Receive the bulletin by email

Imrey Noam

Parashat Vayetzei

Shabbat Shalom!

November 21, 2026 | 11 Kislev | 5787

SHABBAT TIMES

City	Candle lighting	Shabbat ends
New York	4:16	5:17
Los Angeles	4:28	5:26
Chicago	4:07	5:10

Local time in each city · All times PM

How Much Strength Lies Within Us?

On the weekly parashah
Rabbi Reuven Kuklin



A wholehearted desire to help can reveal strength we never knew we had.

Yaakov reaches the well and finds the shepherds waiting. A great stone covers its mouth, and they must wait for all the flocks to gather before they can roll it away. Yet when Rachel arrives with her sheep, Yaakov steps forward and moves the stone by himself. Rashi describes how easily he did it: like removing a stopper from the mouth of a flask.

In the prayer for rain, we recall this deed and ask for water in his merit: 'He focused his heart and rolled the stone from the mouth of a well... For his sake, do not withhold water.' Yaakov gathered all the strength of his heart and mind and rolled away the stone.



But why is this such a great merit? If it was merely a feat of physical strength, what spiritual virtue makes it worthy of being invoked in our prayer for rain?

Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz explains that the key lies in the words 'focused his heart.' Yaakov devoted all the powers of his soul to an act of kindness. His desire to help, and his willingness to give himself entirely to another person's needs, awakened strength that ordinary circumstances would never have revealed. The body's strength, Rabbi Chaim explains, draws on the strength of the soul. When the heart is wholly directed toward a goal, a person can do far more than he imagined possible.

Rabbi Chaim points to a familiar phenomenon: during a fire or another emergency, people sometimes discover strength they never knew they possessed. One person may accomplish what would ordinarily require several. The urgency of the moment brings together powers that lie dormant in everyday life.

In November 2015, nineteen-year-old Charlotte Heffelmire found her father trapped beneath the pickup truck he was repairing in their garage in the United States. Fuel had spilled, and a fire broke out. The young woman rushed to the heavy vehicle and managed to lift it enough to free her father. Later, she herself struggled to explain where that strength had come from.

A THOUGHT TO KEEP

The Light of a Tzaddik

'Yaakov left Be'er Sheva and went to Charan' (Genesis 28:10). Why does the Torah emphasize his departure? Rashi explains that when a righteous person leaves a place, it makes an impression. While he is in the city, he is its glory, its radiance and its splendor. When he leaves, that glory, radiance and splendor depart with him.

How does a tzaddik influence a place? We might think of what he does: the Torah he teaches, the advice he offers and the kindness he shows.

Yet 'glory, radiance and splendor' suggest another kind of influence. Just as light illuminates its surroundings simply by shining, a tzaddik affects the people around him through his very presence, even without acting directly on their behalf.

Someone who has no personal relationship with him can still be changed by knowing that such a person lives nearby. He sees a life of spiritual greatness and discovers the heights a human being can reach.

The tzaddik's example broadens his aspirations and awakens in him, too, the desire to grow.

Times: Hebcal.com. Candle lighting: 18 minutes before sunset. Shabbat ends: sun 8.5 degrees below the horizon.

When Excuses Are Not Enough

Adapted from a story told by Rabbi Yaakov Galinsky

'He raised his voice and wept' (Genesis 29:11).

When Yaakov met Rachel, he burst into tears. Rashi explains that he had arrived empty-handed. Eliezer, his grandfather Avraham's servant, had brought jewelry and gifts for Yitzchak's bride. Yaakov had nothing: he had given all his possessions to Esav's son Eliphaz to save his life.

But why did he weep? Could he have acted differently? Surely he had a good reason for coming empty-handed.

In the town of Sanz lived a poor cobbler named Zalman. From morning until night, he bent over other people's shoes, patching, mending and stitching. He earned barely enough for bread and firewood. His tallit was covered in patches, his shtreimel's fur was thinning, and his old kittel was worn out.

For a long time, Zalman had dreamed of a new kittel. Without telling his wife, he set aside a small tin and saved a coin from each repair. One coin, then another... When the tin was full, he carried it to the cloth merchant.

The merchant emptied the coins onto the counter and counted them. They did not amount to even one crown. The silk cost thirty.

'I'm sorry. This will barely buy enough cloth for the sleeves.'

Zalman went pale. All those months of saving, coin by coin, for nothing?

'Could you perhaps lower the price?' he whispered.



The merchant shook his head. Then he noticed the poor man's tears and paused. On the top shelf lay an old roll of silk. No one expected to sell it anymore: over the years, the threads had dried out and become brittle.

'I can give you enough of that for a kittel. But I must warn you: it is very old. You will have to treat it with great care.'

Zalman's face lit up. Carefully? Of course he would be careful! At last, he would have a new kittel.

He hurried home, spread the silk before his wife and asked her to sew his festive garment. Gently, very gently... With love and trepidation, she set to work. The fabric crumbled like flaky pastry, but stitch by stitch, the kittel took shape.

Before Shabbat, Zalman washed and dressed with care. He slipped one arm into a sleeve; someone helped him with the other. He fastened the garment, tied his sash and set off for the beit midrash. He felt like a king.

The worshippers turned to look. Was this really their cobbler? The shtreimel was the same, but his face was shining, and how his new kittel gleamed!

Someone greeted him and gave him an affectionate pat on the shoulder. A piece of silk fell away.

'What sort of garment is this?'

Another man tugged lightly at the fabric, and the hole grew.

'Don't touch it! Please, don't touch it!' Zalman cried.

But the curious crowd had already surrounded him. Everyone wanted to examine this strange cloth. At every touch, the silk split and tore. Zalman wept while the men went on wondering and feeling the fabric.

Suddenly, silence fell. The rabbi of Sanz, the author of Divrei Chaim, had entered.

'What is happening here?'

The crowd parted. Before the rabbi stood the cobbler, his kittel in shreds.

'I had a dream, and this is all that is left of it,' he managed through his tears.

He told the whole story: the coins he had saved, the good silk he could not afford, his joy at finding the old cloth. He had never imagined it would fall apart so quickly. And why had everyone touched it? Why had they laughed?

The rabbi listened. 'Come to me after Shabbat. I will give you money for good, new cloth.'

Then he turned to the others. 'Why are you hurting him? What else could he have done? He bought what he could afford. Is he to blame?'

The cobbler had an explanation, and a perfectly valid one. But it could not mend his torn kittel. Now we can understand Yaakov's tears. He had surrendered his possessions to save his life; no one could blame him. Yet he still had no gifts for Rachel. Even the best reason could not fill that emptiness.

And what about us?

We work hard, care for our families and earn our daily bread. 'If there is no flour, there is no Torah,' our Sages teach (Avot 3:17), and 'The Holy One does not make unreasonable demands of His creatures' (Avodah Zarah 3a). All this is true. Our difficulties are real, and our explanations may be entirely justified.

But when, after a hundred and twenty years, we stand before the Heavenly Court, we will want to bring what we lived for: the Torah we learned, the mitzvot we fulfilled and the kindness we showed.

If all we have are explanations for why we never found the time, will we be able to hold back our tears?

Adapted for this bulletin from the article at imrey.org/excuses.