

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת ויצא

ויאמר לבן ליעקב הכי אחי אתה ועבדתני חנם הגידה לי מה משכרתך
“Then Lavan said to Yaakov: Just because you are my relative, should you serve me for nothing? Tell me what are your wages?” (29:15)

Why did Lavan think that Yaakov would entertain the possibility of working for free? The Dubno Magid presented a parable to explain this question. There was once a man who owned a clothing store. One day, a poor man came into the store and begged for a coat because he could not afford it. Charitably, the man agreed to give a coat to the pauper as a gift. A few years later, the man came back to the store and explained that he had come back for another coat, but that he had been moderately successful since their last encounter and would pay for this one. He then spoke about how nice the gift from a few years before had been, how it served him so well and how he got many compliments because of it. The owner realized that he was just saying all that because he wanted to flatter the owner into giving him a good price for his purchase. In a similar way, Lavan brought up the free labor that he performed in the beginning of his stay in Charan and the kindness that he had done for Lavan in order to flatter him into taking a lower wage. Lavan, being the conniving schemer that he was, only said nice things to people for his own benefit. He prefaced their business discussion with a nice compliment so that he could save some money.

The Ramban notes that the Torah never said previously that Yaakov had been working for Lavan. It must be that from the time that Yaakov saw Rachel with the sheep and gave them to drink at the well, he took over her responsibilities as a shepherdess. Out of his abundant love for her, he stayed with the sheep and did the work on his behalf.

ויעבד יעקב ברחל שבע שנים ויהיו בעיניו כימים 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)

Why does the Torah repeat that Yaakov was working for Rachel? The Or Hachaim answers that Yaakov expected Lavan to try to deceive him and so he took measures to protect himself accordingly. When he worked, he made it known that he was working for Rachel and not Leah and publicized the fact to everyone around so that it would be difficult for Lavan to trick him. Nevertheless, despite his best efforts, Lavan still managed to trick Yaakov in the end.

ותהר עוד ותלד בן ותאמר הפעם אודה את ה' על כן קראה שמו יהודה ותעמד מלדת

“She conceived again and bore a son and declared: This time let me gratefully praise Hashem; therefore she called his name Yehuda; then she stopped giving birth” (29:35)

Rabbi Friedman suggests that it is fitting that Yehuda, the progenitor of the Jewish monarchy, was named for an expression of gratitude to Hashem. Such acknowledgment

of Hashem's guidance of the world is a very important quality for a king. The only way for the king descended from Yehuda to be successful is if he thanks Hashem and recognizes that it is Hashem who makes him victorious, rather than his own cunning and physical prowess. That is why there is a special law that a king has to carry a Sefer Torah and read it constantly so that he not become too proud and neglect Hashem. It is therefore especially appropriate that Yehuda received this name. In fact, this is why the Jewish people as a whole are referred to as Yehudim. Gratitude and recognition of Hashem's hand in every facet of life is one of the defining characteristics of the Jew.

וישמע את דברי בני לבן לאמר לקח יעקב את כל אשר לאבינו ומאשר לאבינו עשה את כל הכבוד הזה

“Then he heard the words of Lavan's sons saying: Yaakov has taken all that belonged to our father, and from that which belonged to our father he amassed all this honor” (31:1)

The Yalkut Shimoni says that the honor referred to in the posuk is gold and silver. This is derived from a posuk in Nachum (2:10) which describes wealth as honor. The Vilna Gaon points out that this seems to contradict the mishna in Avos (6:3) which says that "Honor refers only to Torah." He answers that the word "kovod" is spelled incomplete, without a "vov" in this posuk as well as in Nachum. When "kovod" is spelled in this way, it refers to wealth because the honor that wealth brings to a person is lacking and incomplete. The only true honor in the world is keeping Torah and mitzvos. When "kovod" is spelled in its complete form, it refers to the honor of Torah, a complete honor that is the highest level of honor that one can attain.

וירא יעקב את פני לבן והנה איננו עמו כתמול שלשום
“Yaakov also noticed Lavan's disposition that, behold, it was not toward him as in earlier days” (31:2)

The Chofetz Chaim writes that the deterioration of the relationship between Yaakov and Lavan serves as a lesson for all time in how to know when our relationship with the gentiles around us is deteriorating beyond repair. When Lavan's sons spoke badly of Yaakov, he ignored it and moved on. Similarly, when the nations talk badly about us and complain, the best thing to do is remain silent and allow them to say what they want, as long as they still leave us alone. However, when Yaakov saw that Lavan's visage and attitude toward him had turned sour, quite unlike it had been before, he was troubled. It was then that Hashem commanded him to leave and return to Eretz Canaan. Similarly, when the talk of the gentiles becomes more than just words but is translated into violent actions and a change in attitude, it is time to move elsewhere to a safe haven. The most reliable place of refuge for Jews is Eretz Yisroel, the same place where Yaakov sought refuge when Lavan turned against him. This is yet another example of how the stories of Sefer Bereishis are "ma'aseh avos siman levanim," a guide for our nation to follow the example of our forefathers and to see how they dealt with situations similar to those in our own lives.

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