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OPEN REBUKE, HIDDEN LOVE

by *Rabbi Michael Hoenig*

At the beginning of this week's Parashah, Ya'akov Avinu blatantly rebukes three unfamiliar shepherds who had seemingly taken a break from their work. Ya'akov exclaims, "*Hein Od HaYom Gadol Lo Eit HeiAseif HaMikneh HaShku HaTzon ULechu Re'u,*" "Look, the day is still long; it is not yet time to bring the livestock in; water the flock and go on grazing" (BeReishit 29:7). It is safe to assume that most people would be offended and quite defensive by a complete stranger's unsolicited critique. The shepherds, however, seem to take the rebuke seriously, and even attempt to offer an excuse for their lack of work.

Why didn't the shepherds start yelling or give a heated response to Ya'akov? At the very least, why didn't they tell him to mind his own business?

The Ponevezher Rav explains how Ya'akov was able to connect and offer rebuke to complete strangers. Upon meeting them, he utters an incredibly powerful word: Achai, my brothers. Had Ya'akov instantly attacked the shepherds and demanded an explanation for their laziness, they would have certainly become very defensive and inflamed. By the time Ya'akov offered rebuke, however, they already sensed his genuine care for them, and they were therefore able to receive his criticism.

The Gemara in Arachin (16b) describes the obligation and parameters of the Mitzvah of Tochachah (rebuke). There is a three way Machloket regarding when a person is absolved from his responsibility to rebuke his fellow man. When the offender either strikes, curses, or protests the individual offering rebuke, then the Mitzvah is no longer applicable. Rav Ya'akov Kamentzky, in his Emet LeYa'akov, asks why the striking, curses, or protests of the offender absolves a person from the Mitzvah of rebuke. He points out that the Rambam (Hilchot Dei'ot 6:7) requires that a person rebuke in a pleasant and calm manner and clearly inform the offender that the rebuke is solely for his benefit. The offender must internalize the loving nature and compassion of the rebuke.

Based on this Rambam, Rav Kamenetzky explains why the striking, cursing, or protests of the offender excuse one from the Mitzvah of rebuke. As soon as the offender strikes, curses, or protests, he is certainly not cognizant of the fact that the rebuke was offered for his ultimate gain and benefit. As a result, the

Mitzvah is no longer present. We learn that the person must sincerely love the offender he rebukes.

Therefore, Ya'akov first demonstrated his love and compassion for the shepherds. Then, he was in the proper position to rebuke them for their work schedule.

In Melachim I (18:22-23), Eliyahu offers a public challenge to the false prophets, allowing them to demonstrate their spiritual prowess. He allows them to offer an animal and attempt to entice their gods into bringing down a fire from heaven. He also harshly criticizes the spectators to commit themselves only towards Hashem. Once the false prophets are discovered as frauds, Eliyahu forcibly seizes and slaughters all of them.

Escaping a death threat from Izevel, Eliyahu escapes to a cave by Har Choreiv: "*VaYomer Tzei VeAmadeta VaHar Lifnei Hashem VeHineih Hashem Oveir VeRuach Gedolah VeChazak Mefareik Harim UMeshabeir Sela'im Lifnei Hashem Lo VaRuach Hashem VeAchar HaRuach Ra'ash Lo VaRa'ash Hashem VeAchar HaRa'ash Eish Lo VeEish Hashem VeAchar HaEish Kol Demamah Dakkah,*" "He [Hashem] said, 'Go out of the cave and stand on the mountain before Hashem.' And behold, Hashem was passing, and a great and powerful wind, smashing mountains, and breaking rocks went before Hashem. [But] Hashem is not in the wind! After the wind came an earthquake. Hashem is not in the earthquake! After the earthquake came a fire. Hashem is not in the fire! After the fire came a still, thin voice" (19:11-12).

The Malbim offers a beautiful explanation of the vivid imagery. By not appearing in the violence of wind, earthquake, or fire, Hashem meant to teach Eliyahu and other leaders that the preferable way to teach people is calmly and lovingly. Eliyahu was acting inappropriately as he displayed anger and force by bringing a drought and killing the false prophets.

We are sometimes surrounded by those who are struggling or deficient in certain areas of their observance. The Torah commands us, "*Hochei'ach Tochi'ach Et Amitecha,*" "You shall reprove your fellow" (VaYikra 19:17). As Ya'akov Avinu taught his descendants, the rebuke must always be accompanied with deep love and compassion.

QUESTIONING God?

by *Binyamin Jachter* (17)

In this week's Parashah, Ya'akov Avinu has a rather unusual conversation with Hashem. On the surface, Ya'akov seems to be telling Hashem what His responsibilities are and what He must do in order for Ya'akov to accept him. He tells Hashem that he will only serve Him if He gives him protection, food, and clothes (BeReishit 28:20), despite Hashem already promising to protect

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Ya'akov throughout his journey (28:15). It seems like Ya'akov Avinu is questioning Hashem!

