



Volume III Issue #12
Written by Rabbi Yair Hoffman

Parshas VaYechi, 14 Teves, 5783
January 7, 2023

On the Parsha

The first Pasuk in Parshas VaYechi tells us that Yaakov Avinu lived for 147 years. However, before telling us how long he lived, the Pasuk first tells us that he lived for 17 years in Egypt (Mitzrayim). Why does the Torah need to highlight how many years he lived for in Mitzrayim?

There is a fascinating response to this question provided by Rav Shlomo Ephraim ben Aaron Luntschitz (1550 – 1619) the author of the Kli Yakar commentary on the Chumash. But first, an introduction to his response is in order.

Rav Aharon Leib Shteinman ZT"l once said that the Mitzvos that we and our children and grandchildren perform, bring us merit in the world to come after we pass away and elevate our place in Heaven (Shamayim). For example, if we helped create or supported a Yeshiva, the Torah that is learned in that Yeshiva can elevate our souls after we pass away. The recitation of Kaddish on our behalf when we pass away is also very effective in elevating our souls. However, even though merits can accrue to us and elevate our souls, they cannot affect who we were as a person - they cannot affect or change our essential character traits (Middos) that we had on Earth.

Why is this important to note? Rav Shteinman explained that in the future time of the resurrection of the dead (Techiyas HaMeisim) we will be given new bodies – new physical forms. These new bodies will physically reflect our character traits and character imperfections. For example, if we did not work on our anger while here on Earth, when we are resurrected, we will have “angry eyes” written on our faces that will be seen by everyone. Our task in this world is to improve our Middos – our character traits. This concept is seen from the words of the Vilna Gaon [Even Sheimah chapter 3] where he said, “Without correction of our character traits – of what purpose is life?”

With Rav Shteinman’s explanation in mind, we proceed with the response of the Kli Yakar. The Kli Yakar writes that the Torah highlighted the 17 years that Yaakov lived in Mitzrayim to tell us that Hashem made Yaakov live in Mitzrayim for 17 years in order to send a message to the Shevatim. The intent of the message was that the Shevatim should connect the 17 years in Mitzrayim to the fact that they sold Yosef at the age of 17. Further, Yaakov lived in comfort and peace in Mitzrayim for 17 years and Hashem’s

message to the Shevatim was that He could have made Yaakov’s comfortable life in Mitzrayim longer than that, if not for the fact that Hashem needed it to be for 17 years in order to send this message to them.

Hashem’s message to the Shevatim was clear. Even though they were Tzaddikim, they could not continue to engage in any self-deception and needed to face the truth of their actions – that the selling of Yosef was wrong and any rationale that they had to the contrary was a self-deception. This was a message to them that they must correct the lie they told themselves and work on their Middos. They also needed to realize that their actions of selling Yosef caused Hashem to limit the years that Yaakov lived in peace in Mitzrayim to 17 as discussed above.

And according to Rav Shteinman’s explanation above, if they would not have atoned for this sin, then during Techiyas HaMesim, their new physical form would have a “jealous heart” in some way for everyone to see (as they were jealous of Yosef in some small measure).

Chizuk - Inspiration

Yaakov had three battles in his life with three major antagonists: Lavan, Eisav, and Saro shel Eisav – the angel representing Eisav and the future nation that would emerge from him. However, not only did he prevail in these battles – the end result was that each battle or struggle actually ended in peace! Rather than continue to quarrel with Yaakov, Lavan decided to make a treaty with Yaakov as it says (Bereishes 31:44) “Come then, let us make a pact, you and I, that there may be a witness between you and me.” Regarding Eisav, it states (Bereishis 33:4) “And Eisav ran toward him and embraced him, and he fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.” And in regards to the encounter with Saro Shel Eisav, though it was indeed a battle, it ended up amicably with Yaakov receiving a blessing (Bracha) from the Saro Shel Eisav.

How is this possible? Most people when they struggle with an adversary end up the lesser for it. The answer is that Yaakov lived a life of Emes – truth, and this is one of the fantastic rewards of living a life devoted to Emes. The ultimate reward for the Middah of Emes is peace.

Halacha – Jewish Law

QUESTION: I am a high school senior and am interviewing for seminary next year in Israel. During these

“May I back out of a school carpool that I have already committed to?”
“Should I report a co-worker who is acting dishonestly?”
Call our **Emes Halacha Hotline** with your Everyday Emes questions at: **718-200-5462**.

