

PARSHAS

Vayishlach

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Yitzchak Yiranen

Rosh Yeshiva Torah

Sameach B'chelko | A Shiur by Rav Dovid Hirsch Compiled by Aryeh Kaminetsky, Y.C. '19

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This *parsha* describes the long-awaited reunion between Yaakov and Esav. The interaction between these two dynamic personalities acutely accentuates the differences between them. Many *meforshim* pick up on a linguistic difference between the brothers. When arguing on whether Esav should accept Yaakov's tribute, Esav insists that he doesn't need it because "*yesh li rav* - I have a lot" (Bereishis 33:9). Yaakov refuses to take back the gift and says "*yesh li kol*, - I have everything" (Bereishis 33:11). The *Kli Yakar* comments that this exchange reveals a fundamental difference in perspective between Yaakov and Esav. While Esav had a lot, he never had enough and was never was satisfied. Yaakov, on the other hand, even after offering up a hefty price for his freedom, still viewed his financial status as "*yesh li kol*." He epitomized what Chazal say in *Pirkei Avos* "*Eize hu ashir? Hasameach b'chelko*."

The theological and psychological implications of this idea can be found in a comment by the Vilna Gaon on the *passuk* in Mishlei, "*Tov lev mishte tamid* - The good heart is constantly in a party" (Mishlei 15:15). The Vilna Gaon explains that people who chase physical pleasures occasionally succeed, yet never find sufficient satisfaction. Once the "party" ends, they are as miserable as before. A "*tov lev*," someone with the perspective of Yaakov, can find himself constantly in a state of *sipuk hanefesh*. The perspective of *sameach b'chelko* unlocks a world of consistent happiness and satisfaction. Rema, relatedly, felt this *passuk* was so important, he used it to conclude *Orech Chayim*.

"People who chase physical pleasures occasionally succeed, yet never find sufficient satisfaction"

The Vilna Gaon extends this idea into the realm of spiritual attainment. Many people spend a lot of time worrying about how much learning they can accomplish, how many *dapim* they can finish, and how many *siyumim* they can make. The Vilna Gaon says one must approach learning with the perspective of *sameach b'chelko*. Learning can be improved dramatically by just focusing on what is in front of you. The Vilna Gaon advocated for slow, deliberate learning which doesn't necessarily cover a lot of ground. Maximizing the value and enjoyment of a few lines of *Gemara* is healthier and more productive than attempting to chase after quantitative success.

Chazal tell us that this encounter between Yaakov and Esav is the blueprint for all of Jewish history on how to deal with antagonists. This may seem strange. After all, Yaakov lost a lot of money and was forced to bow down to a *rasha*! In what sense was this a victory? In truth, victory is defined by one's goals. If Yaakov was seeking money and *kavod* then he certainly did not win. However, Yaakov was *sameach b'chelko* and all he wanted was for him and his family to be safe and have the ability to continue to learn and serve Hashem. Yaakov isn't merely teaching us how to win, he is teaching us what it means to win. True success and happiness aren't found in the grandiose and the magnificent. Someone who wakes up every morning with the ability to attend yeshiva and serve Hashem is a victor regardless of any other circumstance.

It is important that we internalize Yaakov's perspective of *sameach b'chelko* so it can allow us to continue to grow and achieve our unique *chelek* in Torah and *avodas Hashem*.



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A Nice Vort

The Way to Give a Gift

Written by Sammy Marcus, Y.C. '18

It's *motza'ei Shabbos*, and an elevating *shabbos* experience with my family and friends has just concluded. Elaborate *seudos* were eaten, *divrei Torah* were shared, and lively *zemiros* were sung, a cumulative effort to allow the Shabbos to become embedded into our yearning *neshamos*. As the blessing of *Hamavdil Bein Kodesh L'Chol* travels across the room, a transition from *kedusha* to a state of normalcy commences. Shabbos appears in the distant past, while Sunday creeps in ever so quickly.

