

Volume III Issue #7
Written by Rabbi Yair Hoffman

Parshas Vayeitzei, 9 Kislev, 5783
December 3, 2022

On the Parsha

The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 68:2) tells us that Yaakov Avinu, when he left Be'er Sheva to head to Lavan's house in Charan, recited Tehillim (Psalms) 121.

[Note: The italics that follow are the Midrashic commentary on the Tehillim that Yaakov recited]:

"I will lift my eyes up to the mountains" – to those who instructed me and conceived me,

"Where shall my help come?" – Eliezer, when he went to meet my mother, had ten laden camels – I have not a single ring or bracelet! Shall I lose my confidence in Hashem? Heaven forbid!

"My help comes from Hashem who made Heaven and Earth. He will not allow your foot to give way - Lamot Raglecha" – [He will not let you] die.

"Hashem shall keep you from all evil" – from Eisav and Lavan.

"He shall guard your soul" – from the Malach HaMaves – the angel of death.

"Hashem shall guard your going out" – as it says, "And Yaakov went out from Be'er Sheva."

In a speech given in 1960, the Satmar Rebbe (Chiddushei Torah, Bereishis pp. 143-149) posed a number of questions on the Midrash above that include:

1. How is it possible that Yaakov Avinu would even for a moment, doubt his confidence in Hashem?
2. Why doesn't it just say in the Tehillim above, "My help comes from Hashem" and omit the seemingly unnecessary description of Hashem as the one "who made Heaven and Earth"?
3. Why does the Midrash say Hashem will protect him from the Malach HaMaves and why does it end with Hashem will guard "your going out"?

The Satmar Rebbe answered these questions with a fascinating exposition. He explains based on Midrashim, that the place where Yaakov slept on his way to Charan where he saw the vision of the ladder and the angels, was simultaneously and miraculously both the Makom HaMikdash (the place of the Temple) and Beis El – which was Luz, the city of truth (see Rashi on Bereishis 28:17 and the Rav Eliezer Mizrachi there). Hashem had miraculously

brought these two places together so that Yaakov could harness the power of Luz, which had special merits as the city of absolute Emes (truth), to fortify himself to withstand the enormous challenge he would have in maintaining his integrity while living with the deceitful Lavan for the next 20 years. Specifically, the enormous challenge was that Yaakov, who represented Emes, wanted to ensure that he would never have to lie to Lavan, even in cases when it would be Halachically permitted to do so (e.g. to avoid being cheated by Lavan).

With this exposition, we can answer the questions above. The answer to the first question, is that Yaakov was not 100% confident in Hashem that He would give him the strength to maintain his high level of integrity and avoid lying to Lavan in cases when it was Halachically permissible to do so (e.g. to avoid being cheated by Lavan).

The answer to the second question above is similar. The Tehillim above mentions that Hashem is the creator of Heaven and Earth, to allude to the fact that everything is created by Hashem except for one thing. As the Tanna d'bei Eliyahu explains, Hashem created everything with the exception of falsehood. That is something that was created by the fall of man. Yaakov is appealing to Hashem that, like His creation of Heaven and Earth, his future success in dealing with Lavan comes from another one of His creations – truth. As we have said above, Yaakov did not wish to lie to Lavan under any circumstances.

Regarding the third question, Yaakov prayed that Hashem protect him in his "going out" (and coming in) with Lavan, meaning that all of his comings and goings (i.e. interactions) with Lavan be conducted with the Divine trait of Emes – absolute truth. Yaakov's words end with Hashem protecting him from the Malach HaMaves to allude to the fact that the Middah of Emes protects one from the Malach HaMaves. We find this concept with Yaakov as Chazal (our Sages) say in a number of places that even after Yaakov physically past away, "Yaakov Lo Mais" – Yaakov did not die.

