

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת ויצא

ויפגע במקום וילן שם כי בא השמש ויקח מאבני המקום וישם מראשתיו וישכב במקום ההוא

“He encountered the place and spent the night there because the sun had set; he took from the stones of the place which he arranged around his head, and lay down in that place” (28:11)

The Gemara in Chullin 91b says that Yaakov arrived in Charan before realizing that he had passed Har HaMoriah, the future site of the Bais HaMikdash. When he decided to go back, Hashem caused Har HaMoriah to come to him so that he could pray there. R’ Moshe Feinstein notes that unlike other times where someone’s journey was shortened, here the place itself came to him. Why was this different?

Yaakov was concerned that there would be no holiness in Charan and he was used to living with righteous people. Hashem alleviated his concerns by bringing Har HaMoriah to Charan, showing that holiness can even exist in places full of evil. One righteous person can bring the Divine Presence to a place on his own merit. However, when Yaakov awoke, he was afraid because “this is the house of Hashem.” Even Charan can be a dwelling place for Hashem, but it was entirely up to Yaakov to make it happen. This leads to an even greater fear of failing to achieve this potential.

R’ Feinstein concludes: The lesson of this explanation is that we have no right to make excuses that our generation is not good enough to achieve great things or that we cannot succeed because of the place where we live. Anybody can bring holiness to this world in any location. It is our responsibility to make it happen.

וירא והנה באר בשדה והנה שם שלשה עדרי צאן רבצים עליה כי מן הבאר ההוא ישקו העדרים והאבן גדלה על פי הבאר

“He looked, and behold – a well in the field, and behold – three flocks of sheep lay there beside it, for from that well they would water the flocks, and the stone over the mouth of the well was large” (29:2)

The Torah describes how the shepherds gathered around the well in the field and waited for everyone to arrive before they could remove the heavy stone which covered the well. Why does the Torah need to give us a lengthy description of this well and how it worked?

The Malbim writes that this description can be explained as an allegory. The well represents Hashem's influence and presence in this world. When the Shechina has a resting place in Eretz Yisrael, the well is said to be in the city, whereas when the Jewish people are in exile, the well is said to be in the field, outside the city, as in the posuk here. The three flocks of sheep represent the three exiles from Eretz Yisrael: to Egypt, Babylon and Rome. Even when in exile, the Jewish people remain around this well, because it is Hashem's presence and protection that keeps them going in exile. The only thing blocking the return to their land is the large stone covering the well, their sins which block the connection with Hashem. When will they be able to overcome this large stone? When they all gather together. With unity, the people will be able to use their combined strength to overcome the sins that interfere between themselves and Hashem.

We should all ask ourselves if we are contributing to the problem which keeps this well closed or if we are a partner in the attempts to remove the impediment. We should try to take the extra step to bring unity among people and help bring about the redemption. Our destiny is in our own hands.

ויעבד יעקב ברחל שבע שנים ויהיו בעיניו כימים אחדים באהבתו אתה

“So Yaakov worked seven years for Rachel and they seemed to him a few days because of his love for her” (29:20)

In explaining this posuk, the Maharil Diskin quotes the Rama in Even HaEzer 55:1 who says that if an engaged couple spend too much time together, they may end up disliking each other. Generally we find that when a couple has a very long relationship before getting married, it can be unhealthy. Oftentimes, they find deficiencies in each other. Until a couple is married, they do not share a full relationship. When people get married and become like one, they are unable to see faults in their spouse, just as people tend not to see faults in themselves. However, Yaakov, in his

greatness, was able to last seven years before being married to Rachel and still there was no love lost between them during this long waiting period. However, we are not on the level of Yaakov Avinu in modern times. Today, long engagements are not recommended for the reason cited above, among other reasons.

