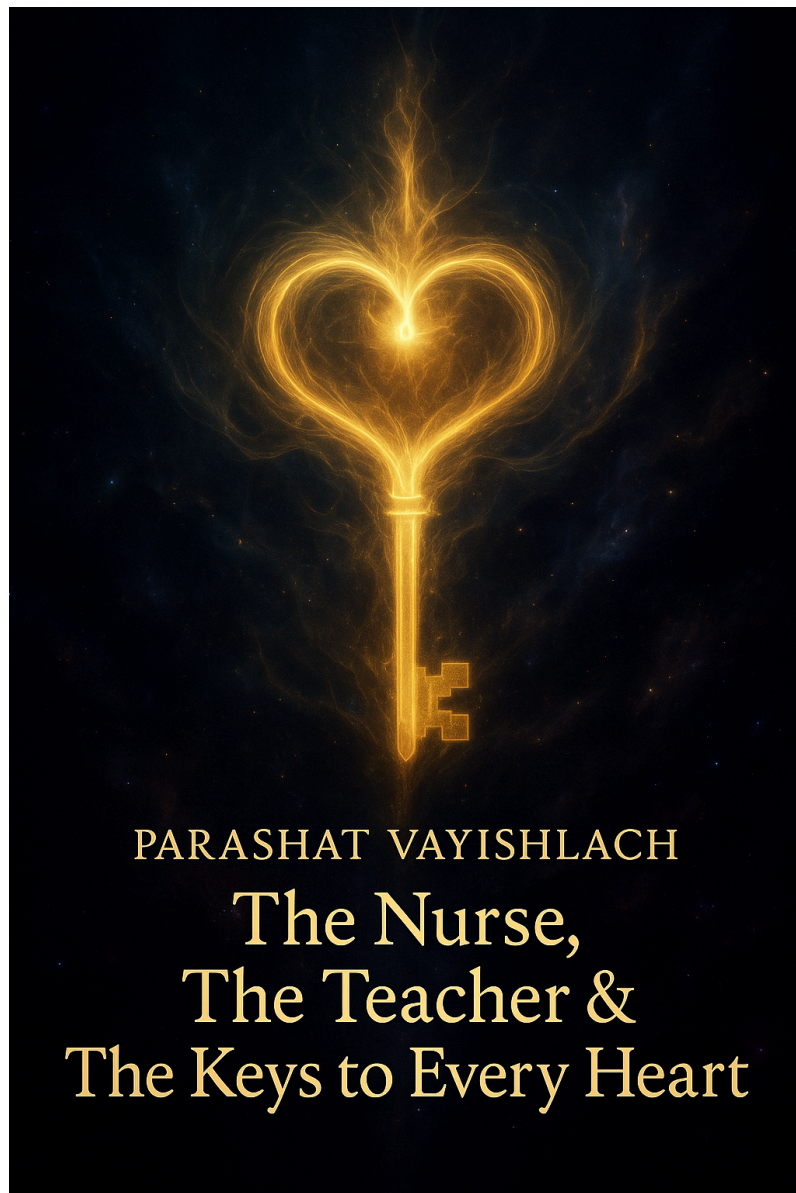


Parashat Vayishlach – The Nurse, The Teacher, and the Keys to Every Heart

Rabbi Shlomo Farhi



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I. The Mysterious Death of Devorah the Nurse

The pasuk in our parasha introduces a surprising moment:

**“Vatomot Devorah, menekhet Rivkah”—
And Devorah, the wet nurse of Rivkah, died.**

Who is Devorah?

Why is Rivkah’s wet nurse suddenly in the story?

The Torah could have simply said **“Devorah,”** yet it emphasizes her as **“menekhet Rivkah”** — Rivkah’s wet nurse.

Why is that her defining title?

The word *menekhet* comes from the same root as **linok** — to nurse — the same word behind *tinok*, a nursing infant.

So Rivkah had a woman who nursed her or nursed for her. But why is this important enough to record?

II. A Wild Midrash: Esav the “Finished Product”

To understand this, we need a remarkable chidush from the Sefer **Nifla’ot Chadashot**, by Rabbi Noach Mendes, the son-in-law of the Vilna Gaon.

Why is Esav called **Esav**?

Yes, he was hairy.

But the name “Esav” comes from **asui** — “made, finished, complete.”

We usually say this means he was born physically developed — covered in mature hair.

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But there's more.

Targum Yonatan, written by the great Tanna Yonatan ben Uzziel, adds:

- Esav was born **fully developed** —
- Including **teeth**.

That is astonishing.

A newborn with teeth?

The Midrash says Esav emerged like a child far ahead of developmental schedule — a biological “adult” in miniature.

