

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת תולדות

ויהי לו מקנה צאן ומקנה בקר ועבדה רבה ויקנאו אתו פלשתים
“He had acquired flocks and herds and many enterprises; and the Philistines envied him” (26:14)

After Yitzchak became rich, the Pelishtim became envious of him and Avimelech asked him to leave the land because they could not take his presence anymore. This jealousy and expulsion, like many events that happened to our forefathers, was a sign for the future. We must be aware that if the gentiles are aware of our success, they can become very upset and jealous. We must be careful not to arouse the anger of the nations that are good to us and allow us to live peacefully in their lands. Throughout our nation's history, the deterioration of the relationship between Yitzchak and the Pelishtim has replayed itself many times. Even though Yitzchak's wealth was not flaunted, it was apparent and the Pelishtim could not tolerate this. How much more so are we to be cautious that we do not flaunt any success that we might have so as not to bring attention to ourselves.

ויחפרו עבדי יצחק בנחל וימצאו שם באר מים חיים
“Yitzchak's servants dug in the valley and found there a well of fresh water” (26:19)

Why does the Torah relate the story about Yitzchak's fights with the Pelishtim over the wells? The Chofetz Chaim says that it teaches us persistence. After each time that the Pelishtim fought with Yitzchak over a well that he had dug, he moved elsewhere and tried to dig a well free of any contention. Similarly, should we fail to succeed at first in any of our pursuits, both material and spiritual, we should not give up and should try again. Hashem us to take the steps to do what we can and put in the requisite effort without giving up so easily. Ultimately, Hashem will guide us and help us succeed in all our endeavors.

ויהי כי זקן יצחק ותכהין עיניו מראת ויקרא את עשו בנו הגדל ויאמר אליו בני
ויאמר אליו הנני

“And it was when Yitzchak had become old, and his eyes dimmed from seeing, that he summoned Esav, his older son, and said to him: My son. And he said to him: Here I am” (27:1)

Why did Yitzchak suffer from blindness? The Midrash Tanchuma says that Yitzchak became blind in order so that Yaakov should be able to deceive him and receive the blessings. The Chofetz Chaim quotes the midrash which says that Yitzchak asked for pain in this world and Hashem agreed that it was a proper request and therefore Yitzchak was the first to suffer a loss of vision. Why is pain a good thing? When a person does a good deed, it creates a defending angel and when he does a bad deed, it creates a prosecuting angel. The angels' power depends on how much energy and desire was put into these actions. When a person has difficulties, his mitzvos carry more weight because they were harder to do. They will cause his mitzvos to outweigh his aveiros. When a

person realizes this, he appreciates the difficulties in life. Yitzchak knew that people always need extra merits. He asked for a tradeoff by which he would earn more merits for his good deeds in the world to come in exchange for suffering a bit more in this world.

ועשה לי מטעמים כאשר אהבתי והביאה לי ואכלה בעבור תברכך נפשי בטרם אמות

“Then make me delicacies such as I love and bring it to me and I will eat, so that my soul may bless you before I die” (27:4)

Why did Esav have to prepare food in order to earn the blessing? Why couldn't Yitzchak just bless him straight out? The simple understanding is that by honoring his father, which was the mitzvah in which he excelled, he would have the merit to receive such a great blessing. Any good things that a person gets comes as a result of his good deeds.

R' Nissan Alpert writes that a person needs to understand that the source of the blessing is greater than he. The word "bracha" is related to the word "bereicha," which means a stream. Just as a stream flows downward, from a high point to a low point, so too a blessing can be conferred from a greater person to someone on a lower level. However, in order for the blessing to be effective, Esav had to first humble himself before his father and accord him the appropriate respect by preparing a meal for him. Only after doing so could he receive the blessings.

When a person makes a bracha, whether during davening or during a meal, he calls Hashem "Baruch." Only after expressing his recognition of Hashem as the source of all blessing in this world can a person receive any blessings from Him. Therefore, every blessing begins with this declaration and one cannot benefit from this world without making this declaration first.

אולי ימשני אבי והייתי בעיניו כמתעתע והבאתי עלי קללה ולא ברכה
“Perhaps my father will feel me and I shall be as a mocker in his eyes; I will thus bring upon myself a curse rather than a blessing” (27:12)

Based on this posuk, the Gemara in Sanhedrin 92a derives that one who is dishonest and changes his words is comparable to one who worships idols. This derivation is based on the fact that Yaakov said that he would be a "mocker," a word which is used elsewhere in reference to idolaters. The Maharsha says that honesty is the most important factor in keeping the Torah. Without it, one cannot fulfill the Torah properly. One who is not truthful does something which is the exact opposite of what the Torah stands for and lying is therefore considered tantamount to serving avoda zara.

קום לך פדנה ארם ביתה בתואל אבי אמך וקח לך משם אשה מבנות לבן אחי אמך

“Arise, go to Padan Aram, to the house of Besuel your mother's father, and take a wife from there from the daughters of Lavan your mother's brother” (28:2)

Why did Yaakov wait so many years before getting married? R' Moshe Feinstein says that Yaakov knew that he was going to go to Lavan's house and he needed to strengthen himself in order to prepare for that difficult situation. He felt that he needed to

work on protecting himself by spending many years at his father's side and dedicating himself to Torah study so that he would be able to survive in a hostile environment and bring up worthy children who would be the foundation of the Jewish nation. We learn from this how important it is to spend time learning in yeshiva before one goes out into the world. One must first fortify himself before exposing himself to potentially harmful influences. After one dedicates time to Hashem, he can be confident that he will be able to succeed even in a hostile environment.

וישלח יצחק את יעקב וילך פדנה ארם אל לבן בן בתואל הארמי אחי רבקה אם יעקב ועשו

“So Yitzhak sent away Yaakov and he went toward Padan Aram, to Lavan the son of Besuel the Aramean, brother of Rivkah, mother of Yaakov and Esav” (28:5)

Rashi comments on the seemingly unnecessary description of Rivkah as "the mother of Yaakov and Esav" that he did not know what this is meant to teach us. Why did Rashi feel the need to say this? Why did he not just refrain from commenting in the first place? The Chazon Ish explained that when a person studies Torah, he must be aware of what he knows and what he does not know. A person has to be honest with himself and admit that he does not know what the meaning of something is. One should not gloss over something and claim to understand it. Rather, he should be truthful to himself, admit that he has a question and then move on if he finds himself unable to resolve the problem. Rashi intentionally commented that he did not know something to teach that this is the appropriate attitude to have. Sometimes it is important to say "I don't know."

Kesharim Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur

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