

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת וישלח

ויירא יעקב מאד ויצר לו ויחץ את העם אשר אתו ואת הצאן ואת הבקר והגמלים לשני מחנות
“And Yaakov became very frightened, and it distressed him. So he divided the people with him, and the flocks, and the cattle, and the camels, into two camps” (32:8)

The Targum Yonasan comments that Yaakov was afraid because he had not honored his parents during the many years that he spent away from home. The Nachalas Moshe writes that the numerical value of מאד is equal to the numerical value of אב כיבוד, hinting to the cause of Yaakov's fear. Yaakov was afraid because Esav had been able to perform this mitzvah all the years while Yaakov had been away from home. Even though Yaakov was such a great person, he was concerned that the lack of merit from this one mitzvah would cause him to be defeated at the hands of Esav. This teaches us the tremendous value of the mitzvah of אב ואם.

ויותר יעקב לבדו ויאבק איש עמו עד עלות השחר
“And Yaakov was left alone and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn” (32:25)

Rashi quotes the Gemara that gives two explanations of the word ויאבק. One explanation is that that they embraced when they wrestled while another interpretation is that they kicked up dirt. This hints to the two ways in which the forces of Esav try to defeat the Jews. One way is to push them into the dirt and tread upon them, as is symbolized by the dirt that they kicked up. The other way in which they attempt to defeat Yaakov is through feigned closeness, as signified by their "embrace." They convince Yaakov that they mean to be friends and make peace so that Yaakov will join them without even realizing it. This is what the Greeks did to the Jews at the time of Chanukah. They attempted to befriend the Jews so that they would assimilate of their own accord.

Yaakov asked Hashem to save him “from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Eisav.” Why did Yaakov use this repetitive phrase? Don't we already know that Eisav is his brother? The Bais HaLevi answers that he prayed for protection from Esav from two different angles. He was afraid that Esav would approach him as a “brother,” as a friend who wanted to remain together with Yaakov, and that he might choose the other approach and come as “Esav,” the wicked man who wanted to kill him. In the end, he was saved from both approaches. In today's society, we must be extra mindful of the people who approach us as “brothers” and try to befriend us and do things with us. Yaakov teaches us that this approach can be even more dangerous because of the influence that they can have on us.

וירא כי לא יכל לו ויגע בכף ירכו ותקע כף ירך יעקב בהאבקו עמו
“When he perceived that he could not overcome him, he struck the ball of his thighbone; and the ball of Yaakov's thighbone became dislocated as he wrestled with him” (32:26)

The Zohar says that Yaakov's thigh represents the supporters of Torah, just as the thighs support the upper body. The Chofetz Chaim explains that the Angel of Esav wanted to prevent Yaakov from learning Torah. When he realized that he could not deter Yaakov himself, he attempted to injure the support of Torah. In this, he succeeded. The Chofetz Chaim continues that there are people who have a lot of money to give away that could be used to support Torah and other religious causes, but they always give excuses why they cannot help. The Angel of Esav understood the importance of supporting Torah. The Mishna in Pirkei Avos says: "If there is no sustenance, there is no Torah." The Angel of Esav knew that Torah study would be crippled without the vital support that it needs. We must step up the fight against the forces of Esav and help support Torah causes.

וירץ עשו לקראתו ויחבקהו ויפל על צאורו וישקהו ויבכו
“Esav ran toward him, and he embraced him, and fell upon his neck, and kissed him; and they wept” (33:4)

Rashi comments that there are dots over the word וישקהו to indicate that Esav did not really kiss Yaakov with all his heart. A second opinion states that even though it is a given fact that Esav hates Yaakov, at that moment his mercy was aroused and he kissed Yaakov with a full heart. R' Menachem Zemba writes that

while people come up with different excuses to hate the Jews, we must understand that it is, in the words of R' Shimon bar Yochai, a "halacha," a given fact. The hatred that Esav harbors for Yaakov is truly a baseless hatred. Nevertheless, the Netziv writes that there will be times where Esav will appreciate Yaakov and will show true loyalty to him.

ותצא דינה בת לאה אשר ילדה ליעקב לראות בבנות הארץ

“Now Dinah - the daughter of Leah, whom she had borne to Yaakov - went out to look over the daughters of the land” (34:1)

Rashi says that Dinah is referred to as the daughter of Leah rather than the daughter of Yaakov because she was following in the footsteps of her mother. Just as her mother was "one who would go out," as we see in last week's parsha when Leah went out to approach Yaakov after the trade of the dudaim, so also Dinah was now going out to watch the women of Shechem. With regards to this, they coined the expression, "Like mother, like daughter."

This Rashi seems to imply that there was something wrong with what Leah did. However, we do not find anywhere that Leah was held accountable for going out and approaching Yaakov. The reason for the distinction between Leah and Dinah is because if parents have a certain quality, a certain middah, the children will often follow those characteristics and mirror their parents. The question is whether the child will use this trait for good or bad. Leah is not blamed because that was her character. Dinah is singled out because she should have been aware of this character trait that she had inherited and should have made a conscious effort to channel it in the right direction.

It is important that parents teach their children to take their natural talents that they have inherited and use them for constructive purposes. The posuk in Mishlei says: "Honor Hashem from that which you have much of." Each and every person has unique talents and should dedicate them to serving Hashem. Writing talents can be used to write words of Torah, speaking talents can be used for giving shiurim, singing talents can be used as a chazan, business skills can be used to help raise funds for Torah institutions, and so on and so forth. Every person knows what they are good at and should try to find a higher purpose for which they can be used. It is important to instill these values in our children as they grow up and discover what their talents are.

ויעקב שמע כי טמא את דינה בתו ובניו היו את מקנהו בשדה והחרש יעקב עד באם

“Now Yaakov heard that he had defiled his daughter Dinah, while his sons were with the livestock in the field; so Yaakov kept silent until their arrival” (34:5)

Upon receiving the news that Dinah had been violated, Yaakov remained silent. On the other hand, his sons became extremely angry when they were informed about what happened. The Torah contrasts Yaakov's reaction to that of his sons to show us that Yaakov understood that one cannot let his emotions dictate his behavior. Yaakov remained silent because he knew that he had to conquer his emotions in order to act rationally and properly decide upon a course of action. His sons, although they were great people and meant well, allowed their anger to take over. It is important never to make impulsive decisions when emotions are running high. A person's emotions can blind him and lead to something drastic and unnecessary which the person will regret later on. Even though it is a justifiable feeling, the action cannot stem from emotions alone. It is always best to think things through before making decisions and use logic as the basis for decisions rather than emotions.

Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur
Shiur given by Rabbi Mayer Friedman
Written by Michael Gutmann