

Volume III Issue #8

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Parshas Vayishlach, 16 Kislev, 5783

December 10, 2022

On the Parsha

“And he said, ‘No longer shall Yaakov be your name, but it shall be Israel – for you strove with an angel and with men and you have prevailed.’” (Bereishis 32:29)

Rashi on this Passuk tells us that the “men” that Yaakov strove with refer to Eisav and Lavan. Rav Nosson Wachtfogel ZT”L in Kovetz Sichos (page 135) explains that we are generally aware of the details of Yaakov Avinu’s struggle with Eisav, but what was the exact struggle with Lavan? Granted, it may not have been easy to work an additional seven years to marry Rachel after Lavan tricked him into marrying Leah and to provide Lavan with “an honest day’s work” during that time, however for a person of Yaakov’s great stature and integrity, it does not appear that it should have been too much of a struggle.

Rav Wachtfogel offers a fascinating explanation. It seems that Lavan’s intentions were not just to trick Yaakov into working an additional seven years for Rachel. Actually, his intentions were far more sinister.

Lavan knew Yaakov was destined to marry Rachel and build his family and the future of Klal Yisroel with her. Rav Wachtfogel cites Rav Yeruchom Levovitz ZT”L, the famed Mashgiach of the Mir Yeshiva in Poland, who once explained, “There is nothing more devastating to an individual than to deny him his destined life partner and destiny.” With his deception and the additional seven years he now required Yaakov to work to marry Rachel, he sought to deny Yaakov of his destiny – a devastating injustice.

With this injustice, Lavan’s intent was to knock Yaakov Avinu off his trademark Middah, Emes (truth). Surely, Lavan hoped, Yaakov would become so angry when he realized that Lavan was trying to deny him his destiny that Yaakov would rationalize not putting an honest day’s work during those additional seven years considering Lavan’s ruthless deceit and injustice.

When Yaakov realized that Lavan’s intent was to have Yaakov violate his trademark Middah of Emes, he became rightfully angry and it was indeed very challenging for Yaakov to consistently put in an honest day’s work for the seven additional years.

And that is the answer to our question above, Yaakov did indeed struggle with Lavan – to remain honest in the face of the charlatan Lavan, who angered him because he sought to tamper with the very Middah that he held most dear.

But what Lavan could not fathom was that our Avos (forefathers) were truly great people and were capable of overcoming enormous struggles and challenges. Yaakov’s ideals and principles were ingrained in him while he was still in his mother’s womb, as Rashi points out in his comments to Bereishis 25:21 - “VaYitzrotzezu HaBanim B’Kirbah” – and the boys struggled within her [womb]. Rashi writes that Chazal interpreted the word “VaYitzrotzezu” as an expression of running. When Rachel passed by the entrances of the Torah academies of Shaim and Aiver, Yaakov would struggle and “run” to come out.

It is well known that the actions and accomplishments of our forefathers are in the spiritual DNA of all of us, their children. Yaakov was as honest in the last seven years in his working for Lavan as he was in the first seven years – which was a formidable challenge. As his children, we too have the capability within us to be honest in the face of formidable challenges.

Chizuk - Inspiration

Rav Yechezkel Levenstein ZT”L took

part in the funeral of the Rosh Yeshiva of Slabodka, Rav Isaac Sher ZT”L. He was asked to eulogize the Rosh Yeshiva, but strangely, he opted not to do so. After the funeral, he explained to those close to him the reason why he did not give a eulogy. Rav Isaac Sher’s passing was right after the passing of Rav Levenstein’s own grandson. Rav Levenstein was concerned that through his own words describing the loss of Rav Sherr, his own personal pain of the loss of his grandson would once again be reawakened and he would begin to cry during his eulogy of the Rosh Yeshiva. Rav Levenstein felt that this would be a form of Gneivas Da’as – fooling others, and would not be permitted for him. Those listening to his eulogy would think that he was crying on account of the loss of Rav Sher, but he would actually be crying about the loss of his grandson. Although no

one would know the difference, it wasn't the ultimate truth and therefore something that Rav Levenstein would not do.

Halacha – Jewish Law

Disclosure: Some details of the question below have been altered to protect the privacy of individuals involved.

QUESTION: I am a Rebbe of some very cute little boys. Recently, two of the little boys made what I deemed to be a frivolous request to go to the school nurse which I denied. Later, it was discovered that these two cutie-pies forged a note from the assistant Rebbe allowing the visit to the school nurse. The forged note, complete with all the misspellings that one would expect from little boys just learning how to write, was adorable. In truth, it would be difficult to hold a straight face if I were to confront them about the forged letter. Should I confront them about it, or chalk it up to a cute, youthful indiscretion and ignore it?

ANSWER: The Gemorah in Yevamos 63a is instructive here. It tells us that Rav's wife would always serve him something that was the opposite of what he had actually requested. When Rav asked for lentils, she would serve him chickpeas. When he asked for chickpeas, she would serve him lentils.

Later on, when Rav's son Chiyah, was old enough to comprehend what was happening, he decided to help his father: When his father asked for lentils, he told his mother that his father wanted chickpeas. Rav then proceeded to tell his son that his mother was improving. Chiyah then admitted to his father that he had been altering Rav's request so that his father would get what he actually wanted. Rav told Chiyah that he should not do so in the future, for the Passuk in Yirmiyahu 9:4 states, "Limdu Leshonam Daber Sheker" – They taught their tongues to speak falsehood. Why did Rav stop Chiya from doing so? Was he not fulfilling the commandment of Kibud Av v'Aim (honoring his father and mother) and also lying to promote Shalom (peace) which is generally permitted? The Yam Shel Shlomo (Yevamos 6:46) explains that here, Chiya could learn to make a habit out of lying since he was lying to his mother regarding his father's requests frequently. This would Chalilah (Heaven forbid) inculcate in him the trait of Sheker

(falsehood) and that is why Rav told Chiyah to discontinue this practice.

A Rebbe's job is to take the place of the parent during his hours of instruction. He must also ensure that his students not be inculcated with improper traits. It may be true that such a forgery at their young ages may be a cute, youthful indiscretion. However, if not confronted and "nipped in the bud" it can become habitual and when these young children grow up and forge a letter, it is most assuredly, not cute.

There are stories of seemingly sincere individuals asking notaries to sign off on the authenticity of the signatures of their wives for a second mortgage when the wives are not present. Rav Elyashiv ZT"l ruled that this is entirely forbidden for a notary to do. These situations often occur in adults when we do not utilize the educational moments that present themselves when they were young.

The two cutie-pies should be confronted and instructed lovingly that what they did was wrong and against Halacha (Jewish law).

Mussar – Introspection

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

"Hagaah Addition: ...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.' The Navi states that the future redemption of Israel shall be in the merit of Tzedakah for through it, Israel will be established forever. Because of it, the great mercies shall awaken upon him and upon Klal Yisrael, as it is known for in the merit of this Mitzvah, much mercies awaken from above. Afterward, the Navi advises and says, 'Distance yourself from oppression, for you shall not fear'. The Navi means to say that when will this happen [that you will not fear]? When you will distance yourself from oppression and theft – then the Mitzvah of Tzedakah will shelter us, and we will not need to be afraid of any prosecutor – for he [the prosecutor] will be unable to raise his head against its [Tzedakah's] merit.