



פרשת וישלח Parshat Vayishlach

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YOUR LIFE'S MISSION

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ASHIRA MEYEROWITZ (21')

ATARA KEEHN (23')

PENINA KAHANE (22')

DAVID BARROCAS (22')

Rashi comments on the second pasuk of this week's parsha, עם לָבָן גֵּרְתִּי, -- "I have sojourned with Lavan" (Bereishit 32:5), that the gematria of גֵּרְתִּי is 613 (תרי"ג), in order to learn that while Yaakov

sojourned with Lavan, he kept the 613 mitzvot and did not learn from his evil ways.

From the plain text of the following pasuk, the Lubavitcher Rebbe (Likkutei Sichot Shabbat Vayishlach 5716) posits that "I have sojourned with Lavan" means that all aspects of Lavan (i.e., all of the physical objects quoted in Bereishit 32:6 -- oxen, donkeys, sheep, goats, servants and maidservants) were to Yaakov no more than גֵּרְתִּי; something foreign (גר) and strange. Yaakov's true home was his soul's attach-

ment to Torah and fulfilling תרי"ג mitzvot.

In Likkutei Dibburim (vol II, p 427), the Frieddiker Rebbe cites a story of the Maggid of Mezeritch: At home one needs everything. On a journey, however, it does not matter if a person's temporary accommodations are not so beautiful, as he is on a transitory journey. Extending this theme, we can understand the connection between the plain reading of the pasuk and its interpretation: Yaakov sojourned with Lavan because for him material possessions were alien (גרות), and thus they did not interfere with his spirituality, thereby allowing him to achieve his goal of fulfilling תרי"ג mitzvot. On a deeper level, Yaakov ensured that these material possessions would not interfere with his spiritual endeavours and that holiness would be infused into the material, thus transforming it.

Examining the objects quoted in the first paragraph from the third pasuk of the parsha, the Midrash Bereishit Rabba (75:6) states that this mention of donkey (חמור -- the same root of חומר, material) refers to Mashiach, of whom it is said, "lowly and riding upon a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9). Connecting these messages,

the Alter Rebbe (Tanya 37) expounds that the coming of Mashiach is dependent upon on the *avodah of birurim* -- that is, when every Jew purifies his body, his animal soul, and his part in the this world, utilizing them for holy purposes, he will bring out the necessary preparations for the Messianic era that will manifest itself in the very near future IY”H.

Bringing everything together, this Shabbat is Yud-Tet Kislev, the anniversary of the liberation of the Alter Rebbe in 5559 (1798), who was imprisoned for his efforts to disseminate the teachings of Chassidut. Once during his 53 days in jail he was questioned by a learned government minister, who posed the following: “In the story of Creation, God called to Adam and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ Didn’t God know where Adam was?” The Alter Rebbe initially responded with Rashi’s interpretation, but when the Russian stated that he already knew this and was asking for a deeper explanation, he replied: “When a person is, for example, so and so many years old (mentioning the exact age of his questioner), God asks him: Where are you? Are you aware of why you were created on this earth? Are you aware of what you are expected to do and how much you actually have done?”

The Rebbeim told this story every year to challenge each Jew: A person is being asked from on high whether s/he has accomplished the purpose of creation, namely to transform this lowly material world into a dwelling for the *Shechina* (Divine Presence), which demands a capacity for the lowly physical objects of this world to become an abode for the Divine Essence. And when enough collective *birurim* has occurred, as we learn how to do from observing Yaakov’s actions outlined in the beginning of the parsha, the world will be primed for the coming of Mashiach and the end of *galut* (may it be Hashem’s will that it occurs speedily in our days!)

KEEP THE PASSION

ASHIRA MEYEROWITZ (21’)

When Yaakov sent messengers to Esav, his message was: *עַם לְבָן גִּרְתִּי*... - “I have sojourned with Lavan” (Bereishit 32:5). Rashi points out that the word (I have sojourned) has the numerical value of 613, the same as the number of mitzvot in the Torah. Thus, Yaakov specifically used this word in order to

tell Esav that he still kept the mitzvot while staying with Lavan, who was known for his dishonesty. Even Yaakov, one of our great forefathers, could have been negatively influenced in Lavan’s house. The Chafetz Chaim adds that Yaakov’s statement was self-critical. Lavan did all of his immoral actions with such enthusiasm and energy and Yaakov felt that his zeal for mitzvot did not compare to Lavan’s passion for doing evil. This pasuk is as if Yaakov says, “I have been with Lavan, while continuing to observe the 613 mitzvot, but I lament that I did not emulate Lavan’s eagerness. In the future, I intend to fulfill the commandments in a stronger fashion.”

After getting new shoes, one is overly excited about wearing them. As time goes on and you have worn them numerous times, the excitement tends to fade. Yaakov, and many other Jews, felt this way about the mitzvot, but we can learn from Yaakov that we should also strive to be enthusiastic about the mitzvot, no matter how many times we observe them.

Commentaries on Rashi question why Yaakov made this declaration to Esav. Did Esav even care about Yaakov’s conduct in Lavan’s house? One answer is that Yaakov was conveying that he could stand up to Esav and not succumb to his spiritual waywardness, just like he stayed true to his beliefs when with Lavan. Yaakov understood the importance of resisting any influences that would weaken him spiritually. While in an environment that goes against one’s morals, it is imperative to stay true to one’s beliefs and not be affected by outside influences. Yaakov’s adamant belief in Hashem can inspire us all, as it helped him not succumb to Lavan and his evil.