Rav Shmuel Goldin, in his book *Unlocking the Torah Text*, explains how Ya'akov could be allowed to say these things as there is possibility that he was negotiating with God. The Midrash (BeReishit Rabbah 70:4) states that the Pesukim are written in the wrong order. Really, Hashem hadn't promised Ya'akov anything, but only once Ya'akov explicitly requests it, Hashem tells him He would do it.

Rashi (28:21 s.v. VeHayah Hashem Li Leilokim), however, explains that in reality, Ya'akov is issuing a prayer, not a demand. By saying Hashem will become his God, he is referencing Avraham's conversation with Hashem. This reference is intended to be Ya'akov's way of asking Hashem to deal favorably with him as He had done with Avraham.

The Rashbam (28:20 s.v. Im Yehiyeh Elokim Imadi) and the Seforno (28:21 s.v. VeHayah Hashem Li Leilokim) look at this prayer in a different way. The Rashbam says that it is simply a request that Hashem help him in the future. The Seforno expands on that and says that it is helping him by eliminating all of his material concerns so that he can grow spiritually. The reason why he says Hashem will then be his God, refers to the level on which Ya'akov sees himself. He envisions that he could be raised to a completely different level if Hashem were to allow him to focus on his spirituality.

Rav Goldin explains that Ya'akov isn't being selfish by asking for material items or even for asking Hashem to help him spiritually. He makes this request to benefit everyone else in the world. He sees it as an opportunity to make Hashem the God of others. If he can be anywhere but still be sustained, he could go anywhere to spread Hashem's name to everyone.

From this we can learn the great importance of prayer. We can ask Hashem for anything, and we can amount to greatness using the things we ask for. After continuous prayer, we can be the best that we can be and hopefully our prayers can spread to everyone else. We can help everyone everywhere by just saying a few words to Hashem each day. Hopefully we can all come together and bring Refu'ah and Shalom to the world.

THE NEED TO NEED

by Moshe Davis ('17)

VaYetzei begins with a very interesting story. Ya'akov Avinu is heading towards Charan to his uncle Lavan after departing from Be'er Sheva, when he pauses his journey to sleep. Rashi (28:11 s.v. VaYifga BaMakom) comments that although the Pasuk does not specify the place where Ya'akov sleeps, as it says, "VaYifga BaMakom VaYalen Sham," "And he reached the place, and he stayed there" (BeReishit 28:11), we can learn through the use of the word "Makom" (22:7) by Avraham that this place is Har HaMoriah. The Torah presents Ya'akov's dream, describing a ladder going from the Earth to the sky, with angels ascending and descending.

Hashem tells him that He is going to give all the land in visible distance to Ya'akov's descendants, and that He will not forsake Ya'akov until He completes His promise. Ya'akov then wakes up and praises that place, calling it a "House of Hashem," once again alluding to the fact that it would, in the future, be the home of the Beit HaMikdash. Suddenly, Ya'akov makes a promise on a condition, "*Im Yihiyeh Elokim Imadi UShmarani BaDerech Hazeh Asher Anochi Holeich VeNatan Li Lechem LeEchol UVegeed Lilbosh...VeHayah Hashem Li Leilokim,*" "If Hashem will be with me and guard me on this path that I am embarking upon, and if He will give me food to eat and clothing to wear... then Hashem will be a God for me" (28:20-21). Ya'akov is saying that as long as Hashem watches over him and gives him food and clothes, he will be loyal to Him and serve Him.

The Midrash (Tanchuma 3) states that Ya'akov was really asking for four things: that Hashem should be with him, that Hashem should protect him, that Hashem should return him to his home in safety, and that Hashem should give him food and clothes. Conversely, the Midrash goes on to say that Hashem granted only three of Ya'akov Avinu's four wishes. He refused to guarantee Ya'akov food and clothes, because if He promised Ya'akov everything, there would be nothing to Daven for, and Ya'akov would lose his special connection with Hashem. However, this Midrash seems troubling considering the fact that Chazal tell us that Ya'akov was the greatest of the Avot, a man who walked with Hashem constantly. His essence revolved around being close to Hashem, so why would his livelihood affect his Avodat and Ahavat Hashem? Hashem seems to be concerned that Ya'akov will become complacent with what he has and stop Davening to Him.

To answer this question, we must first explore the fundamental nature of man. Man was created with a pure Neshamah which is surrounded by a physical body. The Neshamah allows us to know what is right, but the body can sometimes block these feelings. Our goal is to break through the layers of physicality and understand what we need to know. Even Ya'akov needed to exercise his ability to reach out to Hashem. When someone has a need for something and recognizes that he must turn to Hashem to fulfill the need, it brings him to a higher level of appreciating what Hashem does for him or her. The only way for Ya'akov to draw closer to Hashem was for him to need something.

