



Sefer Bereishis - Parshas Vayeitzei

Calling in a Favor

We find an argument takes place between Rachel and Leah, apparently over whose tent Yakov is to sleep in.

וַיֵּלֶךְ רְאוּבֵן בְּיָמֵי קְצִיר-חֲטִיִּים, וַיִּמְצָא דוֹדָאִים בַּשָּׂדֶה, וַיָּבֵא אֹתָם, אֶל-לֵאָה אִמּוֹ; וַתֹּאמֶר רַחֵל, אֶל-לֵאָה, תְּנִי-נָא לִי, מִדּוֹדָאֵי בְנֶךָ. וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ, הֲמַעַט קִחְתְּךָ אֶת-אִישִׁי, וְלִקַּחְתְּ, גַּם אֶת-דּוֹדָאֵי בְנֵי; וַתֹּאמֶר רַחֵל, לָכֵן יִשְׁכַּב עִמָּךְ הַלַּיְלָה, תַּחַת, דּוֹדָאֵי בְנֶךָ. וַיָּבֵא יַעֲקֹב מִן-הַשָּׂדֶה, בְּעֶרְב, וַתֵּצֵא לֵאָה לְקִרְאָתוֹ וַתֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו תָּבוֹא, כִּי שָׁכַר שְׂכָרְתִּיךָ בְּדוֹדָאֵי בְנֵי; וַיִּשְׁכַּב עִמָּהּ, בַּלַּיְלָה הַזֶּה –

“Reuven went, in the days of the wheat harvest, and he found flowers in the field and brought them to Leah, his mother, and Rachel said to Leah, “Please give me some of your son’s flowers.” And she said to her, “Is it not enough that you have taken my husband, that you wish to take my son’s flowers too?” So Rachel said, “Fine, he shall sleep with you tonight in return for your son’s flowers.” Yakov came from the field in the evening, and Leah went to meet him, and she said, “You shall be with me, because I have hired you with my son’s flowers,” and he slept with her that night.” (30:14-16)

The pasuk then discusses Leah’s children’s births, after which:

וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים, אֶת-רַחֵל; וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶל הַיָּמִים, וַיִּפְתַּח אֶת-רַחֲמָהּ –

And Hashem remembered Rachel, and Hashem listened to her, and opened her womb. (30:22)

Rashi explains that what Hashem remembered was Rachel’s kindness to Leah. The day Rachel was to be married, Yakov had given her a code to ascertain he had not been tricked, and had Leah not have know them, she would otherwise have been found out and humiliated. Rachel provided Leah the codes, condemning herself to not being with Yakov for an indefinite period longer, and played a key role in ensuring Lavan’s treachery was not discovered until the next day, when it was too late.

But years had since passed – why does Hashem remember and repay Rachel’s kindness here?

R’ Ezra Hartman explains that in this episode, the Torah teaches us an incredible principle about kindness. What was Leah thinking when she accused Rachel of taking her husband? Rachel was the sole facilitator that enabled Leah to have been a member of Yakov’s family

– without the codes, Leah would have been left in the cold. In fact, Leah had taken Rachel’s husband!

But Rachel does not say this.

R’ Ezra Hartman explains that sometimes, people like to rub in the fact that they’ve done someone a favor, that the other person owes them something. With a real favor, true kindness, the recipient is not even aware that they are being done a favor. Rachel mentioned the codes in passing, for example, “You should know that Yakov’s favorite thing is X and Y,”. Leah was completely unaware of what Rachel had done for her, hence her question. She had no idea what had truly taken place.

Rachel did not say a word about what had happened years earlier, and just talked about the flowers. It is very appropriate therefore, by holding her tongue and declining perfect opportunity to silence Leah, her silence was rewarded. It is specifically at this juncture that – אֶת-רַחֵל וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים, Hashem remembered Rachel – here, as the Seforno says, Hashem remembered her through the flowers.

Hashem repaid her incredible kindness at the moment she showed she stood by it in spite of personal injury, without cashing it in to win a fight.

My Word is My Honor

As Yakov’s family grew, all was not well:

ותרא רחל כי לא ילדה ליעקב ותקנא רחל באחתה ותאמר אל יעקב הבה לי בנים, ואם אין מתה אנכי –

Rachel saw that she had not borne children to Yaakov, so Rachel became envious of her sister; she said to Yaakov, “Give me children – otherwise I am dead.” (30:1)

The Kli Chemda flags the use of the word of – הבה in the request for children. It is uncommonly used, and is used here in reference to an earlier conversation in their family history: – ויאמר יעקב אל לבן הבה את אשתי כי מלאו ימיי ואבואה אליה –

Yaakov said to Lavan, “Give over my wife, because my term is fulfilled; and I will consummate with her.” (29:21)

Rashi remarks that even the lowest degenerates do not speak in such a vulgar manner. Instead, it indicates, that Yakov’s mindset in marrying Rachel was exclusively for the sake of having children. The Kli Chemda notes that the terminology of “הבה” - “give,” alludes to birthing children. This being the case, Rachel’s statement to Yaakov is understood, in which she uses the irregular term “הבה” - “give.” She was alluding to Yakov that their marriage was founded on an agreement to have children.