THE RIGHT INFLUENCE

ATARA KEEHN (23’)

In this week’s parsha, Parshat Vayishlach, Yaakov cries out to Hashem saying:

“הַצִּילֵנִי מֵיַד אָחִי מִיַד עֵשָׂו”

“Save me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esav” (Bereishit 32:12).

Why did Yaakov say both from “my brother” and from “Esav”? The Beit HaLevi answers that, as Esav was approaching Yaakov, he saw two possible outcomes of their meeting. One result was Esav instigating a war because he still hated Yaakov for

stealing the bracha of the *bechor*; thus, Yaakov davened to be saved “from the hand of Esav.” The other outcome Yaakov saw was Esav forgiving Yaakov and wanting them to live close together as two brothers -- which is why Yaakov davened to be saved “from the hand of my brother.” However, why would Yaakov daven to be safe from Esav’s offer of friendship?

The Beit HaLevi responds that the thought of living close together with Esav terrified Yaakov because he was afraid of Esav’s possible influence on him and his family. We have to remember the great power of influence in this world -- for the good and the bad. Take into consideration the strength you have and use that power of influence to make a difference and use it to influence those around you for the good. You are stronger than you think. All you have to do is take the first steps.

THE FEAR FACTOR

PENINA KAHANE (22')

The parsha enters with the famous story of Yaakov meeting Esav for the first time in 14 years. Yaakov sends angels to tell Esav that he was with Lavan for 14 years and that he collected cattle, sheep, and slaves, hoping to gain Esav’s forgiveness. The angels return and inform Yaakov that Esav has agreed to meet him, along with 400 men. Yaakov then reacts with fear.

וַיִּירָא יַעֲקֹב מְאֹד וַיִּצְרָ לוֹ וַיַּחֲזֵק אֶת הָעַם אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ וְאֶת הַצֹּאן וְאֶת הַבָּקָר וְהַגְּמָלִים לְשְׁנֵי מַחֲנוֹת

“Yaakov was greatly frightened; in his anxiety, he divided the people with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two camps” (Bereishit 32:8).

In the previous few pesukim we see that Yaakov was talking with an angel, so why when he hears that Esav is on his way with 400 men is he in distress?

The Ohr HaChaim says that Yaakov was afraid of two things. One, he could be killed, and two, he would perhaps have to kill his brother Esav. This is why the pasuk uses the word *מְאֹד* (a lot), since he was afraid of a lot.

The insight that the Ohr HaChaim offers is eye-opening, however, the question still remains: Yaakov was accompanied by an angel, so why was he so afraid? The Chizukni offers another way of understanding this puzzling pasuk. In pasuk 7, the

Torah says that Yaakov was met by *malachim*, which is plural. The Chizukni uses this pasuk alongside pasuk 8 to further his explanation that Yaakov was met by two angels. The first angel was Yaakov’s protective angel, Michaël, while the second angel was Esav’s angel, Samaël. Yaakov was afraid because he did not know which angel was more powerful.

However, Yaakov sent a message to Esav to earn his forgiveness, so why is he nervous that his brother’s angel was present or that his own angel would be weaker? Perhaps the reason is that Yaakov had stayed in Canaan longer than he was supposed to so that he could earn money instead of returning to care for his elderly parents. This was a recent sin he committed, and thus his angel would be weaker as a result of this sin.

Yet we still wonder, why would this sin cause Yaakov to get killed? It is because, throughout his life, Yaakov looked at Esav through a negative lens and judged him as not having the best intentions; but now Yaakov was doing what he always believed Esav was doing.

From this one pasuk, there are three extremely valuable life lessons that we can learn. First is from Ohr HaChaim’s teaching, that we can not just be worried about ourselves. The lives of other people are just as valuable, and Yaakov demonstrated this by worrying about having to possibly kill his brother. The second lesson is that we never know Hashem’s plans. Yaakov could have easily not been worried since Michaël was there, but he did not know Hashem’s plans, so he prepared for the worse. The third lesson is that we never know someone’s intentions, so we should never look at someone negatively. We always have to look for the best in people because we hope that they will do the same for us when we are in a non-ideal situation.

INTERNAL NAME

DAVID BARROCAS (22')

In Parshat Vayishlach, we see Yaakov Avinu re-named Yisrael. The pasuk says,

וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יַעֲקֹב יֵאמָר עוֹד שְׁמִי כִּי אִם-יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי-שָׁרִיתָ עִם-אֱלֹהִים וְעִם-אָנְשִׁים וְתוֹכֵל

“He said, ‘Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with beings divine and human, and have prevailed’” (Bereishit 32:29).

The name Yisrael is meant to represent that Yaakov is our forefather of faith. Yaakov, unlike the other Avot, was not chosen by Hashem. He had to buy the birthright, and Hashem did not even appear to him until he ran away from his home. So what is it that made Yaakov so great? We know he is called an *ish Tam*, but what essential lesson does Yaakov Avinu come to teach us, his children?

We see throughout the parsha that despite the fact that Yaakov’s name is changed to Yisrael, the pesukim still later call him Yaakov. This shows that his life, although filled with struggles, did not just change when Hashem gave him the name Yisrael. His struggles were lifelong, as are many of ours. The most important lesson to be gained from Yaakov is that even though we will always struggle, the “Yisrael” in us will always be there. Yaakov’s struggles only make him more human and real to us as an example of how to persevere through life’s struggles.

We should all strive to learn this incredible lesson from Yaakov every day. Good Shabbos!



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