

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת וישלח

ויהי לי שור וחמור צאן ועובד ושפחה ואשלחה להגיד לאדני למצא חן בעיניך
“I have acquired ox and donkey, flock and servant and maidservant and I am sending tell my lord to find favor in your eyes” (32:6)

Yaakov was very wealthy and had a large amount of cattle and livestock. Why did he say that he an ox and a donkey, in singular form? Rashi answers that it is derech eretz to refer to many animals as just one. Why is this derech eretz? R' Moshe Feinstein answers in Darash Moshe that a person should not boast about his wealth. By saying that he had one animal, Yaakov was acting with modesty and derech eretz. He did not flaunt the fact that that he actually had many animals.

Another reason for Yaakov's derech eretz is that this is a way of thanking Hashem for every animal that he has. If Hashem had given him just one animal, Yaakov understood that he would have had to be thankful for it. A person must be grateful for every possession that he has, whether he has a lot or a little. This attitude marked the difference between Yaakov and Esav. Esav said that he had more possessions than necessary. He was not thankful for everything because he felt that it was extra. Yaakov said that he had everything. Whatever Hashem gave him was all that he needed in life. Yaakov was thankful for every item in his possession because he understood that every little thing came from Hashem and had a purpose. If a person perceives that he has more than he needs for himself, perhaps he can use the excess to share with others and help them. No possession is extra and purposeless because it all comes from Hashem.

וירא יעקב מאד ויצר לו ויחז את העם אשר אותו ואת הツאן ואת הבקר והגמלים לשני מחנות

“Yaakov became very frightened and it distressed him. So he divided the people with him and the flocks, cattle and camels into two camps” (32:8)

The Sfas Emes writes in the name of his grandfather, the Chiddushei HaRim, that even though Hashem had promised to protect Yaakov, he still davened for protection. He did not want to rely on Hashem's promise, but he wished to take an active role in bringing about his salvation. Even though he had Hashem's promise, he would not sit back and let Hashem take care of it. He wanted to do something to help bring it about.

The Sfas Emes adds his own point to this idea. If Hashem was indeed protecting Yaakov, why bother scaring him at all? He answers that if Yaakov had never encountered any trouble, he would not truly have recognized the kindness of Hashem. A similar idea is brought out by the Netziv in Chapter 117 of Tehillim. The posuk says, "Praise Hashem, all nations; praise him, all the states. For His kindness has overwhelmed us..." Why should all the nations praise Hashem for what He did to us? The answer is that we only see how Hashem has protected us from the plans of our enemies that came to fruition. Only they know what they had planned to do to us but never came to pass. They have seen how Hashem was really protecting us. That is why we call upon the nations of the world to praise Hashem. They can give a bigger praise to Hashem than we can. Similarly, Yaakov had to see the dangers up ahead and the potential troubles in order to fully appreciate Hashem's help.

הצילני נא מיד אחיכי מיד עשו כי יראה אנכיכי אותו פן יבווא והכחני אם על בניים
“Rescue me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esav, for I fear him lest he come and strike me down, mother and children” (32:12)

Why did Yaakov asked to be saved “from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esav?”

Don't we already know that Esav is his brother? The Beis 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 together with us. Yaakov teaches us that this approach can be even more dangerous because of the influence that they can have on us.

A similar thought is expressed by the Chasam Sofer later in the parsha when Yaakov fought with the angel. He comments that the Torah uses two different words for Esav's approach to Yaakov. It says both "וַיַּבְקֹשׁ," "and he fought," (when Yaakov fought with the angel) and "וַיִּחְבקֵהוּ," "and he hugged him" (when Yaakov met Esav). Esav and his heavenly representative tried both to fight with Yaakov and to hug him, representing the two approaches that the gentiles take in their efforts to influence us.

R' Moshe Feinstein cites a Gemara in Chulin 91a which is also related to this idea. The Gemara cites a disagreement as to what the angel of Esav looked like. One opinion is that he appeared to Yaakov as a gentile and one opinion is that he took the appearance of a Torah scholar. This difference symbolizes the two different ways in which Esav tries to attack us, either physically or philosophically. The latter approach has become more common in modern times. We must be prepared and ready to face the spiritual descendants of Esav when they approach us in this manner. The mishna in Pirkei Avos (2:14) teaches us to "know what to answer to an apostate." The Tosfos Yom Tov cites the Midrash Shmuel who writes that one must know the answers and not just repeat things that one heard from others which he does not fully understand. One must study these matters so that he is well-versed in the answers and is prepared for any confrontation. Also, one should only answer the apostate but not enter into a discussion with him. Answering the apostate is only a preventative measure and it is not an ideal situation. One should try to avoid the philosophical approaches of Esav at all costs.

ותגש גם לאה וילדייה וישתחוו ואחר נגש יוסף ורחל וישתחוו

"Leah, too, came forward with her children and they bowed down; and afterwards, Yosef and Rachel came forward and bowed down" (33:7)

Rashi writes that although Leah and the maidservants bowed to Esav in front of their children, Yosef was concerned that Esav would see his mother's beauty and try to take her. In order to prevent this from happening, he bowed to Esav in front of Rachel in order to shield her from his view. We see the creativity of Yosef in preventing Esav from stirring up trouble. A person has to be creative in order to protect the Torah in various situations. We have to follow Yosef's example and always seek new approaches to ensure proper Torah observance. One example of this is using creative ideas to change conversations which are becoming full of gossip or other inappropriate topics. Creativity is vital in dealing with many situations in life. A person has to develop strategies to help others and also to help himself.