This has great relevance to our every-day lives. Sometimes, we entertain thoughts such as, "If only Hashem did this for me or that for me, I would be able to serve Him better." At times, it might even feel like Hashem is sabotaging our plans to serve Him. When we struggle with this, it brings us closer to Hashem because we recognize every single thing that He does for us, and we realize how much we depend on Him.

SUPERPOWERS OR SUPERSTITIONS?

by Gavriel Epstein ('15)

Before Ya'akov and his family make their covert escape from Lavan's house, Rachel makes an intriguing decision: "*VaTignov Rachel Et HaTerafim Asher LeAvihah,*" "Rachel stole her father's

HaDechak, an emergency situation in which creative legal loopholes should be investigated and employed. In the mind of those for whom Shabbat includes liberating ourselves Lechatchilah, as a first resort, from the shackles of technology, such an app would never be imagined or desired.

As technology figures more prominently in our lives and as the conflicts between aspects of a secular lifestyle become incompatible with Halachah, we will be forced to ultimately make a decision about what takes precedence and prominence in our lives and choices.

“ULekachtem Lachem BaYom HaRishon Peri Eitz Hadar Anaf Eitz Avot Kapot Temarim,” “Take for yourself on the first day a fruit of a beautiful citrus tree” (VaYikra 23:40). Over Sukkot, Jews around the world universally take the exact same four species. Whether of Ashkenazic or Sephardic descent, both from North America, South America, the Eastern hemisphere or Western hemisphere, all Jews take the same Peri Eitz Hadar an Etrog. But how do we know that a Peri Eitz Hadar, a “beautiful citrus fruit,” is an Etrog? There are hundreds, if not thousands, of varieties of citrus fruit—oranges, grapefruits, lemons, pomelos, tangerines, and the list goes on.

The Gemara (Sukkah 25a) draws the conclusion that a Peri Eitz Hadar is an Etrog by analyzing the Hebrew word for beautiful, Hadar. They conclude it is the Etrog tree because the word “Hadar” in truth has two meanings: beautiful and dwell. They therefore interpret the Pasuk as referring to a fruit which is Dar Ballan, “dwells continuously all year on the tree.” The Etrog alone fulfills the requirement of constant dwelling. While most other fruits are seasonal, the Etrog grows, blossoms and produces fruit throughout all the seasons. It braves the cold, withstands the heat, remains firm and upright in the wind and stubbornly persists in surviving the storm. The Etrog is truly Dar, it dwells consistently and constantly. In fact, the Hebrew word Dar is very similar to the French word duree or the English word endure.

The beauty of the Etrog is its endurance, its ability to withstand the elements and to triumph over the prevailing winds. The Etrog tree is determined, steadfast, and unwavering and thereby produces fruit that the Torah calls beautiful.

As we spent technology-free time on Shabbat and Yom Tov, we must be reminded how fortunate and blessed we are to have been given the tools to disengage from the world. Like the Etrog tree, let’s be strong, determined, and steadfast in our commitment to Halachah and we too will produce beautiful fruit. Let’s embrace Halachah Lechatchila as nothing short of an ideal way of life.

Rabbi Chaim Jachter’s additions

The travesty of the Shabbos App is analogous to a situation addressed in Teshuvot Chavot Yair 163. A group of clothing salesmen met daily for a Shiur with a certain Talmid Chacham. This group also agreed to submit all their disputes about Hasagat Gevul, illegal encroachment, to this Talmid Chacham for adjudication. One of the members of the group noted that their disputes were frequent and resolving them was highly disruptive to their business endeavors. This member raised the possibility of the members of the group waiving all

claims and counterclaims regarding Hasagat Gevul, thereby permitting each other to engage in Hasagat Gevul. Instead of arguing about whether certain business practices ran afoul of this Halachah, waiving all claims would avoid violation of Hasagat Gevul by removing the prohibition entirely. The Talmid Chacham submitted the question to the Chavot Yair, who vigorously rejected the suggestion. The Chavot Yair strongly condemns this action as a wholesale rejection of a Torah prohibition. He notes that this practice will eventually erode any respect the group members have for the Halachah of Hasagat Gevul and that others would adopt this practice, leading to widespread disrespect for this Halachah. He even compares such behavior to that of the Dor HaMabul, whose wholesale rejection of Torah principles led to a state of affairs where the world was inundated with theft.

The same applies to the Shabbos App. While any individual's violation of Shabbat constitutes a serious transgression, the disrespecting of a Torah principle is far worse, even if the motivation is to mitigate the severity of the transgressions of those who violate Shabbat. It is one thing to violate the Shabbat; it is a far worse thing to create a situation where people will perceive that they are permitted to engage in such violation of Shabbat. We hope that the Shabbos App is a passing phenomenon whose time has not arrived and will never arrive. We look forward to the day when all of Am Yisrael will properly observe two Shabbatot which, we are promised by Chazal (Shabbat 118b), will usher in the Messianic age.

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