



Ashreinu | אשרינו

ENHANCING YOUR STUDY OF THE WEEKLY TORAH PORTION

LIFE'S DECISIONS

RABBI AVI HOCHMAN

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SHEVI ZAK ('17)

LEORA BAITNER ('20)

SHANI WOLFSON ('17)

TY KAY ('18)

ELI LITWIN ('18)

Often I reflect on my initial decision to move to Florida to teach at KYHS of South Florida. I had a choice to make; come to Boca and teach, or take advantage of a post graduate studying opportunity. It was not an easy decision. My wife and

I spent weeks going back and forth through all of the pros and cons. On one hand, I had more friends in the other community and a learning environment that was relatively similar to Yeshiva University where I had previously studied. On the other hand, I felt that I wanted to share my passion for Torah and love of Judaism with others, and KYHS of South Florida would be a perfect place to do that. I sensed that if I wanted to grow as a person, our school would be the best place for me.

וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב, מִבְּעַר שֶׁבַע; וַיֵּלֶךְ, חָרָנָה

“And Yaakov leaves from Beer Sheva and goes toward Charan.” (28:10)

The commentaries have grappled with the extra words in this pasuk. Why do we need to be told that Yaakov leaves and where he goes? Is it not obvious that if he is going towards Charan, that he would be leaving the place where he was currently living, Be'er Sheva?

Rashi has a famous answer to this question, but I'd like to share another answer. The Beit HaLevi in his commentary on the Torah explains that when a person decides to go somewhere, he can either be going for one of two reasons. Either because they no longer want to be in their current location, or because they need to get to the new location. Yaakov leaves for both reasons. He leaves Be'er Sheva because Rivkah wants Yaakov to leave Be'er Sheva in order to escape Esav's wrath. Yitzchak however, wishes Yaakov to go to Charan in order to find

a suitable wife from Lavan's house. So Yaakov, being an obedient son, obeys both of his parents' wishes and relocates with both reasons in mind.

Throughout our lives we are faced with many decisions. Who should we be friends with? Where should we go to college? Where should we go to seminary/yeshiva? Where should we work? Where should we raise a family?

My choice to teach at KYHS of South Florida was my own personal *לילך* because of what I was heading towards. The opportunity that awaited ahead was my focus. A person should focus on the reason behind their decision. Why are you choosing that option? Is it the easy way out? Is there more to gain with the other option? Are we just afraid to take the challenge of the first choice? Hopefully, if we think through our decisions and with Hashem's help, we will ultimately come out on top and all of our decisions will be met with great excitement, accomplishment, and satisfaction.

PROPHETIC DREAMS

SHEVI ZAK ('17)

IN THIS WEEK'S PARSHA, PARSHAT VAYEITZEI, YAAKOV TRAVELS FROM HIS hometown, Be'er Sheva, to Charan. During his journey, a pretty famous event occurs: Yaakov falls asleep and dreams of a ladder that reaches from the ground to heaven, with angels traveling up and down the ladder. Hashem then appears to Yaakov and promises him the land that he was asleep upon. Yaakov's dream is very symbolic, and many different sources discuss what exactly this strange dream means.

Rashi gives the classic explanation of the dream's significance. Yaakov has this dream as he is about to leave Israel. The angels going up into heaven are the ones who are tasked with protecting Yaakov while in Israel, and the angels coming down the ladder are supposed to protect Yaakov once he leaves Israel. This symbolizes how Hashem will always pro-

tect us; no matter where we go in life He is always there, waiting to help us.

Rambam gives a deeper understanding of the ladder's purpose. He says the ladder represents the relationship between existence here on earth and existence in heaven. The people climbing up the ladder are prophets. They go up to heaven, gain an understanding of Hashem, and then come back down and inspire the people with their newfound knowledge. The pasuk says that Hashem stands on top of the ladder, suggesting that He guides these prophets. Yaakov envisions this process in his dream and contemplates this unique relationship with Hashem.

Rambam's explanation gives a deeper insight into the purpose of prophecy. The role of the prophet was to help the people form a meaningful relationship with God. Even as far back as the times of Yaakov, people yearned to form a connection with Hashem and to gain a deeper understanding of Him. We can learn from Yaakov's contemplation of Hashem, as well as our personal relationship with Him, that it is so important to connect to Hashem and to follow in his ways because, like Rashi said, He is always there to help us achieve our goals.

A UNITED NATION

LEORA BAITNER ('20)

ויקה מאבני המקום וישם מראשתי

"And he took from the stones of the place, which he arranged around his head." (Bereishit 28:11)

THERE IS A MIDRASH RELATING TO THIS PASUK THAT states that Yaakov took many different stones to use as a pillow to rest his head on. The stones fought with one another saying, "Upon me shall the righteous man rest his head." Since all the stones were fighting about where Yaakov would lay his head, Hashem transformed them into one stone, so that Yaakov would sleep on all of them. Chazal explain that

Yaakov gathered twelve stones as a reference to the twelve tribes that he would father. This miracle of the stones merging occurred so that the entire Jewish nation, 12 distinct and unique tribes, would be united as one nation, serving Hashem and continuing Yaakov's legacy. This shows us that we need to appreciate the unique contributions of each and every individual, while also viewing ourselves as part of a whole, a nation of people unified by common goals and a common purpose.