Chizuk - Inspiration

The Gemorah (Avodah Zara 24a) tells us of Dama Ben Nesina of Ashkelon who excelled at Kivud Av V'Aim (honoring his parents) and refused to awaken his father to retrieve the key to a lockbox that contained a

precious stone in order to sell it to the sages of Israel for use in the Beis HaMikdash. The Gemorah includes this vignette of Dama Ben Nesina (a gentile) to inspire us to reach this high level of Kivud Av V'Aim. To inspire us to reach for a high level of Emes, we include a story about Bobby Jones, the great amateur golfer who was well known about a century ago.

The year was 1925, and the US Open that year was played in Boston, Massachusetts. Mr. Jones entered the tournament like he entered most tournaments in the 1920s — as the favorite. In the opening round, Jones was struggling with his irons and, on the 11th hole, he hit his approach shot short and to the left. His ball landed in the tall grass. As he was readying for his next shot, his club inadvertently caused his ball to move ever so slightly. He called over the rules official following him and told him what had happened. The official immediately conferred with several members of the gallery. It was determined that no one had seen the ball move. The official told Mr. Jones that only Mr. Jones himself could determine if the ball had moved. Mr. Jones stayed firm in his conviction that he had violated Rule #18 — moving the ball. He said, “I know I caused the ball to move,” and he gave himself a one stroke penalty.

Mr. Jones competed mightily that day, but ultimately came in second place, losing the US Open to Willie Macfarlane by one stroke. When a reporter congratulated him on his honesty, Jones admonished the reporter saying, “You might as well have praised me for not robbing a bank.”

Halacha – Jewish Law

DISCLOSURE: Details of the question below have

been altered for privacy purposes.

QUESTION: I work at a firm that is not ethical. When a vendor will send us an invoice for products that we have purchased, my boss will instruct me to tell the vendor that we will not pay the entire amount owed on the invoice because the vendor did not comply with our lengthy list of ordering guidelines as set out in the document that we have provided to them. However, we are instructed to intentionally hold back this document and not provide it to the vendor until later in the production process making it impossible for the vendor to comply with all of our guidelines. Would this unethical practice require me to quit my job?

ANSWER: You should start looking for other employment as soon as possible. This is a scam in which a lie is employed

to steal money and you are assisting it. In the meantime, you should take the following actions: 1) You should inform your supervisor that this practice is unethical and fraudulent. 2) You should not engage in the deception yourself and when you speak to the vendor, word your communication to the vendor in such a manner that it is not a lie (e.g. you can tell the vendor that you will not pay the invoice in full, because they didn't follow the guidelines. This is a true statement even though it deceives the vendor into thinking that they received the guidelines in a timely manner). If you do not do this, then you will have violated Mesayeh Lidei Ovrei Aveirah — assisting the hand of evil-doers. You would be in violation of this even if you could argue that you are not truly assisting an evil-doer as the firm would continue the same practice even if you declined to assist. Nevertheless, it is still forbidden because you would be actively engaging in the scam.

Even after following the advice above, please be advised that the dispensation to continue your employment at this firm is a temporary one. Our advice to you is that you should seek comparable employment elsewhere. If after three months of looking, you have not found comparable employment, then you should take any job offered to you.

Mussar – Introspection

We continue with our translation of the third chapter of the Chofetz Chaim's Sefas Tamim.

“HAGAAH ADDITION: Indeed, it is actually a full verse in the Torah (Devarim 6:5), ‘And you shall love Hashem your G-d, with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your means.

This is specifically what YOUR means [in the Passuk above]. That which it says with ‘all your soul’ and it does not state in general with the entire soul, is to teach us that each person must serve Hashem to his own spiritual level that Hashem had placed within him, and he should not be satisfied in serving Hashem in the same manner as his friend does — for each person is judged according to his or her own intelligence and abilities, as I have written in Shmiras HaLashon (end of Shaar HaTevunah 14).

The same is true regarding all one's means, each one [shall love Hashem] according to his or her own means, whether to be lenient or stringent. This is what is stated in Yishayahu (54:14), ‘You shall be established through Tzedakah. You shall be safe from oppression and shall have no fear; from ruin, and it shall not come near you.’”