ויבא גם אל רחל ויאהב גם את רחל מלאה ויעבד עמו עוד שבע שנים אחרות
“He consorted also with Rachel and loved Rachel even more than Leah; and he worked for him yet another seven years” (29:30)

The Yalkut Shimoni says that normally employees work hard for two or three years, but then they get comfortable on the job and take it easy. However, the Torah tells us that Yaakov Avinu served “yet another seven years,” emphasizing that the second set was just like the first set. The work was performed in the same manner as the first, with alacrity and integrity. Rashi adds that Yaakov really had a very good reason to slack off during this second set of seven years. After all, the only reason he was still working was because Lavan deceived him. Nevertheless, Yaakov was honest in his work and if he owed Lavan seven more years of labor, he made sure to do it properly. Even though people like to rationalize why they do not need to give it their all at work, we see the inaccuracy of this logic from Yaakov, who had a valid excuse and still gave his best effort.

כי כל העשר אשר הציל אלקים מאבינו לנו הוא ולבנינו ועתה כל אשר אמר אלקים אליך עשה

“But, all the wealth that Hashem has taken away from our father belongs to us and to our children; so now, whatever Hashem has said to you, do” (31:16)

When Rachel and Leah responded to Yaakov’s description of how Hashem commanded him to return to Eretz Yisrael, they described how Lavan had mistreated them and then said “so now, whatever Hashem has said to you, do.” How could they say that since they have nothing to lose by leaving, Yaakov should listen to Hashem and go back? If Lavan would have been treating them nicely, would they have advised Yaakov to ignore Hashem’s command? What is the meaning of their response?

R' Eliyahu Lopian writes in his sefer Lev Eliyahu that a person should not think that living a life of Torah is a sacrifice because he will not have an enjoyable life in this world. This is a very big mistake. Leading a strictly religious life means to be in control of oneself, to refine one's character and to be satisfied with oneself and his lot. If a person throws himself into a life of Torah, he will be happy and content and will not feel as if he is missing out on life. If a person infuses his davening with energy and enthusiasm, he will feel a sense of enjoyment in davening. The same is true of Torah study and mitzvah observance. It is those who attempt to experience every worldly pleasure that are truly unhappy. They are never satisfied. The desire for honor, wealth and pleasure constantly hound them and can never be sated. What value is there in such a life?

After Shlomo HaMelech investigated every worldly pleasure in his book Koheles and found them to be worthless, he concludes that the best thing a man can do in this world is to fear Hashem and keep his mitzvos. What does this mean? Had these pursuits proved enjoyable, Shlomo would have advised against keeping the Torah? The truth is that in order to fully experience the joy of serving Hashem, one must recognize that doing so is not a sacrifice at all. Rather, it is a material existence which lacks substance and pleasure. Therefore, after showing this to be the case, Shlomo concludes that one should not feel constrained or restricted by the Torah. This is actually the most enjoyable path that one can take in this world.

This is also what Rachel and Leah were saying. They could see the greatness of Hashem because they recognized that following his command was really in their best interest. It was obvious to them that they had no future in their father's home, but when Hashem commanded it, they fully appreciated Hashem's goodness and why listening to Him is the best thing for a person to do. They exclaimed that, indeed, their father had been mistreating them and so, in truth, it was the best possible thing to do to listen to Hashem's command.

One does not always see this idea as clearly as Rachel and Leah did at that moment, but we still must be aware of the truth of this principle even if it does not always seem obvious. We are not missing out on anything in this world by being faithful to the Torah and its mitzvos.

(It is said that those who are born religious admire baalei teshuva who are able to extricate themselves from the enjoyment of the world around them and commit to a life of Torah. Yet, at the same time, the baalei teshuva have been there and done that and recognize the world for what it is: a world where one can never truly achieve satisfaction. They admire those born religious who may believe that the world out there contains many more pleasures than their current lifestyle and nevertheless do not deign to try it. A life of Torah brings a measure of satisfaction and joy to a person like nothing else. –MG)

*Shiur given by Rabbi Mayer Friedman
Written by Michael Gutmann*