This was actually the case – as soon as she had delivered her second child, the last of the twelve sons, completing Yakov’s family, she died.

Thanksgiving – A Jew’s Attitude

The Beis Yosef famously questions why we celebrate 8 days of Chanuka and not 7, seeing as there was enough oil for a day, meaning the benefit from the miracle was 7 days worth. R’ Yaakov Hillel quotes Rashi on the pasuk where Leah gave birth to her fourth child, (29:35) that is based on a Midrash: – מעתה יש לי להודות, הפעם אודה: שנטלתי יותר מחלקי, “This time, I will thank: since I have taken more than my share. Consequently, I must offer up thanks. “

Bizarrely, the Midrash identifies Leah as the first person to truly praise God. Bizarrely, because many before her thanked and praised God, for example Avraham at the Akeida and Noach after the flood.

The basic understanding of her thanks indicate that her rationale was that each of Yakov’s wives would be mother to 3 of the 12 tribes, and since she had exceeded her fair share, she was grateful for the extra good G-d had done to her. R’ Hillel tells us this is not so.

She did not express thanks solely for the extra, but everything overall. By receiving more than she felt she was due, it contextualized everything she’d been given until then. She realized that she was wrong to calculate or expect anything at all; we can’t second-guess G-d. She realized she was wrong to have assumed that 3 was her “fair share”.

What is natural, what we take for granted and makes sense, is still a miracle. This is a massive concept, and internalizing will change the way you see everything.

Why do we expect to be able to walk tomorrow, to see, to live, to be free, to be well? We are so overly familiar with exceptional processes that we view the incredible as simply “natural”.

There is an amazing Gemara in Taanis 25a about the righteousness of R’ Chanina ben Dosa that illustrates this point. He came home one Friday night and saw his daughter crying, and inquired why. She informed him that she had lit a lamp for Shabbos, that she had thought was filled with oil, but was in fact filled with vinegar, and she was weeping that they would have no light for Shabbos when the wick reached the vinegar, at which point it would extinguish.

The reply: “מי שאמר לשמן וידלוק הוא יאמר לחומץ וידלוק” תנא היה דולק והולך כל היום כולו עד – שהביאו ממנו אור להבדלה –

He who said that oil should burn will also say to vinegar to burn.” And the lamp burned the entire following day until they lit a Havdala candle from it. This story speaks volumes about how skewed our perceptions are: nature is not natural.

R’ Hillel explains that we celebrate the “extra” day of Chanuka to teach us something that seems so obvious that we don’t see it – that we must be thankful for every single thing we have and do.

The way of a Jew is "מודה אני" to be thankful. The first thing a Jew is meant to do in the morning is thank Hashem that they woke up. Sometimes people don't wake up – I take this opportunity to thank you Hashem. Some people can't walk; paralyzed suddenly, after a lifetime of mobility. Thank you Hashem that I am not one of them.

When we realize that not only are the "miracles" miracles, but everything in between – ועל – נְסִיךְ שֶׁבְּכֹל יוֹם עִמָּנוּ, וְעַל נִפְלְאוֹתֶיךָ וְטוֹבוֹתֶיךָ שֶׁבְּכֹל עֵת, עָרַב וּבִקֵּר וְצָהָרִים – then we're really on our way to true praise of HaShem, and a better understanding of Hashem as the constant Creator.

It is poignant to recognize that we are called יהודים, and the leader of the Maccabi revolution was Yehuda. Being grateful to God, as well as the people around us is the lifeblood of our people.

Primeval: Yakov's Journey

When Yakov was sent away from home by his parents: – וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב מִבְּאֵר שֶׁבַע וַיֵּלֶךְ חָרָנָה – Yakov left Beersheva, and he fled to Charan. (28:10)

Why would Yakov leave the land of Israel for a place devoid of spirituality, and more simply, a land he didn't belong? Furthermore the Torah needn't mention that he left Be'ersheva. If he went on a journey, presumably he started at home. Why specify his point of departure?

The Sfas Emes explains that Yakov's escape from Esau's clutches was a preparation for his descendants' eventual exiles. Yakov traveled to a place where Hashem's presence was more hidden, or less palpable; to show his descendants that in the darkest of places, the torch of our faith can still shine bright.

Yakov demonstrated how our faith can persevere throughout our struggles. Consider where he left, Be'ersheva. Home, representative of complete spirituality. How so?

אבאר is a wellspring. Water is a fundamental component of all life, and figuratively correlates to the spiritual life force, the connection to G-d that sustains all existence. שבע means seven, representing the seventh day of creation – Shabbos. Shabbos requires that we distance ourselves from mundane and unimportant things. Eating and sleeping are ordinary activities, yet on Shabbos they take on a new dimension as a part of Shabbos observance, allowing us to fuse spirituality and transcendence into the our physical lives. Thus, Be'ersheva represents a place where the spiritual its' connection to the physical world are apparent.