Yosef's creativity was his one of his great characteristics. We also see his resourcefulness throughout the narrative of his experiences in Mitzrayim. Yosef developed strategies in order to lead Egypt through a famine and devised a plan to lead his brothers to repent for selling him before he revealed himself to them. We also have to be creative in our own lives so that we can continue to serve Hashem properly. One must be creative in order to resolve disagreements and fix other problems. Being proactive, like Yosef was, is the key to success.

ויאמר לו אלקים אני קל שקי פרה ורבה גוי וקהל גוים יהיה מך ומלכים מחלציך יצאו

“And Hashem said to him: I am G-d. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a congregation of nations shall descend from you, and kings shall issue from your loins” (35:11)

The Gemara in Yevamos 65b cites Hashem's commandment to Yaakov to "be fruitful and multiply" as the source for the biblical commandment for men to get married and have children. Rabinically, the obligation for women to have children is derived from the posuk (Yeshaya 45:18), "He did not create it for emptiness, He created it to be inhabited." Getting married and building a family is not something that one can choose not to do. It is a mitzvah from the Torah and it is no different than any other mitzvah. Even though the dating process can often be frustrating, every date is part of the preparation for the mitzvah. This is the attitude that one must have about dating. It is part of the preparation for the mitzvah, just like preparing for Shabbos and buying objects in order to perform a mitzvah with them. One does not have the option to neglect his duty to search for a wife. One must put in as much effort as is necessary for as long as it takes until he finds a suitable wife and fulfills the mitzvah.

וְאֶת בְּשַׁמְתָ בַת יִשְׂמָעֵאל אֲחֹות נְבִיאוֹת

“And Basmas, daughter of Yishmael, sister of Nevayos” (36:3)

Rashi points out that Basmas is referred to as Machalas at the end of last week's parsha. In truth, her real name was Basmas. The added name Machalas is from the root "machal," "to forgive." This teaches us that one who gets married has all his sins forgiven at the time of his wedding. The Magen Avraham in Orach Chayim 573 implies that this is true for men and women and writes that this is the reason why the bride and groom fast on their wedding day. Marriage is a chance to start life anew and begin again. Hashem gives a person the chance to begin with a clean slate at this auspicious moment. Obviously, this potential for forgiveness only works if the bride and groom repent at the time of their wedding as well. This may be the reason why they recite the vidui, confession prayer, at mincha on the day of their wedding.

R' Moshe Feinstein asks: Why is this point taught to us specifically in connection with the marriage of Esav? He answers that this shows us the extent of Esav's wickedness. Esav had the opportunity to change when he got married but he let this opportunity go by. Many times opportunity stares us in the face and we fail to take advantage of it. When we are faced with certain life-changing events, such as marriage, that provide us with a chance to change, we must seize those opportunities and improve ourselves.

The Gemara in Megillah 11a cites the final posuk of our parsha, "He is Esav, He is Edom," as a proof that he was always Esav, he was wicked from the beginning of life until his end. The Torah Temimah explains that unlike Yishmael, Esav did not repent at the end of his life. The posuk writes that at Avraham's burial, Yishmael allowed Yitzchak to go before him. Chazal see this as proof that Yishmael repented later in life and recognized Yitzchak's greatness. When the parsha records Yitzchak's burial, it states that Esav preceded Yaakov. This indicates that he still held fast to his old habits and never changed his ways, despite the opportunities presented to him.

ותמנע הייתה פילגש לאלייפז בן עשו ותולד לאלייפז את עמלק אלה בני עדה אשר עשו
“Timna was a concubine of Elifaz, son of Esav, and she bore Amalek to Elifaz; these are the children of Adah, Esav's wife” (36:12)

The Gemara in Sanhedrin 99b records that Timna was a princess of the Chorim. She recognized the greatness of the family of Avraham and wanted to convert. However, the Avos turned her away and did not want to accept her as a convert. In her desperation to join the family of Avraham, she went to Esav's family and became the concubine of Elifaz. She felt that she would be better off as a maid-servant in the family of Avraham than a princess for any other nation. In the end, she was the mother of Amalek, the enemy of the Jews, because the Avos should not

have turned her away.

What was the rationale behind the decision of the Avos to turn Timna away? Even though we do not look to proselytize, we do accept those who approach us sincerely and refuse to be discouraged by the responsibility. In fact, Avraham taught many people about Hashem and to believe in one creator. The Torah Temima answers that she was not completely sincere in her desire to convert. She wanted to join Avraham's family because of their prestige. This is not a valid reason to allow conversion. Similarly, Chazal tell us that converts were not accepted during the time of Dovid HaMelech and Shlomo HaMelech because the Jewish nation was so successful that any potential converts would have had ulterior motives.

Why was Amalek's birth from Timna a just punishment for turning her away? Chazal tell us that Amalek gains power when the Jews are distant from Hashem. When we stray from the path that Hashem prescribes for us, we are attacked by the son of the one who was pushed away. Amalek was born because our ancestors distanced her from Hashem, so her son attacks their descendants when they become distant.

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