

Yaakov Avinu Sanctified His Entire Body Resembling the Luz Bone that Never Dies

In this week's parsha, parshas Vayeitzei, the holy Torah teaches us how HKB"H imposed upon Yaakov Ovinu — the elite of the Ovos — the formidable task of establishing the foundation for the sacred people of Yisroel in the house of Lovon HoArami. In the house of that evil person — concerning whom the author of the Haggadah states: **“ולבן ביקש לעקור את הכל”** — **and Lavan intended to uproot everything** — he was charged with the task of marrying as wives the future Matriarchs — Rachel and Leah, Bilhoh and Zilpoh. They gave birth for Yaakov to the heads of the twelve tribes, from whom all future generations of Jews would descend. We find the following description in sefer Tehillim (122, 4): **“שבטי י”ה עדות לישראל”** — **the tribes of Kah, who are a testimony for Yisroel.**

Yaakov Ovinu's incredible journey begins with the very first possuk of this week's parsha: **“ויצא יעקב מבאר שבע וילך חרנה”** — **and Yaakov departed from Be'er Sheva and headed toward Choron.** Rashi, z"l, (the end of parshas Toldos) introduces the teaching of our blessed sages (Megillah 17a) that Yaakov sequestered himself in the Yeshivah of Ever for fourteen years before leaving for Choron. Scriptures proceed to describe how, at the conclusion of those fourteen years, HKB"H arranged for Yaakov to sojourn at the location of the future Beis HaMikdosh, Har HaMoriah: **“ויפגע במקום וילן שם כי בא השמש”** — **he encountered the place and spent the night there, because the sun had set.** Rashi comments: **“ששקעה לו חמה”** — **the sun set**

for him suddenly, not at its normal time, so that he would spend the night there.

In a vision that night, he beheld a divine revelation that would determine his path for the rest of his life. HKB"H appeared to him in a dream and promised him that he would merit establishing a loyal household in Yisroel — **“bayis ne'eman b'Yisroel”** — producing sacred offspring that would inherit the promised land; additionally, He would protect and watch over Yaakov wherever he went (28, 12):

“ויחלום והנה סולם מוצב ארצה וראשו מגיע השמימה, והנה מלאכי אלקים עולים ויורדים בו, והנה ה' נצב עליו ויאמר אני ה' אלקי אברהם אביך ואלקי יצחק, הארץ אשר אתה שוכב עליה לך אתננה ולזרעך, והיה זרעך כעפר הארץ ופרצת ימה וקדמה וצפונה ונגבה, ונברכו בך כל משפחת האדמה ובזרעך, והנה אנכי עמך ושמרתיך בכל אשר תלך.”

And he dreamt, and behold! A ladder was set earthward and its top reached heavenward. And behold! Angels of G-d were ascending and descending on it. And behold! Hashem was standing over him, and He said, “I am Hashem, G-d of Avraham your father and G-d of Yitzchok; the ground upon which you are lying, to you will I give it and to your descendants. Your offspring shall be as the dust of the earth, and you shall burst forth westward, eastward, northward and southward; and all the families of the earth shall bless themselves by you and by your offspring. Behold, I am with you; and I will guard you wherever you go.”

In his dream, Yaakov beheld a divine ladder: **והנה: "And behold! Angels of G-d were ascending and descending on it – depicting the fact that Yisroel must first direct their prayers heavenward to Hashem, in order to subsequently bring the heavenly bounty down to earth. From this magnificent vision, Yaakov realized that he had slept in the place of the Beis HaMikdosh. As a result, he was overwhelmed by a tremendous sense of awe (ibid. 16): "וויקץ יעקב: משנתו ויאמר אכן יש ה' במקום הזה ואנכי לא ידעתי, ויירא ויאמר מה נורא המקום הזה, אין זה כי אם בית ויאמר וזה שער השמים. Yaakov awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely Hashem is in this place and I did not know!" And he became frightened and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the abode of G-d and this is the gate of the heavens!" Here Rashi comments: "וזה שער השמים, מקום תפלה לעלות תפלתם השמימה" – and this is the gate of the heavens, a place of prayer for their prayers to ascend heavenward.**