Yakov's primeval journey shows how to travel through the darkness. The Torah very deliberately records his point of departure – we must always remember where we came from. We may find ourselves in places where G-d seems remote, yet we have the capacity to serve Him through simple actions and thoughts. A kind word or deed, a simple blessing on what we eat, can bring G-d into our lives in the darkest of hours.

What Goes Around Comes Around

Lavan caught up with Yakov after he and his family escaped Lavan's ranch, and they agreed a pact to not harm each other. The pact was to have a signature: עַד הַגֵּל הַזֶּה - This pile of stones shall bear witness... (31:52)

The Midrash adds that Yaakov also thrust a sword into the wall, as a second witness. The Da'as Zkeinim points out that Bilam ben Be'or's downfall was through these two, a wall and a sword. What does Bilam have to do with Yakov and Lavan's agreement?

There is a Gemara in Sanhedrin that the figure called Be'or is in fact the same person as Lavan, and Kushan Reshasaim (a wicked king in Judges). Simply put, Bilam was Lavan's son.

Bilam was injured by a wall, and died by the sword, as it says in Bamidbar:

- אֶל-הַקִּיר , אֶת-רַגְלוֹ בָלַעַם, וַתִּלְחַץ אֶת-רַגְלוֹ בַּלְעָם (22:25) his foot was crushed against the wall.
- וַיִּשְׁמַע, אֶת-דִּבְרֵי בְנֵי-לָבָן לְאִמּוֹ – אֵת בִּלְעָם בֶּן-בְּעוֹר, הָרְגוּ בַחֶרֶב (31:8) also Bilam son of Be'or was slain by the sword.

There is a story told by the Gemara in Taanis that a boy found a girl who'd tripped into a pit, and agreed to rescue her on the condition that they marry. She consented, and they made the pit and a nearby animal witnesses. They went their separate ways, and years later he married another woman, who bore him two sons. But one died by falling into a pit, and another was killed by an animal. His wife asked lamented the bizarre misfortunes that had befallen them, and he recalled the vow and his witnesses. His wife told him to divorce her and find the girl, which he did.

This is similar to the case of Bilam in that the witnesses came back to "remind" them of their duties, a clear demonstration of measure for measure.

When Yakov entered Lavan's house, Lavan clearly had no sons, as otherwise he would not send his daughters to tend the sheep, a man's job. Yet by Yakov's departure, he has since had sons: – וַיִּשְׁמַע, אֶת-דִּבְרֵי בְנֵי-לָבָן לְאִמּוֹ (31:1). Lavan only had daughters until Yakov arrived. Years later, Bilam, his own son, broke the pact that nothing befall his daughters.

The witnesses to the pact upheld it, and he was crippled by a wall, and killed by the sword. These are a fulfillment of the law that when witnesses give key testimony that sentence someone to death that – יַד הָעֵדִים תְּהִיָּה בּוֹ בְּרִאשׁוֹנָה לְהַמִּיתוֹ – The hand of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death.

United We Stand

The Pasuk says " – וַיִּיקַץ יַעֲקֹב, מִשְׁנָתוֹ, וַיֹּאמֶר, אֲנִי יוֹשֵׁב בְּמִקְוֵם הַזֶּה; וְאֲנִי כִי, לֹא יָדַעְתִּי – And Yakov awakened from his sleep, and he said, "I now know the Lord is in this place, and I did not know before." (28:16)

Clearly this means something else, and R' Shamshon Ostropolier obliges us. He explains that we know from Sefer Yechezkel there are 4 images on the Kisei HaKavod (G-d's Holy Throne), a lion, an eagle, a cherub and a man.

He then explains that אֲנִי is Roshei Teivos Aryeh (lion), Cruv (cherub, the angel that appeared on the Aron) and Nesher (eagle), and אֲנִי־כִי is Roshei Teivos Aryeh, Nesher, Cruv, and Yakov. This is what he was really saying; "אֲנִי I already knew were on the Kisei HaKavod, but after I saw the Kisei Hakavod in my dream, I saw "אֲנִי־כִי with the additional yud, for Yakov ie that my face was the fourth, fitting enough to be on the Kisei HaKavod, לֹא יָדַעְתִּי."

I heard a very interesting explanation on how he saw himself as fitting from when he woke up and not before. There is machlokes how many stones Yakov took as the pasuk does not say how many. Pirkei D'Rebi Eliezer says that Yakov took 12 stones to put around his head. Before, all the stones were separate and individual, and Yakov/ Yisroel was not fit to be on the Kisei HaKavod. But once he woke up and saw they had combined to make 1 stone, *then* he was fitting to be on the Kisei Hakavod, and that's why he didn't know before. We can apply this to ourselves by saying that the 12 stones is a metaphor for the 12 Tribes, and clearly from this we can see that divided we are not fit to be on the Kisei HaKavod, but **united, we are.**

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