But then the Yalkut adds something even wilder:

Esav in the womb consumed all the blood of Rivkah's cycle,
altering her hormonal balance so profoundly
that she became unable to nurse.

In other words:

- Esav's aggressive, self-preserving nature began **before birth**.
- He “took” what was necessary for *him* to survive.
- Rivkah lost the hormonal ability to produce milk.
- Yaakov — the weaker twin — would have died without milk.
- Esav already had teeth and could survive on solids.
- So Rivkah required a **wet nurse** — Devorah.

This is not a medical journal; it's a spiritual narrative wrapped in physiological metaphor.
But the message is powerful:

From the very beginning, Esav's instinct was **take for myself**,
even at the expense of others.

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And perhaps — perhaps — Rivkah's complicated relationship with Esav begins right here:
He deprived her of nursing Yaakov and possibly of having more children. A built-in wound.

III. Was Devorah There Earlier? Or Brought Later?

Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer says that **Eliezer**, when he traveled to bring Rivkah back, brought "Rivkah and her menekhet."

So maybe Devorah was always with her.

Or maybe she only became Rivkah's wet nurse *now*, due to Esav's prenatal hijacking.

Or perhaps both are true:

- She was Rivkah's childhood caretaker,
- later becoming the caretaker of Rivkah's sons.

But now something profound emerges.

Because **Targum Yonatan**, in translating the verse about her death, calls her not simply "wet nurse," but:

Pedagogue — teacher.

The same word as the English "pedagogy."

So which is she?

- A wet nurse?
- A teacher?
- A companion?

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- All of the above?

Why does the Torah focus on the *wet nurse* identity when she is clearly so much more?

IV. The Teacher as the Nursing Mother: Moshe's Analogy

To answer this, we recall a pasuk in Bamidbar.

When Moshe cries to Hashem about the overwhelming responsibility of leading Am Yisrael, he doesn't say:

- "How can I do this—it's too heavy."
- "How can I do this—it's too exhausting."
- "How can I do this—I'm carrying all their baggage."

Instead he says:

"Ha'anokhi hariti et ha'am hazeh...

ka'asher yisa ha'omen et ha'yonek?"

"Did I give birth to this nation, that I must carry them as a nursing mother carries her infant?"

Why that imagery?

Of all metaphors, why the nursing mother?

Why not a donkey carrying too much weight?

Why not a mailman with 100,000 packages?

Why not the Smashburger guy who suddenly gets a 500-person order?

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Because Moshe isn't complaining about **workload**.

He is expressing **heartload**.

A donkey carries a package.

A worker carries responsibility.

A teacher, parent, leader —
carries **souls**.

A nursing mother does not feed because she *must*,
but because her body, her biology, her being
is **aligned with the child's needs**.

Her milk changes daily to match what the child needs nutritionally.

How? Wireless? Bluetooth?

It is God's engineering.

So too, a real teacher — a real *rebbe*, a real *morah*, a real *parent* — must be:

- constantly adjusting,
- constantly sensing,
- constantly nourishing,
- constantly giving the child exactly what they need.

Not what's easiest.

Not what's one-size-fits-all.

Not what worked for child #1 or #2.

Exactly what this soul needs.

V. Spotify Wrapped, Torah Wrapped — Who's Really Listening?

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Yesterday Spotify released “**Wrapped**”, showing people their yearly listening stats.

Thousands of minutes.

Hundreds of episodes.

Some people are the top 3%, 4%, 5% listeners.

Some don't miss a live class.

Some listen while driving.

Some listen while cooking.

Some while playing tennis.

One listener logged **7,700+ minutes** — and that's only on Spotify.

Others listen on Apple Podcasts, WhatsApp, or live.

But here is the truth:

**One minute that changes your life
is more valuable than 10,000 minutes that don't.**

Sometimes a person walks into the class, collects tzedakah, and says afterward:

“Rabbi — BOMBA class.”

You ask him what he understood.

“Nothing. Not one word.”

But he was inspired.

He saw Torah.

He saw people learning.

He felt the energy.

The soul heard something — even if the ears did not.

Even the one minute matters.

So whether you learn:

- 7,729 minutes,
- or one minute,

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- or one word,
- or nothing but the inspiration in the room—

Torah enters somehow.

And if *one minute* of your presence can influence someone else —
then *you* are a teacher, too.

VI. More Than the Calf Wants to Suckle...

The Gemara says:

**“Yoter m’ma she’ha’eigel rotzeh linok,
ha’parah rotzah le’hanik.”**
More than the calf wants to nurse,
the mother wants to feed.