In this essay, we wish to scrutinize two actions performed by Yaakov Ovinu immediately upon waking from this G-dly vision which he saw in his dream that night (ibid. 18): **"וישכם יעקב בבוקר ויקח את האבן אשר שם מראשותיו, וישם אותה מצבה ויצוק שמן על ראשה, ויקרא את שם המקום ההוא בית Yaakov arose early in the morning and took the stone that he had placed around his head and set it as a pillar; and he poured oil on its top. And he called the name of that place Beis El; however, Luz was the city's original name.**

We will endeavor to explain what possessed Yaakov: (a) to make a monument out of the stone that he had rested his head upon, and (b) to change the name of the place from "Luz" to "Beis El"? It appears that we can interpret these two actions in the following manner: Yaakov specifically chose these actions to serve as the cornerstone for the sacred structure of the people of Yisroel that he was about to establish in Charan.

The Stone Composed of Twelve Stones Corresponding to the Twelve Holy Tribes

To begin with, let us address the first action: **"ויקח את האבן אשר שם מראשותיו, וישם אותה מצבה ויצוק שמן על ראשה" – and he took the stone that he had placed around his head and set it as a pillar; and he poured oil on its top.** Rashi clarifies for us an apparent contradiction present in these pesukim. It initially states (ibid. 11) that Yaakov took **"מאבני"**, from the stones of the place – plural, many stones. Subsequently, it states (ibid. 18) that he took **"האבן"**, the one, singular, stone that he had placed under his head. Rashi resolves the issue as follows: **"עשאו, עשאו, עשאו, עשאו, עשאו, עשאו, עשאו, עשאו, עשאו, עשאו, עשאו, עשאו" – he formed a gutter pipe around his head with the stones, because he was afraid of dangerous animals; they began quarreling with one another.**

Each one wanted the tzaddik to specifically rest his head upon it. **HKB"H immediately transformed them into one stone.** This explains why the latter possuk refers to the stone in the singular. Now, we are aware of the basic principle that HKB"H does not perform miracles without a purpose. So, what in fact was the purpose served by this divine transformation of the many stones into one single stone?

Let us explain the matter based on a statement of our blessed sages in the Midrash (B.R. 68, 11): **"ויקח מאבני המקום, רבי יהודה אמר, שנים עשרה אבנים נטל, כך גזר הקב"ה שהוא מעמיד שנים עשר שבטים, אמר [יעקב], אברהם לא העמידן, יצחק לא העמידן, אני אם מתאחות הן שנים עשר אבנים זו לזו, יודע אני שאני מעמיד י"ב שבטים, כיון שנתאחו י"ב אבנים זו לזו ידע שהוא מעמיד י"ב שבטים"** According to the Midrash, Yaakov took specifically twelve stones, representing the twelve tribes that HKB"H decreed that he would establish. Neither Avrohom nor Yitzchok established the twelve

tribes. If the stones united to form one single stone, Yaakov would know that he was destined to successfully establish the twelve tribes.

How are we to comprehend this dispute that took place among the twelve stones? They represented the neshomos of Yisroel that are divided up into twelve tribes. It is well-known that each tribe has its own unique path and way of serving Hashem. Consequently, each stone, corresponding to one of the tribes, specifically wanted the tzaddik, Yaakov Ovinu, to rest his head upon it. Each one wanted Yaakov Ovinu to adopt his methodology as the way Yisroel would serve Hashem — as he proceeded to release the neshomos of Yisroel from concealment in the house of Lavan HaArami.