KEEP CLIMBING

SHANI WOLFSON ('17)

IN THIS WEEK'S PARSHA, PARSHAT VAYEITZEI, YAAKOV TRAVELS FROM HIS hometown of Be'er Sheva to Charan, where his uncle Lavan resides. On his way, Yaakov stops to rest and he famously dreams about a ladder connecting heaven and earth, with angels climbing and descending it; Hashem appears to him and promises that the land he is sleeping on will be given to his descendants. Many mefarshim comment on this, saying that this dream symbolizes Hashem giving Yaakov protection (Rashi).

However, I believe that this dream symbolizes more than just a blessing of protection. There are two ways to use a ladder; you can climb up or down. Typically, a ladder represents a scale, such as the social ladder, and the best place to be is at the top. In life we find ourselves sometimes experiencing really great highs, at the top of the ladder, and sometimes we find ourselves at really extreme lows, at the bottom of the ladder. The bottom of the ladder in Yaakov's dream starts on earth and the top of the ladder is in heaven, teaching us that when we are successful, it is because we are closer to Hashem and when we are failing, it is due to our lack of connection with Hashem. The angels continuously climb the ladder, which teaches us that we have the ability to "climb" or work to become closer to Hashem, no matter where we currently stand on "the ladder" or in life.

When Yaakov gets to Charan, he is faced with numerous trials and tribulations. Lavan tricks

him into marrying his daughter Leah, and Yaakov consequently has to work 14 years in order to marry Rachel. Many would consider this a low point of Yaakov's life, but I believe this is Yaakov's "climbing" period where he literally has to work and totally trust Hashem. Although it seems like Yaakov is at the bottom of life's "ladder" while in Lavan's house, we see that Yaakov ends up very successful as the father of the 12 tribes and also very connected to Hashem.

THE MEANING OF MALACHIM

TY KAY ('18)

THE CONCEPT OF AN ANGEL IS AN INTERESTING ONE. Since an angel is not a physical being, its existence is difficult to understand. Many picture an angel as a completely white and winged being, while others associate angels with heaven or protection. In actuality, angels are both earthly and heavenly: at times angels are busy praising Hashem in shamayim, while at other times they take on the appearance of humans, such as when Avraham invited the three visiting angels into his house. The very definition of a malach is a messenger, further supporting the claim that angels are an intermediary between Hashem and man.

Parshat Vayeitzei contains many fascinating aspects as it details Yaakov's travels. One of the most famous stories is when Yaakov places the stones underneath his head, falls asleep, and dreams of angels ascending and descending a ladder between heaven and earth. As angels act as the bridge between heaven and earth, it makes sense that they climb up the ladder. After all, the angels, just like us, aspire to become closer to God. The descent of the angels is a peculiarity, however. Why must they come down?

The angels in the dream are a metaphor for mankind's daily life. They represent man's constant struggle to achieve closeness to God. That struggle will never be completely positive -- at times we "descend the ladder." We face certain challenges in every quest we embark on. The important part of every man's journey is rising back up after getting knocked down. Hopefully, we can overcome our challenges and arise victorious.

BEING MAKIR TOV

ELI LITWIN ('18)

IN THIS WEEK'S PARSHA THE TORAH MENTIONS: "and God remembered Rachel and God heard her and He opened her womb." (30:23) Rashi comments, "He remembered her that she gave over her signs to her sister." Rachel revealed the signs to her sister Leah on her wedding night so that Leah would not be shamed. We find this same concept regarding Lot. "And so it was when God destroyed the cities of the plain that God remembered Avraham so he sent Lot from amidst the upheaval...." (19:29) Rashi comments, "He remembered how Lot knew that Sarah was Avraham's wife and he heard how Avraham in Egypt said that Sarah was his sister and he [Lot] did not reveal it because he had mercy on Avraham; therefore, God had mercy on Lot."

Rabbi Henry Isaacs points out that in simple terms the Torah is conveying the concept of "hakarot hatov" -- "recognizing the good" that was done by one person on behalf of one's fellow man. God repays a person for a good deed that was done on behalf of one's fellow man and does not forget that good. If God then is a "makir tov", recognizes a good deed done by one person to another person, we surely should strive to be a "makir tov" to each individual who does something good for us!



1. Which of the sons of Yaakov, whose birth is recorded in this parsha, is not named by a mother?

2. For which child born to Leah is there no reason given for the name?

3. In this parsha, Rachel steals the terafim (idols) from her father Lavan. Where else in Tanach does another woman handle terafim?

4. Where are flowers mentioned in this parsha?

5. Where is ice referred to in this parsha?

(1) In naming all the sons, the verse states "And she called." Only with Levi does it state "he called his name Levi," implying that he was not named by his mother (Genesis 29:34). (2) The Torah does not state any reason for the name of Leah's daughter, Dina (Genesis 30:21). (3) Michal placed terafim in the bed of David to help him escape from her father, Shaul (1-Shmuel 19:13). (4) Reuven collects dudaim for his mother which, according to some commentators, is a type of flower (Genesis 30:14, with Rashi). (5) Yaakov describes his devotion to Lavan by saying that by day he consumed him and by night ice consumed him (Genesis 31:40).

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