

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

“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)

What was Yaakov afraid of? Rashi explains that Yaakov was afraid that he would have to kill Esav. R' Moshe Feinstein asks: Why was Yaakov so distressed by this possibility? After all, if it would end up being a matter of life and death, there would be nothing wrong with killing Esav in order to save himself and his family. Why did this bother him? The answer is that he was worried why he would need to kill someone in order to save himself. Yes, it might be permitted, but he was concerned that there would not be any peaceful alternatives. Why could it not be easier so that they could avoid conflict without any bloodshed? Yaakov was scared when he realized that he may have done something wrong that put him in such a predicament. He recognized that such a situation, while still permissible, nevertheless called for introspection. Similarly, Chazal teach us in Parshas Metzora that when the Jewish people entered Eretz Yisroel, there were instances of tzaraas on houses and when they had to demolish the houses, they discovered treasure hidden in the walls. R' Moshe Feinstein points out that this was not necessarily a complete blessing. Hashem could have granted the person his fortune in a different way, without forcing him to become homeless in the process. It is indeed a gift from Hashem, but the way in which the gift was given should give the recipient pause to think. Yaakov Avinu felt this very strongly. While he understood that Hashem would save him in this confrontation with Esav, he was afraid that he would not merit an easy salvation but that it would come about through violence.

וישא את עיניו וירא את הנשים ואת הילדים ויאמר מי אלה לך ויאמר הילדים אשר חנן אלקים את עבדך

“He raised his eyes and saw the women and children, and he asked: Who are these to you? He answered: The children whom Hashem has graciously given your servant” (33:5)

Why did Esav ask who Yaakov's wives and children were? Was it not obvious that the women and children accompanying him were his new family? The Chofetz Chaim says that Esav was not simply questioning who they were, for that was evident. Rather, he noticed just by looking at them that these were special women and children. He asked Yaakov how it came to be that these women and children so extraordinary. Yaakov responded that they were the children that Hashem had granted him, using the word "chanan" in his answer. The letters of "chanan" can also be understood as an acronym for the three important mitzvos that apply to women in their upkeep of the household: challah (separating a portion of dough for the kohen), niddah and ner (lighting candles on Shabbos). It was in the merit of their punctiliousness regarding these mitzvos that Yaakov's wives reached such high spiritual levels and that they had such righteous

children.

ויאמר עשו יש לי רב... ויאמר יעקב... קח נא את ברכתי אשר הבאת לך כי חנני אלקים וכי יש לי כל ויפצר בו ויקח

“Esav said: I have plenty... But Yaakov said... Please accept my gift which was brought to you, inasmuch as Hashem has been gracious to me and inasmuch as I have everything. He urged him and he accepted” (33:9-11)

What is the difference between Esav's description of his wealth as "I have a lot" and Yaakov's description of his wealth as "I have everything"? R' Moshe Feinstein explains that a wealthy person who believes in Hashem knows that there is no such thing as have extra money. If Hashem gave it to him, it is a gift entrusted to him in order to use it wisely, in accordance with the will of Hashem. Yaakov understood this and therefore felt that his wealth was "everything." Every cent was important and was given to him for a purpose. This is why Yaakov went back for small jugs that were worth very little. Even these utensils were seen by Yaakov as a tool through which to serve Hashem, for if that were not true, why would Hashem have given them to him? How, then, could he not go back and retrieve them? Esav, who did not acknowledge the hand of Hashem in his life, instead told Yaakov that he had "a lot," more than he knew what to do with. He saw his extreme wealth as extra because he felt that he did not need it. These are the different views that Yaakov and Esav had regarding their fortunes.

All of the above can also be said of intelligence and any other natural gifts that a person may have. Each individual has to assess himself and know his strengths and unique capabilities. Hashem created each person with special talents that others do not possess. A person should be careful not to let his gifts go unused in the service of Hashem. Every person is different and can serve Hashem in a way different from anyone else because of his unique characteristics. When we pool our talents and skills together as a nation, we are able to collectively serve Hashem far better than we could individually.

ויהי ביום השלישי בהיותם כאבים ויקחו שני בני יעקב שמעון ולוי אחי דינה איש חרבו ויבאו על העיר בטח ויהרגו כל זכר

“And it came to pass on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of Yaakov's sons, Shimon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, each took his sword and they came upon the city confidently and killed every male” (34:25)

The Midrash says: Why are they called the brothers of Dinah? Were not all the tribes her brothers? Since they sacrificed their lives for her, she is described as only their sister. Rabbi Friedman points out that Shimon and Levi earned the title of "Dinah's brother" because of their courageous action. Every person should ask himself what titles he is gaining for himself before Hashem. Is he doing any unique actions for other people that will earn him greatness in the eyes of Hashem? We should all work on helping others and, by doing that we will take steps toward earning a name for ourselves in spiritual greatness.

ויהי בשכן ישראל בארץ ההוא וילך ראובן ושכב את בלהה פילגש אביו וישמע ישראל ויהיו בני יעקב שנים עשר

“And it came to pass, while Yisrael dwelt in that land, that Reuven went and lay

with Bilhah, his father's concubine, and Yisrael heard. The sons of Yaakov were twelve” (35:22)

Rabbi Friedman points out that the posuk tells us that Yaakov heard about Reuven's inappropriate behavior, but does not indicate that Yaakov had any reaction. He did not send him away and did not disinherit him. Instead, the posuk continues by counting Yaakov's children and even counts Reuven first among all his brothers. Yaakov heard about what Reuven did but instead of punishing him, he drew him closer. This is a lesson that we can learn from our illustrious ancestor as to how we should behave toward children who misbehave. Yaakov understood that his son was a young man and that young people make mistakes. Parents should be patient with their children and even if a child does something that seems to disgrace the family, the best way to deal with the child is not to throw him out but to keep him close.

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