Notwithstanding, Yaakov Ovinu understood by means of "ruach hakodesh," divine inspiration, that the ultimate goal was for the tribes to unite and serve the one and only Hashem as one — as the possuk states (Shemos 12, 49): **“תורה אחת — there shall be one Torah for all of the people.** Therefore, Yaakov created a sign for himself: **“אם מתאחות הן שנים עשר אבנים זו — if these twelve stones join together, then I will know that I am destined to successfully establish the twelve tribes; for, anyone worthy to be a part of Yisroel will join together to serve the one and only Hashem. כיון שנתאחו י"ב אבנים זו לזו ידע שהוא מעמיד י"ב שבטים — when they did, indeed, unite to form one stone, his destiny became clear to him.**

Yaakov Ovinu's Stone is the Foundation Stone in the Holy of Holies

Based on what we have learned, thus far, we can shed some light on a statement found in the Zohar hakadosh (Noach 72a). It states that the stone that Yaakov placed beneath his head and, subsequently, used to make a monument to Hashem, represents the "even-shesiyo," the foundation-stone described in the Mishnah (Yoma 53b), which was located

beneath the Oron in the Kodesh HaKodashim. The Gemarah (ibid. 54b) explains: **“אבן שתיה - שממנה — הושתת העולם”** — it is called the "foundation-stone," because the entire world was founded from this stone.

We learn from here a tremendous piece of information. The twelve stones that Yaakov Ovinu happened to choose, seemingly, were not ordinary stones. In fact, HKB"H arranged that he would use twelve specific stones upon which the world was founded. Yaakov then placed them under his head, and they miraculously transformed into a single stone. Ultimately, HKB"H place this special stone under the Aron in the Kodesh HaKodashim.

If we now combine this detail with what we learned in the Midrash — that the twelve stones represent the twelve tribes — we arrive at an amazing conclusion. The "even-shesiyo" upon which the world is founded, is actually made up of twelve component stones corresponding to the twelve tribes. This coincides with what we have learned in the Gemarah (Chagigoh 12b) concerning the number of pillars which support the world: **“וחכמים אומרים על י"ב עמודים עומדת, שנאמר (דברים לב ח) יצב — גבולות עמים למספר בני ישראל”** — based on a possuk in Devorim (32, 8), the sages conclude that the earth rests upon twelve pillars.

At this point, we have gained a better understanding of the first action performed by Yaakov in preparation for establishing the structure of the nation of Yisroel: **“וישכם יעקב בבקר ויקח את האבן אשר שם מראשותיו, וישם אותה מצבה — וישכם יעקב בבקר 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 as a pillar; and he poured oil on its top.** Yaakov intended to perform a symbolic gesture in anticipation of establishing the foundation for the general population of Yisroel — which would be formed from the twelve tribes. HKB"H, in turn, took that stone and placed it beneath the Aron in the Kodesh HaKodashim.

Yerushalayim Represents the Luz the Life-source of the World

Continuing along this exalted path, we will now address the second action performed by Yaakov Ovinu immediately upon arising in the morning: **”ויקרא את שם המקום ההוא בית אל, ואולם לוז שם”** **“--And he called the name of that place Beis El; however, Luz was the city’s original name.** First, let us introduce the words of one of our early commentaries, Rabeinu Bachayei; he teaches us that this possuk is referring to Yerushalayim, which was formerly known as “Luz,” until Yaakov decided to rename it “Beis El.” Here are the words of Rabeinu Bachayei:

”ואולם לוז שם העיר לראשונה - המקום שקראו בית אל והוא ירושלים, מה היה הצורך להודיענו שנקרא לוז מתחילה, ומה תועלת המגעת אלינו מזה. ויתכן לומר כי בא הכתוב לרמוז לנו בשם הזה, כי מזה התחיל העולם להשתכלל ולהתחדש, והנה הוא ראשית הבריאה והחידוש, ועל כן גלה לנו כי שם העיר לראשונה לוז, מלשון לוז השדרה באדם, שממנו עתיד להתנער ולהתחדש ולהיברא לתחיית המתים, כי כשם שפלא החידוש הזה היה משם, כך פלא של תחיית המתים יתחיל משם.”

