes society’s tendency to devalue complex ideas, or those that can be interpreted in multiple ways, in favor of simple ones, and sees this as being indicative of a general decline in mental and intellectual effort. He writes: “While England endeavors to cure the potato rot, will not any endeavor to cure the brain-rot – which prevails so much more widely and fatally?”

If there was a general decline in mental and intellectual effort already in the mid-1800s – when there was no such thing as TV’s, computers, radios, phones, internet, and social media – you can imagine the extent of what “brain rot” looks like today. How would Thoreau react to these ubiquitous habits:

- checking the same news website for the 100th time in an hour
- refreshing emails every 30 seconds
- scrolling and scrolling and scrolling through Tik Tok and Instagram feeds for hours on end
- binge watching for an entire day
- constantly looking down at your phone ignoring the pulsating life that is going on right in front of you

All this is a manifestation of our “brain rot”. At its core, “brain rot” is a result of the mismanagement of the physical world. Instead of using materialism as a *means*, it’s used as an *end* in and of itself, leading to overconsumption which results in a person feeling down, unfulfilled, and miserable. Being entrenched in trivial, unchallenging escapes rots our brains.

The verse in the Book of Iyov states: אדם לעמל יולד - “A person is born to work hard.” This isn’t just a mission statement; it’s a testament to our very essence and nature. We were designed in a way that requires us to put in effort and challenge ourselves in order to feel good and attain fulfillment and meaning.

Scrolling on a phone is fun, tantalizing, and addictive, but since there is precious little mental or intellectual effort involved, it is inherently unfulfilling.

Our forefather Yaakov Avinu dreamt of a ladder that had its feet on the physical ground and its top reaching to the heavens. The ladder serves as a model for the importance of bridging the gap between the physical and spiritual realms. It represents the potential for physicality to be channeled and uplifted towards a higher plane of existence. Each rung represents a crucial step of effort that brings us closer to the top in our journey towards living meaningfully.

Judaism bids us to engage in the physical world and to use it as a stepping stone – a rung on the ladder – to spirituality. On Shabbas, having a beautiful meal with family and friends, reciting blessings, accompanied with joyous song and inspiration, we take the seemingly mundane meat and potatoes (or rice, if you are Sehardic!) and elevate it.

Taking in the breathtaking beauty of the natural world that fills us with humility and awe, we are experiencing something Godly and holy penetrating through the physical. And when we take a portion of our hard-earned money and we give some of it to someone in need, we are infusing the physical with a spiritual currency.

Everything in the material world can be channeled towards the spiritual, as evidence by Yaakov Avinu’s ladder that was rooted in the world while reaching the heavens.

All we have to do is decrease the brain rot and start using our time to climb the ladder of life, one rung and one moment at a time.

Have a holy Shabbos!
R’ Ori Strum

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