If your rabbi, your teacher, your mentor, your rebbetzin
does not *love* teaching —
if they do not crave giving Torah —
if they do not light up when asked a question —
they are not your rebbe.

A rebbe must not only teach —
a rebbe must **need** to teach.

Like a nursing mother
who not only feeds the child
but whose own body *hurts* when she cannot.

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VII. “Like an Angel of Hashem Tzivakot” — What Does That Mean?

The Gemara famously says:

If your rabbi is like an **angel of God**, learn from him.
If not, don't.

How can any human be an angel?

Danny from the shiur offered a great thought:

- Maybe the rabbi is the best fit for you,
- a personal guardian-type figure.

But here is a simpler explanation:

What is an angel?

One who was created **for one job**,
and does that job with absolute focus.

A malach has no hobbies.

No second career.

No side gig.

His entire being is dedicated to his mission.

If your teacher teaches like that —
with that level of clarity, passion, and purpose —
then that is your teacher.

VIII. If I Won the \$775 Million Lottery...

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Yesterday's lottery was \$775 million.

Nobody knows this — I'm breaking news —

I won.

...\$12.

If I had actually won \$775 million,
what would I do for work?

People dream:

- Roller coaster designer
- Brain surgeon
- Pilot
- Professional traveler
- Artist

But if I won \$775 million?

**I would do exactly this.
Teach Torah.**

I would buy the building next door,
the one across the street,
the block,
turn all of 63rd Street into a Torah Center.

But the **work**?

This is what I was born to do.

My skillset.

My passion.

My soul's excitement.

That is what "like an angel" means.

Not perfection.

Purpose.

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IX. A Baby Knows How to Nurse — Instinctively

A baby must learn thousands of things:

- Eating solids
- Walking
- Speaking
- Toilet training
- Riding a bike

But nursing?

No one teaches that.

The moment the baby is born,
it knows how to nurse.

It even inches itself toward the source of nourishment.
Instinctively.

Why?

Because it is the **most natural act**
required for survival.

A teacher must believe:

Learning is the most natural thing in the world for a child.

If a teacher thinks:

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- “This kid can’t learn.”
- “This kid doesn’t want to learn.”
- “This kid isn’t capable.”

Then that child is doomed —
not because they can’t,
but because the teacher **doesn’t know how to unlock them.**

Every child’s heart is locked.
Every rebbe, every parent, every mentor
must find the key.

X. Rabbi Freifeld’s Key on the Wall

Rabbi Shlomo Freifeld had a framed key hanging on his wall.

Students asked:

“Rebbe, what’s this key for?”

He answered:

“Every student has a locked heart.
And every heart has a key.
I frame this key to remind myself every day
that if a student isn’t learning,
it’s not their fault.
I just haven’t found the key yet.”

That is why a pedagogue is called **meneket** — the wet nurse.

Because just as a nursing mother knows:

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- the child *wants* to nurse,
- the child *needs* to nurse,
- the child already *knows how* to nurse—

So too every soul wants to learn,
needs to learn,
and already knows how to learn.

It simply needs someone
who believes that
and unlocks it.

XI. The Final Blessing — Rings of Keys

May Hashem bless us to be teachers —
not only in classrooms,
but in our homes,
in our friendships,
in our communities.

May He bless us with:

- **rings of keys** like the supers in old buildings,
- keys to the hearts of our spouses,
- keys to the hearts of our children,
- keys to the hearts of our parents,
- keys to the hearts of everyone we love,
- and everyone whose growth we hold responsibility for.

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Because teaching — real teaching —
is not transferring information.

It is unlocking souls.

Takeaway

Every human being is a mixture of instincts and greatness.

We are all born with the instinct to learn — like infants born knowing how to nurse.
But hearts become locked through distraction, trauma, fear, doubt, culture, or failure.

The job of a teacher, parent, friend, or mentor is not to force learning —
but to open hearts.

A nursing mother responds to the needs of her child instinctively.
A great teacher responds to the needs of every student intuitively.

And each of us is both the child and the teacher.

We all have people to unlock.
And we all need someone to unlock us.

Shabbat Table Discussion Questions

1. **Who was the “Devorah” in your life?**
Someone who taught you not just information, but nourishment.

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2. **What part of Esav's prenatal story resonates with you?**
Do you ever feel that some people drain energy or emotional resources before relationships even begin?
 3. **Which instinctive learning ability do you see in yourself or your children?**
What comes naturally — and what requires “unlocking”?
 4. **Have you ever misread someone's behavior because you didn't realize what “nutritional blend” their soul needed?**
 5. **What are the keys on your spiritual keychain right now?**
Which hearts do you need to unlock?
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