He questions why it was necessary for the Torah to inform us of the place’s previous name, “Luz.” He suggests that this name alludes to the fact that the development and conception of the entire world began from this place. Just as this place named “Luz” was the source of the wondrous innovation of the world, so, too, the Luz bone in the human spine is the source for the future miraculous resurrection of the dead.

We can understand this incredible revelation in light of the following Midrash (B.R. 28, 3):

”אדריאנוס שחיק עצמות שאל את רבי יהושע בן חנניא, אמר ליה מהיכן הקב”ה מציץ את האדם לעתיד לבוא, אמר ליה מלוז של שדרה, אמר ליה מנין אתה יודע, אמר ליה איתיתיה לידי ואנא מודע לך, [הביאו לידי ואני אוכיח לך], טחנו ברחיים ולא נטחן, שרפו באש ולא נשרף, נתנו במים ולא נמחה, נתנו על הסדן והתחיל מכה עליו בפטיש, נחלק הסדן ונבקע הפטיש ולא חסר כלום.”

This Midrash appears at the end of parshas Bereishis and concerns the generation of the flood. We learn from this Midrash that the bone from which HKB”H will resurrect the dead in the future is called **”לוז של שדרה”** – “Luz” of the spinal column; it is indestructible – whether you attempt to grind it, burn it, dissolve it, or pulverize it, it remains intact.

Based on this phenomenon, Rabeinu Bachayei provides us with an amazing insight. HKB”H created in the human body the vertebral bone known as the “Luz”; it remains in existence forever and is the starting point from which HKB”H will rebuild and resurrect the dead in the future. In a similar fashion, HKB”H created the holy city of Yerushalayim, representing the “Luz” of the spatial world. It was the starting point from which HKB”H created the spatial world, and from which the rest of the world expanded and developed. So, too, in the future, HKB”H will initiate the resurrection process in Yerushalayim – the Luz of the spatial world – and the process will spread from there to the rest of the world.

The Gro’s Explanation of the Association between Beis El and Besuel

Yet, if Yerushalayim was known as “Luz,” because it was the spatial starting point of creation, what prompted Yaakov to rename it Beis El? The answer to this question can be derived from the impeccable teachings of the Gro in his commentary on the Zohar hakadosh (Terumoh 152a), Yahel Ohr. There the subject of the Luz bone in the spine – which never dies and is the source of the resurrection of the dead – is discussed. He concludes: **”ונקרא בתואל”** **“על שם בית אל שהוא לוז”** – it is called Besuel after Beis El, which is Luz.

The Gro is referring to the fact that the Zohar hakadosh (Toldos, Midrash HaNeelam 137a) states that the Luz bone located in the spine is called “Besuel.” The letters of the name Besuel can be broken down to spell **אל-בתו**, meaning the daughter of El. In this manner, the Gro explains the association between

the Luz bone which is called "Besuel — bito shel El" — meaning the daughter of El--and Yerushalayim, which is called "Beis El." Just as the Luz bone is the source of life for the body, so, too, Yerushalayim is the source of life for the universe.

The meaning of the possuk is now quite evident: "ויקרא את שם המקום ההוא בית אל" -- **And he called the name of that place Beis El.** Then the possuk proceeds to explain: "ואולם לוז שם העיר לראשונה" -- **however, Luz was the city's original name** — due to the fact that it represented the Luz of the spatial world. Now, since the Luz bone is referred to as "Besuel — bito shel El," Yerushalayim, which is the Luz of the spatial world is referred to as "Beis El."

I heard a wonderful allusion to this association from the Admor of Chakov, shlit"a, in Yerushalayim. The possuk states: "ואולם לוז שם העיר לראשונה". The word "אול" is an abbreviation for the phrase: "וְנֶאֱמַן אֲתָהּ לְהַחְיֹת מֵתִים — and you are trustworthy to resurrect the dead." Thus, we find an allusion in the possuk to the fact that HKB"H will initiate the resurrection of the dead in the future from Yerushalayim.