In this week's *parsha*, Yaakov Avinu returns to *Eretz Canaan* only to find out that his brother is preparing a massive assault against him. For Yaakov, a *tzadik* re-embracing the *kedusha* of Hashem's Promised Land, a decision was due; accept a calamitous end or seek an opportunity for *shalom*. Choosing the latter, Yaakov prepared to meet Esav by sending him a beautiful array of gifts. Upon seeing each other for the first time since their youth, Yaakov and Esav share in a loving embrace, indicating that the gifts Yaakov sent to Esav left a positive impact. What is the *mussar haskel* here for us to learn?

Rav Meilech Biderman explains that when coming face to face with a perceived enemy, there are numerous ways to engage. One could fight or run from an adversarial threat. Alternatively, one could view such a circumstance as an opportunity to achieve spiritual growth. Rav Meilech suggests that we should use the strategy of Yaakov when engaging the multifaceted and ever elusive enemy of the Jewish people - the *yetzer harah*.

When faced with *nisyonos* that could stunt one's growth towards the peaks of *ruchniyus*, we must approach them like Yaakov Avinu; embrace them, and offer them the finest of our flock. As *Bnei Yeshiva*, we are all equipped with the flock of tools needed to combat challenges that could curtail growth, and like Yaakov, we must not hesitate to send our flock forth.

A *yetzer harah* shared by many is rushing to end Shabbos, to hasten the *havdala* from *kodesh to chol*. We must view *havdala* not simply as the end of a week, but as lead-in to six days full of opportunities to elevate ourselves in preparation for the upcoming Shabbos. By embracing this *yetzer harah*, we can emulate Yaakov Avinu, who approached both *Eretz Canaan* and Esav with a keen willingness to embrace in search of spiritual elevation. Using the six days of *chol* to prepare for the upcoming Shabbos is the ultimate gift we could provide to Shabbos.

Major Machloksim in the Parsha

Written by Avi Weschler, RIETS

How was Yaakov certain that by splitting up, one of his two camps would survive an attack?

- **Rashi:** What Yaakov really meant was that he would ensure the survival of one of the camps by fighting with Esav. With this approach, one sees that Yaakov had planned out a real battle strategy. One of the camps was purposely placed in the vanguard and was made ready to do battle so that the other one could run away and escape to live another day.
- **Ibn Ezra:** Yaakov was not sure what would happen and was merely expressing his hopes for the best outcome. Perhaps one camp would be able to run while the other fought, or Esav would be subdued by the bloodshed of just one of the camps.
- **Ramban:** Yaakov believed that God would not allow for his family to be entirely annihilated. He believed that some portion of his family would survive the encounter to continue his legacy.

Shechem may have been sentenced to death for kidnapping Dinah, but how were Shimon and Levi justified in killing all the men in Shechem?

- **Rambam:** They deserved death for not keeping one of the *sheva mitzvos Bnei Noach*. One of the seven *mitzvos* requires that a judicial system be set up to settle the disputes that occur in the land. Since the people of Shechem did not organize a trial for the crime committed by Shechem, they were all deemed worthy of the death penalty for not fulfilling their requirement. This approach lends clarity to Yaakov's rebuke of the brothers after they destroyed the city. He was not upset about the death penalty was given to the people because they were actually deserving of it. Yaakov was merely worried about the repercussions that could happen as a result of the bold action taken by the brothers.
- **Ramban:** He argues on Rambam and says that there cannot be a punishment of death for failing to uphold a positive command (the command to actively set up a court system). Instead, he believed that the crime worthy of death committed by the people of Shechem was that of idol worship. Thus, Shimon and Levi took their retribution against Shechem himself by tapping into a previous misdeed committed by the people of Shechem. This approach would explain how later on Yaakov commands his family to dispose of all their idols. It must be that they acquired them while plundering Shechem.

Foursquare

The *passuk* says, “Yaakov is alone and a man (*ish*) wrestles with him” (Bereishis 32:25). Who is this *ish* referred to in the *passuk*? Rashi says this *ish* is the *malach* of Esav. In next week’s *parsha*, when Yosef is looking for his brothers, the *passuk* says “He is lost in the field and a man (*ish*) asks him, ‘What are you looking for?’” (Bereishis 37:15). Who is this *ish*? Rashi says that it is the *malach* Gavriel. How does Rashi know that in one place the word “*ish*” is a reference to the *malach* of Gavriel but in the other *passuk*, “*ish*” refers to Esav’s *malach*? He knows this because the *malach* asks Yosef, “What do you need?” The *malach* of Esav would have never asked Yaakov such a question, as seen through Yaakov’s wrestling match in our *parsha*.

