

אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה

מאת הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר רבינוביץ זצ"ל

Shmuessen from
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פרשת ויצא

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הרב משה אליעזר בן הרב ישראל
רבינוביץ זצ"ל

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וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב מִבְּעַר שָׁבַע וַיְלֶךְ תְּרֵנָּה (בראשית כ"ח י')

Yaakov's Encounter with Eliphaz

Last week's *parsha* ends with Yaakov in a pretty dire situation. He had to flee his hometown; if he would come anywhere near his parents' home, he was in danger of being murdered by his brother.

A short while after Yaakov left town, along came his nephew Eliphaz, who was ready to kill him. Yaakov convinced him out of it by reminding him what Hashem had told their grandfather Avraham at the *Bris Bein Ha'bsarim*: "Your children will be foreigners in a land that is not theirs, and they will be enslaved and tortured for 400 years."

"If you kill me," Yaakov explained to Eliphaz, "then who will be enslaved in a foreign land? There will be no grandchildren left other than you and your offspring; inevitably, these predictions will become your lot."

Eliphaz immediately changed his mind after hearing these words. "You're right; I can't kill you. But my father commanded me to do so!" he exclaimed. "What will I do about my obligation to heed the words of my father?"

Well, Yaakov had a solution for Eliphaz. He suggested that Eliphaz take all of his belongings; that way, he would be considered dead, as Chazal teach us: עני חשוב כמת – *a pauper is considered like a dead man*. By stealing all that Yaakov had, Eliphaz will have accomplished his father's commandment. And so, he took everything Yaakov had – leaving him completely impoverished. We learn this from the words "כי במקלי עברתי" – *for I have passed with my staff*. This implies that Yaakov had nothing on him but his staff.

It turned out, however, that eventually Eliphaz returned to kill Yaakov. Shortly after the exile in Mitzrayim was over, his son Amalek came with the intention to destroy the descendants of Yaakov.

Proper Priorities

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz used to give *mussar* based on Eliphaz's response. People can literally spill blood and cause endless pain, all because of a supposed '*mitzvah*'. They can warp the meaning of a *mitzvah* into a terrible sin, and still do it with fervor – all *l'shem shomayim*. We see from here the supreme importance of following our *Daas Torah* in order to keep our priorities straight; without clear *hashkafos*, we can turn our responsibilities upside-down.

The *Yetzer Hara* has many tricks up his sleeve. He can easily take the most impure mindset and paint it with the appearance of being holy. If we don't carefully scrutinize each scenario and consult with our Rebbeim, we can easily buy into someone else's warped ideology. This can apply to political issues, *hashkafos* being sold in a newspaper, and many other instances. Just because somebody seems to be professing the will of Hashem, that doesn't necessarily mean it's true. The *chazir* also shows its split hooves in the attempt to make us think that he is *kosher*. So if they threw a *maamar Chazal* at you that you never heard of or you don't quite understand, don't make any rash decisions; consult with your *Da'as Torah*.

Yaakov's Reaction to the Dream

Let's move on to another *nekudah* which can also be tied into Rav Chaim's *shmuess* about Eliphaz. The *Torah* tells us that when Yaakov stopped for the night, Hashem came to him in a dream and promised him a family that would spread to the four corners of the earth. He was also promised the highly coveted land of Eretz Yisroel.

What must Yaakov's thought process have been like upon awakening from the dream? We can imagine that he was probably pretty happy. After fleeing his parents' home, having all of his belongings robbed by his

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nephew, and avoiding proper sleep for 14 years – it must have felt good to hear that it would all pay off in the end. But the *pasuk* doesn't depict that kind of reaction. Instead, we see that Yaakov exclaimed: "אכן יש ה' במקום" – "Surely Hashem is present in this place – and I did not know!"

