



New Life in Dry Bones Parshas Vayetze

My father, Rabbi Yisroel Grossman, stood freezing in front of the locked doors of a Johannesburg synagogue. It was pouring rain as he stood in the street on Shabbos morning. When he asked the previous evening when the *Shacharis* morning prayers began he did not get a clear answer. Now he understood why.

After debating with himself, he decided to wait until the building was opened and prayers commenced. After a long while someone showed up and unlocked the doors, but notified my father that there would not be a *Minyan*, a quorum of ten men required for public prayers.

Where was everyone? Hundreds of people were present for the evening prayers. The person explained that most congregation members did not attend the morning prayers and instead went to work. My father was shocked. He had never encountered such a situation.

He was an old Jerusalemite who was sent to collect funds for the yeshivas in Israel and spent two long months in the country. He was sent on the mission because he was the one to point out the necessity of a high quality Torah education.

Now, standing helpless in Johannesburg, he was upset to find the community in such a sad state. He asked to gather as many people as possible, and slowly a quorum was found. After prayers he called on their support for the establishment of a yeshiva in their community. They would perish as a community without it, he warned.

Our weekly parsha recounts how Yaacov "arrived at the place and lodged there because the sun had set, and he took some of the stones of the place and placed [them] at his head, and he **lay down in that place.**"¹

Our Sages explain that only in **that place** Yaacov laid down, but during the fourteen years that he served in the house of Ever, he did not lie down at night, because he was engaged in Torah study.

A question is asked – Yaacov was sent by his parents to Haran to find a wife and establish a family. How did he have the audacity to spend fourteen years in the study of Torah before embarking on his quest?

The Zohar teaches us, through the interpretation of the various names of the places mentioned in the parsha, that Yaacov left the Land of Israel and went to a place where G-d's rage reigns, a harsh place seemingly more distanced from G-d.

Yaacov left his safety and security to a dangerous place. He knew that only the holy Torah would safeguard him during his perilous endeavor. The only way to properly succeed in his mission and establish a holy home would be on the foundations of Torah.

Therefore, by studying Torah prior to his marriage, Yaacov was carrying out his parents' mission in the most optimal fashion.

The People of Israel without Torah are like a body without a soul.

Father did not conclude his push by addressing the community on Shabbos. He convened the community leaders and announced the establishment of communal yeshiva.

It was as if he had forgotten the purpose of his visit to the place.

He went from place to place, establishing Torah classes and teaching. He put all his effort into the endeavor, thus infusing dry bones with new life.

When asked about his own mission, Rabbi Yisroel replied that his mission was the dissemination of Torah. "What is the difference where?" he added. I got engaged to my wife-to-be during those days. He sent me a message congratulating me and encouraging me to proceed.

Praising my father's actions, one rabbi pointed out that my father travelled from place to place, toiling to ensure that G-d's name is sanctified.

¹ Beresheit 28:11.