This illuminates for us the amazing connection between the two actions performed by Yaakov that momentous morning: "וישכם יעקב בבוקר ויקח את האבן אשר שם מראשותיו, וישם אותה מצבה ויצוק שמן על ראשה, ויקרא את שם המקום ההוא בית אל, -- **Yaakov arose early in the morning and took the stone that he had placed around his head and set it as a pillar; and he poured oil on its top. And he called the name of that place Beis El; however, Luz was the city's original name.**

The common denominator between these two actions is that they both relate to the foundation and cornerstone of the nation of Yisroel — for whom the world was created. The stone which he placed under his head, and then consecrated as a monument, represents the "even shesiyu," the foundation-stone upon which the world is founded; while Yerushalayim — which he named Beis El —

also represents the Luz of all creation. HKB"H will initiate the resurrection of the dead process from Yerushalayim, just as He will initiate the resurrection of the dead from the Luz bone.

"עשר אעשרנו" Alludes to the Two "Yud"s in "וייצר"

After much thought and consideration, I would like to propose an interpretation of Yaakov Ovinu's prayer uttered that historic morning, after meriting the divine revelation he saw in his dream (Bereishis 28, 20): "וידר יעקב נדר לאמר, אם יהיה אלקים עמדי: ושמרני בדרך הזה אשר אנכי הולך, ונתן לי לחם לאכול ובגד ללבוש, ושבתו בשלום אל בית אבי, והיה ה' לי לאלקים, והאבן הזאת אשר שמתני מצבה יהיה בית — אלקים, וכל אשר תתן לי עשר אעשרנו לך" -- **then Yaakov took a vow, saying, "If G-d will be with me, and He will guard me on this way that I am going; and He will give me bread to eat and clothes to wear; and I will return in peace to my father's house, and Hashem will be a G-d to me — then this stone which I have set as a pillar shall become a house of G-d, and whatever You will give me, I shall surely tithe to you."** Why did Yaakov vow to tithe — set aside "maaser" — from everything that Hashem would give him, precisely at that moment?

It appears that we can explain the matter based on a powerful insight found in the Maor V'Shemesh (Vayechi). In his own unique way, he addresses the famous statement in the Gemarah (Taanis 5b): "יעקב אבינו לא מת" — **Yaakov Ovinu never died.** He explains that Yaakov Ovinu successfully sanctified and purified his physical body to the level of the Luz bone — which does not depend on any material benefit from this world. He achieved this end to such a degree that his entire body attained the status of the Luz bone — which remains in existence intact and never dies; therefore, the Gemarah proclaims: "יעקב אבינו לא מת" -- **Yaakov Ovinu never died.**

In this manner, he elucidates the possuk astutely (Bereishis 35, 6): "ויבוא יעקב לזוה אשר בארץ: -- **thus Yaakov came to Luz in the land**

of **Cenaan**. In other words, he elevated his entire being to the level of the Luz. This is also the sense of the possuk (ibid. 48, 3): **“וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל יוֹסֵף: אֵל שְׂדֵי נְרָאָה אֵלַי בְּלוּז בְּאַרְץ כְּנַעַן וַיְבָרֶךְ אוֹתִי”** — **Yaakov said to Yosef, “El Shakkai had appeared to me in Luz in the land of Cenaan and He blessed me.”** Yaakov blessed his son that his entire being should achieve the status of the Luz bone. Based on what we have learned, the possuk informs us that Yaakov sanctified himself to the level of the Luz in the land of Cenaan — which is Yerushalayim, the King’s palace, the Luz of the universe.

