



## **Vayetzei: Heed the Head**

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

*And Jacob left Beer Sheba, and he went to Haran. And he 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. (Bereishis 28:11).*

The Parsha opens with Yaakov Avinu leaving the security of his parents' home and venturing into the great unknown in order to find his life partner (and escape his vengeful brother). The Torah relates the story of his grand vision in which Hashem promised Yaakov safety, security, and success.

Rashi comments on the placement of stones around Yaakov's head:

*He arranged them in the form of a pile around his head because he feared the wild beasts.*

The Lubavitcher Rebbe asks, "if Yaakov feared wild beasts why did he not protect his body as well? If he believed that God would protect his body, why not believe that God would protect his head? And if he did not want to rely on a miracle to protect his head, then why rely on a miracle to protect his body?" The Rebbe explains that Rashi is conveying to us a profound life lesson. Yaakov understood that he was not simply making a geographic transition; he wasn't simply making a move from his parents' home to his uncle's home. He was leaving the spirituality and holiness of a patriarchal abode and venturing into a place of deceit and deception. But alas, one cannot always remain in the safety of the spiritual cocoon. Life often requires and propels us into spiritually hostile environments, and we must strive to maintain our proper "hashkofos," ideals and beliefs. This was the symbolism of Yaakov covering his head while leaving his body exposed. The body must enter into hostile environments, but the head, my thoughts, ideas, outlooks, and religious beliefs must remain protected, bolstered, and resistant to the external bombardment. As Yaakov prepared his body to enter the house and society of Lavan, he secured his head and spiritual identity.

We have a sacred mission to engage and contribute to greater society. We have the ability to make a difference not only in our small corner but in the lives of those around us. We have the capacity to be a light unto the nations. In order to make these contributions and effect change, we must often leave the wholesome cocoon of holiness and venture into the world and society around us. Whether we are venturing out for career, community needs, or education, we must make sure to properly bolster and strengthen ourselves before we take that first step. We must surround our head with the stones of Torah, *avodas Hashem* (service of God), commitment to *mesorah* (tradition), and connection to our people. Yaakov protected his head and returned to his land and his family, intact and spiritually strong. May we find success in all our life endeavors and keep our head protected every step of the way.