To subscribe to this weekly, free newsletter or for further information about our Foundation, please visit us at www.everydayemes.org or contact: info@everydayemes.org.

interviews, some of the questions that the seminaries have asked are of a nature that if I respond truthfully, they may not accept me. For example, "Do I get along with all of my teachers?" In honesty, I can't really say that I do, but how will that make me look in the eyes of the seminary. Therefore, I am tempted to lie. By asking such questions, is the seminary transgressing Lifnei Iver (the prohibition of causing another to sin) if I give in to my temptation to lie? Furthermore, how may I handle such a question without lying?

ANSWER: It seems that there are many authorities that clearly rule that there is a prohibition of Lifnei Iver regarding causing another to lie [the Turei Even on Megilah 28a, 'Umah', the Tumim in C.M. Siman 32, Rav Meir Auerbach in his Imrei Binah (C.M. Siman 34).]

The Gemara in Nedarim 62b tells us that Rav Ashi owned a forest (Avah) that he sold to a fire temple (where they burn wood for idol worship purposes). When asked about the prohibition of Lifnei Iver, he responded that in the majority of cases, the wood that the fire temple buys is used for ordinary heating and not for idol worship and that he had the right to rely on the majority of cases.

However, there are other passages in the Gemara that seem to contradict the above and indicate that there is a prohibition of Lifnei Iver whenever a strong likelihood of a violation exists even if in the majority of cases a violation would not occur. In Bava Metziah 75b, we see that it is a violation of Lifnei Iver to loan money when there are no witnesses because of the concern that the money will not be paid back. There is also an indication of the same reasoning from Bava Metziah 5b.

Three Approaches to Resolution

One approach to resolving the contradiction is that whenever there is a greater probability of a violation than a non-violation, then we assume that a violation will occur, and there is Lifnei Iver. This is the approach of the HaGaos Tosfos Anshei Shem in Mishnayos Shivi'is 5:7 and the TaZ in Y.D. 151. The Gemara in Bava Metziah 75b and 5b above, believes that in these cases there is a greater probability of a violation than non-violation and that is why they say there is a prohibition of Lifnei Iver (in accordance with the reasoning in Nedarim 62b). The seminary that asks the types of questions that you are referring to may be relying on the fact that although a girl may be tempted to lie by the question asked, in their estimation, most girls would tell the truth.

Another approach is that the cases in the Gemara in Bava Metziah 75b and 5b above that say there is a prohibition of Lifnei Iver when there is a strong likelihood of a violation (even if there isn't a greater probability than not of a violation) is a prohibition of a Rabbinic Lifnei Iver (see Tzitz Eliezer Vol. IV 5:3). The seminary that asks the types of questions that you are referring to may be relying on the fact that although a girl may be tempted to lie by the question asked, in their estimation, there would not be a strong likelihood that the girl would lie.

Rav Dovid Feinstein ZT"l explained that if the action being performed will directly lead to a violation on the part of the recipient, and without it, the recipient would not have had the desire to violate Halachah, then it is a violation of Lifnei Iver. According to Rav Dovid's approach, the seminary should not be asking these types of questions.

Regarding how to answer the question, perhaps you can respond with something like, "That is an excellent question, and I try and generally do get along with my teachers. I do very much want to grow in my year in seminary and seek to get along with everyone."

Mussar – Introspection

We continue with the translation of the third chapter of the Chofetz Chaim's Sfas Tamim:

"This sin of deception has within it the power to awaken the trait of strict justice against him, and to negatively seal his fate more so than other sins, as it says in Sanhedrin 108a:

'Rabbi Yochanan says: "Come and see how great is the power of robbery, for the generation of the flood violated every precept, but their sentence to be destroyed was not sealed until they extended their hands and engaged in robbery, as it is stated: 'For the earth is filled with robbery through them, and behold, I will destroy them with the earth' (Bereishis 6:13). And this is one of the reasons that causes money to disappear from Israel, where their wealth does not remain with them – remaining only for a short time. For in our abundance of sins there is more theft and robbery in the world through these individuals, for they go to Gentile courts and inform on their friends. They [the Gentiles] take away their [friends'] money and they are convinced of their rectitude and think that they have earned Kosher money. They think this because the Gentile [courts] have permitted it. The truth is however, that this is pure theft."