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פרשת ויצא
Parshat Vayeitzei

Ashreinu | אשרינו

Enhancing your Stu ekly Torah Portion

Parsha Summary

In this week's parsha, Yaakov leaves Be'er Sheva and travels to his uncle Lavan's house in Charan. He stops at Har HaMoriah (the future Har HaBayit), and has a dream about *melachim* going up and down a ladder. The dream sig nified Hashem telling him that he will be watched over and will return back to Eretz Canaan safely. Yaakov stayed with Lavan for 20 years, working for him as a shepherd, and Lavan was very deceptive throughout Yaakov's time working for him. Yaakov marries Lavan's daughters, Leah and Rachel, and the first eleven tribes are born.

Every Step of the Way

Mrs. Perl

Mrs. Perl

Calev Zak ('25)

Mia Kogan ('23)

Binny Ciment ('24)

In Parshat Vayeitzei, Yitzchak tells Yaakov that he should leave Canaan to go find a wife from amongst his mother's family. Arriving penniless in Charan, Yaakov is given the opportunity to work for his Uncle Lavan in exchange for the right to marry his daughter. As we know, Lavan tricks Yaakov and gives him Leah for a wife instead of Rachel. Devastated by the potential loss of his true love, Yaakov promises to work for Lavan for another seven years if he will allow him to marry Rachel. Rather than living happily ever after, however, the family experiences its share of sorrow, jealousy, and strife, and they ultimately flee Charan rather than contend with the anger of Lavan and his children.

One question that arises when learning about this story is whether the purpose of including these family squabbles is merely to teach us about the personal lives of the *Avot* and *Imahot* or whether it serves a

greater purpose. Perhaps by taking note of the themes within the parsha we can derive a deeper meaning underlying Yaakov's time in Lavan's house.

Let's start at the beginning of the parsha. Although Yitzchak did tell Yaakov to go to Charan to find a wife, his primary reason for going was to escape Esav's wrath after the incident with the *brachot*. Running away from home, Yaakov stops to camp for the night and has his first recorded encounter with God. After promising him "Birchat Avraham", Hashem says:

וְהִנֵּה אָנֹכִי עִמָּךְ וּשְׁמַרְתִּיךָ בְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר תֵּלֵךְ וַהֲשִׁבֹתִיךָ אֶל הָאֲדָמָה הַזֹּאת כִּי לֹא אֶעֱזָבְךָ עַד אֲשֶׁר אִם עָשִׂיתִי אֵת אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתִּי לָךְ

"And behold: I am with you. I will protect you wherever you go and I will return you to this land for I will not forsake you until I have done that which I have promised you" (Bereishit 28:15).

With Hashem's promise to protect and to guide him even while outside the land of Canaan, Yaakov continues on his journey to the land of Charan and ultimately takes refuge in Lavan's house. Although he marries, has children, and acquires wealth, he lives in a constant state of unease in Lavan's house and never fully settles into his surroundings. Despite this acquisition of material wealth and his apparent success, ultimately his relationship with his host sours and it is God, who had not revealed himself to Yaakov for twenty years, who tells him that it is time for him to escape Lavan's house and to return to Canaan.

The concept of "*maaseh avot siman l'banim*" (what happens to the fathers is a sign for the children) is often quoted when discussing Sefer Bereishit. Applied to our parsha, it indicates that while Hashem was intimately involved in the life of Yaakov Avinu on the individual level, what happened to him and his family is actually reflective of what will happen to the Jewish people on a national and communal level throughout their history.

Our parsha seems to highlight the concept of exile and redemption and to emphasize the idea that Hashem will not forsake us even while in exile. Hearing about all of Yaakov's trials, one may have concluded that God abandoned him while he was in exile. However, viewing these events within the greater context of Sefer Bereishit, it seems that Hashem was behind the scenes with Yaakov every step of the way and was instrumental in his success.

Mastering Your Environment

Calev Zak ('25)

In our lives, we live in many different environments. Some of them, like our homes, workplaces, and social environments, are centered around individuality and are a place where we can have influence. These are small systems and each person within them can contribute in ways that affect them. On the other hand, we are all also a part of larger environments such as our community, country, and even the world. In these places we

cannot exert our influence as strongly as in the small systems, but these larger environments still force us to adjust.

