

INSIGHTS from the SEDRA

Insights from the Sedra is a project of the Scholar's Kollel of Great Neck. It aims to provide several questions and answers about the Sedra, culled from various commentaries, including the following: Baal Haturim, Darash Moshe, Vedibarta Bam by Rabbi Moshe Bogomilsky, Torah Treasures by Dov Furer, Wellsprings of Torah by Alexander Friedman, and Kol Dodi by Rabbi Dovid Feinstein, Great Torah Lights by Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Goodman, Something To Say by Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser, The Vilna Gaon, Growth Through Torah by Zelig Pliskin and The Call of the Torah.

ויצא יעקב מבאר שבע וילך חרנה

“Yaakov departed from Be’ersheva and went toward Charan.” (28:10)

Why both verbs? Why not simply state, “*Yakov went from Be’ersheva to Charan*”? The *Dubner Maggid* answers that for some travelers, departure is their primary goal. For instance, when the angel asks *Hagar* from where she is fleeing and where she is headed, she responds, “*I am fleeing my mistress, Sarah*” (16:8) – i.e., her destination is irrelevant! In contrast, other travelers concentrate on where they are going rather than where they’ve come from. In *Yaakov’s* case, both are significant! Since *Eisav* plans to kill him, he must flee – hence, “*Yaakov departed.*” And because *Yitzchak* tells him where to seek a wife, his destination is equally important – hence, “*he went to Charan.*”
(*Rabbi Yaakov Kranz, Ohel Yaakov*)

[According to *Chazal*, rather than proceeding directly to *Charan*, *Yaakov* attended the *Yeshiva* of *Shem v’Ever* for fourteen years. This detour also justifies the two verbs, for a single statement would have implied a direct move from one town to the other.]

The *Steipler Gaon* considered the *Maggid’s* concept especially relevant today. For in the previous generation, children were sent to distant *yeshivot* not to escape from their own environment – the sacred Jewish centers of Europe and Russia – but only to receive the best education. It was strictly a “*Vayeilech*” (and he went to situation). Nowadays, however, when foolishness, vanity, and worse surround us, we must send away our sons not only for education’s sake but to provide them with a Torah environment. Like *Yaakov*, our children are involved in both “*Vayeitzei*” (and he departed) and “*Vayeilech*” (and he went).
(*Rabbi Yaakov Kaniefsky*)

והנה סולם מצב ארצה וראשו מגיע השמימה

“And behold a ladder set up on the ground, and the top of it reached to heaven...” (28:12)

If a man regards himself as humble, “set up on the ground,” then “his head will reach to heaven.” G-d will consider him truly great. As the *Zohar* states: “*He who is small is actually great.*” Then, too, he will deserve to have “the L-rd stand beside him,” (v. 13) to have the *Shechina* hover over him, as it is written: “I dwell among the humble.”
(*Orech L’Chayim*)

וידר יעקב נדר לאמר אם יהיה אלקים עמדי

“Yaakov made a vow saying, ‘If the L-rd will be with me...’” (28:20)

The word לאמר is to remind us that unless a vow has been verbalized it is not valid. Mere good intentions do not rate as a vow. The word אם in this case is not to be understood as something conditional but is similar to the word אם, as in the phrase אם כפר יושת עליו (*Shemot* 21:30) or as in the phrase אם כסף תלוה את עמי (*Shemot* 22:24). In both those instances the meaning is “when,” i.e. something that will definitely occur.

Yaakov also included the attribute of justice in his vow. So far, G-d has spoken to him only in His capacity as *hashem*, the attribute of Mercy. He undertook to tithe his acquisitions provided that also the attribute of Justice would prove to be with him. This is why he chose the expression אלקים and not Hashem when formulating his vow. (Something to Say)

עשר אעשרנו לך

“I shall repeatedly tithe to You...” (28:22)

Aser Asarenu, the Hebrew expression for “I shall surely tithe,” repeats the verb “to tithe” twice. This is the basis for the rabbinic ordinance according to which the highest degree of charity is to give not just one-tenth but *two-tenths*, or *one-fifth*, of one’s wealth to the poor. (Vilna Gaon)

ויען יעקב ויאמר ללבן מה פשעי מה חטאתי כי דלקת אחרי

“And Yaakov said to Lavan, ‘What is my transgression, what is my sin, that you have so hotly pursued me?’” (31:36)

Rabbi Meir Shapiro of Lublin often described how the wicked of the world are much more zealous than the righteous. If only we could learn from these people to have such enthusiasm for *mitzvot*! This was *Yaakov’s* comment to *Lavan*: I now know “what my transgression is, what my sin is” – I see I still have much to learn, even from you, *Lavan*; “for you have so hotly pursued me” – I wish I pursued my *mitzvot* as ardently.

Similarly, as *Rashi* paraphrases *Yaakov’s* message to *Eisav* – “I have lived with *Lavan*’ (32:4), observed the 613 commandments, and failed to learn from his evil deeds” – *Yaakov* is lamenting that although he observed all the *mitzvot*, he did not learn from *Lavan’s* tremendous enthusiasm (albeit for evil). (Great Torah Lights)

ויקרא לו לבן יגר שהדוּתא ויעקב קרא לו גלעד...על כן קרא שמו גלעד

“And Lavan called it Yegar-sahaduta, but Yaakov called it Galeid. Therefore, he called it Galeid.” (31:47-48)

QUESTION: Originally *Lavan* called it by one name. Why did he change his mind to call it *Galeid*?

ANSWER: While *Lavan* was eager to reach a new peace treaty with *Yaakov*, he wanted it to be done in his language. *Yaakov* refused and told *Lavan*, “If you want a treaty with me, it must be in my language and on my terms.” *Lavan*, seeing *Yaakov’s* persistence, immediately yielded and agreed that everything be done in accordance with *Yaakov’s* conditions.

An important lesson can be learned from this: Unfortunately, there are Jews who think that they must compromise in order to find favor in the eyes of society. Torah teaches us never to be ashamed of our authentic ideas and ideals. The world, seeing our sincerity and devotion to Torah, will immediately yield and respect the Jew for his beliefs. (Vedebarta Bam)

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