

And it was, in the morning, that behold it was Leah. (29:25)

Yaakov *Avinu* was acutely aware of Lavan's corrupt nature. He made it a point to spell out clearly, *b'Rachel bitcha ha'ketanah*, he wanted to marry Rachel, Lavan's younger daughter. Not trusting Lavan to adhere to his word, Yaakov made up *simanim*, signs, which would signal to him whether Lavan had, in fact, made a switch. Rachel, however, was uncomfortable with the notion that her sister would be humiliated. So, she shared the *simanim* with her. She was certain that Yaakov would agree that it was wrong to allow Leah to be so shamelessly treated. Therefore, she did not ask, she acted.

Rachel's extraordinary act of *vitur*, concession, yielded her right to marry Yaakov, which would transfer the position of First Matriarch to her sister, Leah. One would think that Rachel's act of *vitur* cost her nobly. This cannot be further from the truth. Rachel was originally an *akarah*, barren woman. It is only due to her acquiescence in allowing Leah to take her place that Hashem blessed her with her son, Yosef. Furthermore, because of the *z'chus*, merit, of her *vitur*, Hashem allowed *Klal Yisrael* to return to the Holy Land. Rachel *Imeinu* gave our nation hope, all due to her special *z'chus* of *vitur*.

One should not think that Leah was any different. She, too, conceded. When she was pregnant with her daughter, Dinah, it was not originally Dinah. Leah knew that she was pregnant, and she knew that it was a boy. She prayed to Hashem to switch fetuses with Rachel (who was pregnant with a girl). She pleaded with Hashem that her sister be blessed with two sons; otherwise, she would have fewer sons than the maidservant wives, Bilhah and Zilpah. As a result, her daughter Dinah, who had been impregnated by Shechem, gave birth to a little girl who was shunned by her family and later sold to an Egyptian priest by the name of Potifar. Yes, Osnas *bas* Potifar ended up marrying Yosef, thus allowing her grandmother's act of *vitur* to come full-circle.

Vitur can be life-saving. *Horav Michel David Rozovsky, zl*, was *Rav* of Grodno. When he died in 1935, he left over two sons who were both brilliant scholars: *Horav Yehoshua Heshel, zl*, and his younger brother, *Horav Shmuel, zl*. Both were Torah giants who were capable of succeeding their father in the *rabbanus*, rabbinical leadership, of Grodno. The family of the deceased naturally wanted the older brother to assume his father's position, while the community was more enamored with the younger *Rav* Shmuel. When observant Jews are locked in debate and a solution to their issue eludes them, they seek the counsel of a *gadol*, Torah giant, who will offer a resolution. Thus, the two sides agreed to present their query to the *gadol hador*, preeminent leader of the generation, *Horav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski, zl*. The appointment was set for a week later at 10:00 a.m.

Rav Shmuel was aware of the meeting. On the designated day, he arrived at *Rav* Chaim Ozer's home at 8:00 a.m. He said that he did not want to waste the *Rav's* time. Therefore, it was not necessary to decide concerning the *rabbanus* of Grodno. He absolutely refused to assume the position which he felt should go to his older brother. He left no room for discussion. When the

disputants arrived at the home of *Rav Chaim Ozer*, the *Rav* informed them that the decision had been made for them: *Rav Yehoshua Heshel* would be their next *Rav*.

It should have worked out. *Rav Yehoshua Heshel* was a brilliant *talmid chacham*. *Rav Shmuel*, however, had a certain way about him that caused the members of the community to gravitate to him – at the expense of his brother. *Rav Shmuel* felt that if he would leave, the community would take a more positive attitude toward his brother. Thus, without asking or telling, he performed the *Goral HaGra*. (This is a unique procedure attributed to the *Gaon, zl, m'Vilna*, which involves opening a *Chumash* to a random page, counting seven *parshiyos* and then seven *pesukim*. This is carried out only by holy people, who not only know what they are doing, but also how to interpret its message.) The *pasuk* that he discovered was: *Lecha Lecha*, “Go for yourself, from your land, from your relatives, and from your father’s house to the land that I will show you” (*Bereishis* 12:1). *Rav Shmuel* viewed this as a portent to leave Grodno and set sail for *Eretz Yisrael*.

Without fanfare, he immediately left, together with *Horav Zalmen Rotberg, zl* (son-in-law of *Rav Meir Karelitz, zl*). He arrived in the Holy Land alone, an orphan with no money, no family, but nonetheless, happy in his decision not to involve himself in *machlokes*, controversy. Eventually, he was asked to give a *shiur* in the nascent *Ponovezh Yeshivah*, where he became the premier *maggid shiur* of his day. Sadly, a few years after his arrival in *Eretz Yisrael*, World War II broke out and, among the multitudes of our brothers and sisters who were murdered by the accursed Nazis, was the Jewish community of Grodno, together with their beloved *Rav*. The only survivor of the *Rozovsky* family was *Rav Shmuel* who was saved in the merit of his *vitur*, concern for the feelings of his older brother. His acquiescence to leave a community where he was well-known, loved and respected, to go to a place where he was an unknown, with nothing and no one, took extraordinary courage, faith and resolution. He merited to establish thousands of *talmidim*, students, who themselves have transmitted Torah to many more. The Torah world is in his debt. They are all fruits of *Rav Shmuel's vatranus*.

Horav Chaim Kreisworth, zl, would relate his personal story in which his *vatranus* catalyzed the merit that saved his life. He was a young boy when his parents sent him away to *yeshivah*, which was quite distant from his home. The *yeshivah* had neither a dormitory nor a kitchen, thus relegating students to sleep wherever they could and eat “days.” This means that on a daily basis, kind-hearted members of the community opened their homes and shared their meager meals with the boys. As a young student, *Rav Kreisworth* slept beneath a fruit stand in the market, and he had to walk four kilometers to the home where he received his meal. It took seven years before he was able to arrange a home near the *yeshivah* which provided him with a meal. Now, he was now able to sleep in the *ezras nashim*, women’s section, of the local *shul*.

The first day of the new *z'man*, semester, a new student, whose vision was clearly challenged asked *Rav Chaim* where he could find a place to sleep and eat. The future *gadol* told him, “You will sleep in the *ezras nashim* and eat at the home of a member of the community who lives across the street from the *yeshivah*. He had relinquished his “bed and breakfast” to a boy who had difficulty

seeing and would, therefore, neither be able to walk the four kilometers nor sleep beneath the fruit stand. *Rav* Chaim was back where he started.

Years passed, and the Nazis invaded the town. They went into the *shul* and rounded up the students. They had a list of names. As soon as they called a name, the student came forward and was shot, his body thrown from the window. On the first floor, the remaining students recited *Tehillim* and *Vidui*, Confession, knowing the fate that awaited them. They called out, "Kreisworth, Chaim!" As *Rav* Chaim walked upstairs, he prayed to Hashem, "*Ribono Shel Olam*, only You know what I did for the student whose eyesight was poor. Please, remember my act of *vitur* and allow me to live."

As soon as he concluded his prayer, one of the guards asked him, "Do you have parents?" *Rav* Chaim answered, "Yes." "I, too, have parents," the guard said. "I am certain that, just as my parents would want me to live, your parents also want you to live. I will shoot my gun into the air, and you will "fall" out of the window and lay among the dead bodies. When it is safe to get up, leave and run away. This is your chance to save yourself!"

Three hundred *yeshivah* students were murdered that day. *Rav* Kreisworth was the only survivor, all in the merit of *vitur*. He thought that he was doing a favor to another student who could not fend for himself. Instead, that student was the cause of his continued life. We never know that when we think we are helping someone else, we are actually helping ourselves.