Three Interpretations of Yaakov's Reaction

The Brisker Rav explains that Yaakov was concerned about the obligation to have מורא in a מקום מקדש. This is a *mitzvas asai* which we learn from the words "וממקדשי תיראו". Yaakov was shocked that he had apparently dishonored the מקום המקדש by sleeping there, and he was greatly dismayed by this. The Brisker Rav pointed out that we see here the tremendous trepidation Yaakov Avinu had regarding *kiyum hamitzvos*; although he could have been busy rejoicing over the great *besurah* that Hashem just gave him, he was instead focusing on his possible lack of sensitivity towards a *mitzvah*.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz used to give a different *shmuess* about this *parsha*. He used to focus on the immense *derech eretz* Yaakov had for a מקום קדוש. One can argue that *lemaysa* Yaakov merited to experience *nevuah* during that sleep, and he was guaranteed unparalleled blessings – which perhaps justified his short sojourn in the area. But Yaakov didn't see it that way; the ends don't justify the means. If it's not *derech eretz*, then it can't be done!

They tell a story that elucidates the feeling that Yaakov must have experienced when he awoke from his sleep:

A Yid that was once stuck in a distant shtet'l overnight. He tried knocking on doors to find a place to stay for the night – but the hour was late, and all the locals were fast asleep. Finally, the Yid found the town shul. It was dark inside, so he felt his way around – up a flight of stairs and towards the far end of the room, where he suddenly felt a spot that seemed to be covered with hay. He cozied himself into the pile of hay and went to sleep for the night.

In the morning, the Yid was shocked to discover what his makeshift bed really was. He had walked off of the Ezras Nashim balcony and onto the pile of decaying Hoshanos – right on top of the Aron Kodesh. The Yid began to shudder, realizing that he had disgraced the holy Aron.

Rav Moshe Feinstein זצ"ל offers a third explanation into Yaakov's reaction. Sometimes, a person can think: "I am in a place that is devoid of *kedusha*, so how will I be capable of growing close to Hashem?" However, he may come up after 120 years to discover that –אכן יש ה' במקום הזה ואנכי לא ידעתי – Hashem was there all along, and he was unfortunately unaware of it. It's not our job to make *cheshbonos*, and say: "America is so full of *gashmiyus*! There's so much obsession with earthly desires and frivolity in this country! There's no way a Yid can *shteig* in this land." Rather, says Reb Moshe, we should begin to recognize that *yeshivos* are popping up all around America. –יש ה' במקום הזה – Hashem is here with us in *galus*, guiding us so that we can continue to lead lives filled with *ruchniyus*; we must do our best to grab our opportunities by building more *shuls* and *yeshivos*, instead of winding up complaining in the end that אנכי לא ידעתי, I was unaware of Hashem's presence.

The Contrast Between Yaakov and Eliphaz

Regardless of which *p'shat* we go with, it is very clear from Yaakov's response that he was very focused on perfecting himself. Instead of getting swept away with feelings of excitement and gratefulness for the great *besurah* he just received, he spent time dwelling on how he could have acted in an even more elevated way.

This reaction is a stark contrast to his nephew's aforementioned behavior. Eliphaz was convinced that he was doing a '*mitzvah*' by following his father's orders – and yet, he was willing to complete the task with a subpar approach, i.e. stealing Yaakov's belongings, as opposed to killing him. Whereas Yaakov, who was actually involved in a *nevuah* – one of the highest *madreigos* a person can reach – was focused on improving himself and making a *cheshbon* of how he could have been better. When a person has the right priorities and follows *Da'as Torah*, he doesn't only know when he is doing the right thing – he actually does it the best way possible.

Excelling in One Area Above All Others

What's interesting about this discussion is that we have here three *Gedolei Yisroel* learning the same *pasuk* in the Torah – yet they all derived an entirely different message from it. The Brisker Rav took *mussar* from here about the constant vigilance and trepidation a Yid must feel with regard to *kiyum hamitzvos* – which was one of the most prominent themes in his life. Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz took *mussar* from here about the importance of being a *ba'al derech erez* – also, an extremely pronounced focus in his life and teachings. Rav Moshe Feinstein – who lived and breathed Torah and Halacha into the war-scarred Yidden living during his time – took *mussar* from here to remain laser-focused on building מקומות קדושים and strengthen the vibrancy of Jewish life in America.

