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A Stone or a Pebble

וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֹא נוּכַל עַד אֲשֶׁר יֵאָסְפוּ כָּל־הָעֶדְרִים וְנִגְלְלוּ
אֶת־הָאֶבֶן מֵעַל פִּי הַבְּאֵר וְהִשְׁקִינוּ הָצֹאן:

They replied, “We cannot water the flocks until all the flocks are rounded up and all the shepherds can roll the boulder off the opening of the well together. Only then can we water the animals.” (Bereshit 29:8)

In Parshat Vayeitzei, we are told of a seemingly simple but deeply symbolic encounter between Yaakov and a group of shepherds near a well. Yaakov, arriving from his journey, notices the shepherds sitting idly beside the well. He questions them: why are they wasting precious time rather than removing the stone from the mouth of the well to water their flocks?

Their answer is straightforward yet telling: “*Lo nukhal*” – “We cannot.” The stone is too large, too heavy, too impossible. But

then Yaakov approaches the well, and singlehandedly rolls away the stone that they insisted could not be moved.

Imagine the astonishment of the shepherds. The same stone they viewed as an immovable obstacle, Yaakov removed with ease. What gave Yaakov such power—physical or otherwise—that they lacked?

Rabbi Norman Lamm, in his *Drashot L’Dorot: A Commentary for the Ages*, offers a profound interpretation. Throughout rabbinic literature, the well represents different spiritual realities: Zion, Mount Sinai, or the miraculous well that accompanied Bnei Yisrael in the desert. In each case, the well symbolizes a source of divine life, creativity, and potential—the wellspring of the Jewish soul.

The stone covering the well, then, represents whatever blocks that inner source from flowing freely. For some, it is a massive boulder; for others, merely a pebble. **The difference lies entirely in attitude.**

There are people whose wells remain sealed their entire lives. They possess deep reservoirs of talent, passion, and holiness—but they remain untapped. Something, a fear, a doubt, a sense of limitation, covers the opening. Whether that obstacle feels like a boulder or a pebble depends on how we see it.

The shepherds in the story were not physically weak; they were *mentally defeated*. They declared “*lo nukhal*”—it cannot be done—and so it wasn’t. Their conviction in failure became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Yaakov,

**Mazel Tov to Grandparents
Rachamim & Rosie Bastiker
of Mitzpeh Ramon and to
Sara & David Bedein
of Efrat, on the birth of
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by contrast, approached with confidence. He *believed* he could—and so he did.

Later in Yaakov’s life, the Torah echoes this contrast. When Yaakov wrestles with the angel, the pasuk states: “וַיִּתְּכֵל” – **“And he prevailed.”** (Bereshit 32:26). Yaakov possessed the spirit of *nukhal*—the belief that one *can*. The angel, by contrast, is described as seeing that “he could not prevail” – “לא יכול לוֹ.” Once he believed he could not win, defeat was inevitable.

This pattern is timeless. Each of us stands before our own well—our inner source of meaning and purpose—and each of us faces stones blocking the way. To some, those stones appear immovable; to others, merely small obstacles on the path to greatness.

Yaakov teaches that true strength is not measured in muscle but in *mindset*. His victories—over Esav, over Lavan, and even over the mysterious angel—were born not of

physical might but of determination.

We, too, are called to embody Yaakov’s strength. The “stone” before us—whether fear, failure, habit, or hesitation—need not remain a boulder. If we approach it with faith, courage, and the conviction that *nukhal*—we *can*—then the wellspring of our own divine potential will burst forth.

Every generation faces its own stones covering the well—the barriers that keep the Jewish soul from flowing freely. Some see them as too heavy, too entrenched, too impossible to move. But the secret of Jewish endurance, from Yaakov onward, has always been the same: we believe that we can.

Faith transforms impossibility into possibility. What appears to the world as a boulder, Am Yisrael lifts as though it were a pebble—because we know that beneath it lies the eternal source of strength that has sustained us through for generations. ■