In Parshat Vayeitzei, the Torah focuses on the transition from one place to another and how it changes a person's conduct. The word *vayetzei*, meaning "and he went out," describes how Yaakov left Eretz Yisrael and came to Charan, an unknown place. The word *Charan* is associated with anger, and thus Rabbis refer to it as the arousal of Hashem's anger.

There are three dimensions to Yaakov's stay in Charan: (a) he was confronted by a personal challenge, (b) he built his family, and (c) he elevated the environment of Charan.

If the central part of our religion of Judaism is to look up to our forefathers, then we should be following exactly what Yaakov did in our lives today. The problem is that Yaakov was the holiest man of his time and many people looked up to him. Today, while we live in this big world of billions of people we are not able to have such an effect as Yaakov did. However, what we must do is slowly each and every day try to better ourselves, change the environment around us only a tiny bit, face every personal challenge with bravery, and fulfill ואהבת לרעך כמוך so we can bring Mashiach a little bit closer.

Good Shabbos everyone!

More Love

Mia Kogan ('23)

The pasuk in Parshat Vayeitzei says:

וַיָּבֹא גַּם אֶל רָחֵל וַיֶּאֱהַב גַּם אֶת רָחֵל מִלֵּאָה

"And he also married Rachel, and he also loved Rachel more than Leah…" (Bereishit 29:30).

Wouldn't it make more sense to say, "וַיֶּאֱהַב אֶת רָחֵל", "And he loved Rachel"?

The Rambam says that it mentions that Yaakov also loved Rachel more than Leah because it is natural for a man to have more love for the woman with whom he first had a connection, as mentioned in Gemara Sanhedrin (22b) concerning women: "And she makes a firm commitment only to he who marries her first." Therefore, saying that Yaakov loved Rachel more than Leah shows that his love for Leah was unnatural.

We know that Yaakov was supposed to marry Rachel, but Lavan tricked him and made him marry Leah instead. The midrash teaches that Yaakov presumed a trick would be played on him and organized secret signs between himself and Rachel. When Rachel noticed that her father was planning to switch Leah for her, she realized that her sister might become embarrassed. Therefore, Rachel communicated the secret signs to Leah. When Yaakov became conscious of this, his love for Rachel strengthened because she conducted herself in such righteousness and good nature. That's why the Torah says: וַיֶּאֱהַב גַּם אֶת רָחֵל מִלֵּאָה, "And he loved (also) Rachel through Leah."

"A" for Effort

Binny Ciment ('24)

Yaakov worked 20 years under Lavan. Those years of being a shepherd for his father-in-law were very difficult for him. Lavan was ungrateful, a liar, cheater, and a hard boss. He made Yaakov work under absolutely terrible conditions. The Rambam, one of the great rabbis who lived in the 11th century, wrote a set of books detailing Jewish laws and principles known as the משנה תורה. When discussing the law regarding the need for a paid worker to work his hardest while on the job, the Rambam mentions that Yaakov put all of his strength into his job. However, unlike anywhere else, Yaakov is called הצדיק - the righteous - by the Rambam (Hilchot Sechirut 13:7). Why did the Rambam choose to give Yaakov a title – צדיק – here of all places?

I heard the following answer from Rabbi Yitzchok Cohen and Rabbi Aharon Kahn, both Roshei Yeshiva of Yeshiva University: Under normal conditions, it is not easy to give 100% of your time and energy while working. People like to take breaks here and there throughout the day. It's even harder to give your all when you don't enjoy your job. It's even harder when your boss doesn't appreciate your effort and work, and makes your life miserable. Yaakov had the worst boss of all time, yet, despite this, he gave 100% effort. Rambam calls Yaakov a צדיק specifically when describing this law because what Yaakov did shows everyone how big of a צדיק he truly was.

The lesson for us is to learn from our forefather, Yaakov or, as the Rambam calls him – יעקב הצדיק – and give our best effort in whatever we do all the time, even if we don't enjoy it and even if we feel that no one appreciates our work and effort.

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