These *Gedolim* all lived their central themes for their entire lives. True, they were great in all areas of Yiddishkeit – but they excelled in the themes that were near and dear to them beyond everything else. When our time comes, we will be asked: “What area did you excel in?” If we answer, “I was very serious about my learning”, then they will point out: “Interesting. You didn’t seem very focused when you allowed yourself to get interrupted over here, and over here, and over there...” If you say, “I didn’t excel in Torah, because my life’s primary focus was *gemillas chasadim*,” then they may answer: “Aha. That’s interesting. Because when beggars came knocking at your door in the middle of your birthday party, you wouldn’t answer, because it wasn’t important enough. And when the fellow in *shul* needed *chizuk* so desperately, as he was going through a difficult divorce, you couldn’t even afford him a warm smile or a pat on the back... If *gemillas chasadim* was your focal point, then you wouldn’t let anything else get in the way.”

The Trickster Tries to Conceal his Treachery

Later in the *parsha*, we learn the story of Yaakov and Lavan making a covenant over a mound of stones, where they both agree to never attempt to hurt each other in the future. The Da’as Zekeinim notes that it was because of this agreement that Bilam Harasha ended up getting smitten twice – once by stone, and once by sword. Here’s the *cheshbon*: Chazal teach us that Lavan and Bilam were actually the same person. The moment Bilam chose to follow Balak’s men in order to curse Klal Yisroel, he effectively breached the covenant. Now, the mound of the covenant was made up of stones, and a sword was pierced through the top. Therefore, Bilam’s leg was crushed between his donkey and a wall of stones – which, consequently, was the same mound of stones of that very covenant, as Chazal tell us. And finally, he was killed by sword, as the Torah relates later on.

The Da’as Zekeinim highlights another interesting lesson from this story: that the way of a treacherous man is to constantly change his name, thereby covering his tracks along his path of crookedness. This implies that the Da’as Zekeinim learned that Lavan intentionally changed his name to Bilam in order to give himself more leeway to harm the Yidden. However, he concludes, the deceiver will wind up getting slammed by his own words. That is precisely what happened by Lavan – the very sword and stones that he used as a promise resulted in bringing about his own suffering and demise.

The Brachos of a Parent or Grandparent

After Lavan makes the deal with Yaakov, he proceeds to *bentsch* his daughters and grandchildren. The Seforno points out that this *bracha* should not be underestimated; when a parent or grandparent blesses their offspring, they put their entire heart into it, and they really mean every word that they say. According to this Seforno, perhaps we should seek blessings from our parents and grandparents the same way we run after the blessings of *Gedolim* – if not more.

There is a widespread *minhag* for fathers to *bentsch* their children on Friday night. Some even have the same *minhag* for grandparents when they are spending Shabbos with their grandchildren. If you have this *minhag*, then perhaps you should have in mind the insight of the Seforno before you give your blessing; it can make it so much more meaningful and effective.

Never Return to a Place of Darkness After You Have Experienced Light

The *pasuk* concludes this episode by telling us “וישב לבן למקומו” – *And Lavan returned to his place*. But for Yaakov, on the other hand, the description is slight different: “ויעקב הלך לדרכו” – *And Yaakov went on his way*.

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Says the Meshech Chochma: a *Tzaddik* affects everyone around him. He brings a certain aura of serenity and holiness along with him that permeates through the assembled people. Lavan was swept up by this *kedusha* – but shortly thereafter, he ‘returned’ to his original state. Only a fool allows himself to let go of an elevated *madreigah*. Yaakov, on the other hand, continued ‘along his way’; there’s only one direction in his life, and that’s up.

I know we have spoken about this idea numerous times in the past, but I cannot stress it enough. A person must realize that even if he slipped a little bit, he doesn’t have to lose his entire *madreigah*. That’s what Lavan does – not an *einikel* of Yaakov Avinu.

Consider Yourself Like a Malach

Let me add a little bit more to this thought. The Ohr Hachaim tells us that the “מחננים” mentioned in the next *pasuk* comprised two camps: the camp of the *Malachim* and the camp of Yaakov. This sounds a bit strange; people and angels don’t really fit in the same category!

One of the first malicious tactics that the Nazis *ym"sh* used was transporting Yidden on cattle cars. A person naturally feels separate from animals – he would never dream of sleeping in a dog house or riding on a horse cart. When they dumped Yidden onto cattle cars, they caused them to feel like animals, which resulted in their collective morale plummeting. This was very effective in stopping the Yidden from defending themselves and causing them to be easily subdued and controlled.