In our previous essay, we elucidated the possuk (Bereishis 2, 7): **“וַיִּצְרֶה ה' אֱלֹקִים אֶת הָאָדָם עֹפֶר מִן הָאָדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה-- and Hashem G-d formed the man of soil from the earth, and blew into his nostrils the soul of life; and man became a living soul.** Rashi notes that **“וַיִּצְרֶה”** is spelled with two **“yud”**s representing two periods of formation — one for this world and one for the resurrection of the dead. We can suggest that this refers to two types of formation related to man’s physical form: (1) **“וַיִּצְרֶה לְעוֹלָם”** — **“הַזֶּה — the formation of his body in this world in such a manner that it dies and disintegrates, and (2) “וַיִּצְרֶה לְתַחִיית הַמָּתִים”** — the formation of the Luz bone in the spine which does not die, but persists intact, and serves as the foundation for the entire body that will ultimately be resurrected.

Extending this line of reasoning, we can suggest, with the utmost humility, that this is what prompted Yaakov to name the place originally known as Luz **“Beis El.”** Upon realizing that the stone that he had placed beneath his head was none other than the **“even shesiyo”** upon which the world was founded and, additionally, that Yerushalayim, in fact, represented the Luz of the entire universe, he prayed to HKB”H that he should merit sanctifying his entire body to such a degree that it would no longer benefit from this world. He wished to elevate his entire physical being to the status of the Luz bone which endures

forever. Hence, he renamed the place formerly known as Luz **“Beis El”** — alluding to the Luz bone known as **“Besuel — bito shel El.”**

We have now shed a small amount of light on our meager understanding of the gist of Yaakov Ovinu’s prayer: **“אִם יִהְיֶה אֱלֹקִים עִמָּדִי וּשְׁמֵרָנִי”** — **“בְּדֶרֶךְ הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ”** — I pray that I do not follow in the path of Lavan HaArami, chasing after the senseless fancies of this world; **“וַנִּתֵּן לִי לֶחֶם”** — **“לֹאכֹל וּבִגְד לְלַבֹּשׁ”** — may He provide me with enough food and clothing to satisfy my basic needs but not enough to provide any greater degree of pleasure or benefit; **“וּשְׁבַתִּי בְשֵׁלֹם אֶל בֵּית אָבִי”** — so that I may return to my Heavenly Father’s house in peace with my body intact; **“וְהָיָה ה' לִי לְאֱלֹקִים”** — thus, may I merit to devote all matters of this world solely to Hashem; **“וְהָאֲבָנִים הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר שְׁמַתִּי”** — **“וּמִצְבֵּה יִהְיֶה בֵּית אֱלֹקִים”** — and the stone comprised of twelve component stones, corresponding to the twelve tribes of Yisroel, shall endure forevermore — like the **“even shesiyo,”** the foundation-stone upon which the world was founded.

“וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר תִּתֵּן לִי עֶשֶׂר אֶעֱשֶׂרנּוּ לָךְ” — with this statement Yaakov alludes to an incredible idea. The phrase **“עֶשֶׂר אֶעֱשֶׂרנּוּ”**, which literally means I will tithe, is composed of two words derived from the Hebrew word **“eser,”** meaning ten. The letter **“yud”** has a numerical value of ten. Thus, the phrase **“עֶשֶׂר אֶעֱשֶׂרנּוּ”** can be seen as an allusion to the two **“yud”**s found in the word **“וַיִּצְרֶה”** — representing the formation of the earthly body and the formation of the Luz bone.

As explained, the former formation derives benefit from this world and ultimately disintegrates; whereas the latter formation avoids any benefit from this world and exists for all eternity. With this in mind, Yaakov prays: **“וְכֹל”** — **“אֲשֶׁר תִּתֵּן לִי”** — **“עֶשֶׂר אֶעֱשֶׂרנּוּ לָךְ”** — I should merit sanctifying both bodily formations solely to Hashem; even the physical, material body should be transformed and elevated to the status of the eternal Luz bone.