The same goes for people and *Malachim*. An angel would never place himself in the same camp as a human being – it would be disgraceful to do so. However, Yaakov Avinu lived his life like a *Malach* – to the extent that even the *Malachim* themselves were comfortable sharing their camp with him. When a person identifies himself as an uplifted being, as opposed to a simpleton, then he can raise his self-regard to a point where he is repulsed by *aveiros*.

This is the great contrast between someone who continues to upgrade himself and someone who chooses to wallow in the mud. Let us learn to be more like the *zeideh* Yaakov – and less like the other *zeideh*, Lavan.

נחשתי ויברכני ה' בגלגלך (בראשית ל' כ"ז)

רש"י: שעל ידך בזה לי ברכה, כשבאת לכאן לא היו לי בנים, שנאמר (לעיל כ"ו) והנה רחל בתו בזה עם האון, אפשר
יש לו בנים והוא שולח בתו אלל הרועים, ועכשיו היו לו בנים שנאמר (להלן לא א) וישמע את דברי בני לבן:

The Ingratitude of Lavan's Sons

We find that as long as Yaakov was in town, Lavan saw tremendous blessing in his home. Rashi points out that we see from the fact that Lavan had sent his daughter to the well that he must not have had sons. Why would he endanger his daughter if the same job could be done by a man? But later on (Perek 31 Pasuk 1), we find that the *pasuk* describes how Yaakov overheard “the sons of Lavan” talking about how Yaakov became wealthy off their father’s back. From here we see that during the duration of Yaakov’s stay, Lavan was blessed with sons.

I have a *kasha* on this Rashi, though: why did Rashi have to go all the way to that *pasuk* in order to bring his proof? We already see a couple of *pesukim* earlier (Perek 30 Pasuk 35) that Lavan removed all of the abnormally colored sheep from his flock and gave them to “his sons” in order to minimize the chances of Yaakov getting wealthy off of his flock. Couldn’t Rashi already prove from this *pasuk* that Lavan had sons?

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I think we can answer that Rashi was trying to teach us a lesson by specifically citing the *pasuk* that he did. In that *pasuk*, we see how Lavan's sons were lamenting their great loss by having Yaakov around. "Did you see that fellow, Yaakov? Because of him, we're losing everything! He's taking all our wealth away. If not for him, our father would have so much more!" Rashi was pointing out the tremendous lack of *hakoras hatov* that Lavan's sons had for Yaakov. Did they even realize for a second that their entire existence was only due to Yaakov's presence? Had they paid a little more attention, they would have heard their own father admitting – "ניחשתי ויברכני ה' בגללך" – *I have learned by divination that Hashem has blessed me on account of you.*

Noticing the Hashgacha at All Times

We always mention the Ohr Hachaim that says regarding the *akedah*: we say in *Shema* "ואהבת את ה'" – and these were all included in Hashem's request of Avraham to sacrifice his son! בכל לבבך – Avraham loved Yitzchok with his whole heart; בכל נפשך – Yitzchok was Avraham's entire *neschama*; he was the entire future of Avraham's work in the world! And בכל מאדך – Avraham didn't need his money, he just wanted to support Yitzchok so that he could go on to live a life of serving Hashem! And yet, Hashem wanted him to give it all up. That's the quintessential *ahavas Hashem*! But the main point I want to focus on is the last thing the Ohr Hachaim says: do we really think for a second that Hakadosh Baruch Hu wanted Yitzchok as a *korban*? Of course not! He wanted to give Avraham this great *zechus* of exercising *ahavas Hashem* to its fullest. This would benefit his children and grandchildren for generations to come.

We often get stuck looking at the small picture in front of us and struggle to grasp why Hashem is testing us. We begin to ask questions; we begin to wonder why this happened or why that happened... can't we stop for a moment and realize that *everything* is good for us? Every single hardship, every single mishap, every single *nisayon* is there for our benefit! Do we want to look like the sons of Lavan who were so focused on Yaakov getting rich that they forgot that their very existence was because of him in the first place? We have to stop getting stuck on the things that seem inconvenient or even unfortunate and begin to recognize the bigger picture. We may never know that this particular misfortune is actually our greatest benefit!

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