Noam Skidelsky, Syms ‘20

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When Yitzchak dies, the *passuk* says, “Esav and Yaakov, his sons, buried him” (Bereishis 35:29). Why does this *passuk* put Esav, the elder brother, before Yaakov, but by the burial of Avraham, the *passuk* places the younger Yitzchak before Yishmael (Bereishis 25:9)? The *Medrash Seichal Tov* answers that really Yaakov should have been put first (like Yitzchak), but Yaakov gave some of his *kavod* to Esav in order to “appease [Esav’s] thoughts.” Why would Yaakov want to appease Esav after everything that Esav did to him? Yaakov overcame his feelings and showed compassion to the person that he hated most. We can all try to learn from this special ability of Yaakov Avinu to treat everyone with respect, even if we may not always feel they deserve it.

Avi Rothwachs, Y.C. ‘21

Right before his battle with Esav, Yaakov Avinu expresses a certain fear to Hashem. He says, “*katonti m’kol hachasadim* - I am unworthy of all the kindness” (Bereishis 32:11). He is nervous that his merits have shrunk due to the amount of kindness he has been shown by Hashem. Considering all the hardships he has gone through as well as his status as one of the most pious beings to ever live, this is truly an incredible statement. We see from here the tremendous appreciation one must have for every little thing Hashem does for us, without taking anything for granted. Even our great forefather Yaakov Avinu didn’t feel like he deserved the little good that Hashem blessed him with in his life.

Yaakov Kaminetsky, Y.C. ‘21

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The Torah tells us that Yaakov was left alone when he fought with an “*ish*” (Bereishis 32:25). The *medrash* states that just like it says by Hashem- “*v’nisgav Hashem l’vado*,” that Hashem will be exalted alone, so too Yaakov was alone. What is this connection between the aloneness of Hashem and Yaakov? Sometimes a person has to be alone, as a *yachid*, in order to attain spiritual greatness. Rebbe Nachman (*Likutei Maharan, Likutim*) says that Avraham succeeded in serving Hashem solely by the ability to be an *echad*, acting as an independent person against the tide. In order to accomplish anything in our *avodas Hashem*, we must be a *yachid* for what we believe in and act as if we are alone.

Gershon Dovid Beer, RIETS

Bottom Line Halacha

Modim D’Rabbanan

Written by Zach Doberman, Y.C. ‘19

The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Siman 127*) *paskins* that when the *shaliach tzibur* reaches *modim* during *chazaras hashatz*, the congregation should bow and say a different form of *modim* than the *shaliach tzibur*. This is referred to as “*modim d’rabbanan*.” Nowhere in *Shulchan Aruch*, though, does the *Mechaber* say that the *shaliach tzibur* should say any part of *modim* quietly. In fact, Rav Mordechai Willig has emphasized on multiple occasions that Rav Soloveitchik and Rav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin were *makpid* that the *chazan* should not say any words to himself. It was imperative to them that the *tzibur* hear every word from the *chazzan* and they shunned the somewhat common practice of *chazzanim* starting quietly until “*hatov*” or “*ve’al kulam*.” The *Mishna Berura* there adds in *seif katan 3* that the *shaliach tzibur* doesn’t need to wait for the *tzibur* to finish *modim d’rabbanan*. As to the amount of times one should bow during *modim*, the *Shulchan Aruch* relays that there are *shittos* that hold one should bow both at the beginning and the end, and concludes that “*tov lachush l’dvarav*.” Taz (127:3) brings Ra’avad who is the source for this ruling based on his understanding of a *Gemara* in *Brachos*. Rema brings down an opinion from the *Piskei Mahareia* which says to bow for the entirety of *modim d’rabbanan*. The *Biur Halacha* quotes the Vilna Gaon who says that one should bow until “*she’ata hu Hashem elokeinu*” and then stand up straight.

Sugya from the Parsha

Im Lavan Garti- Was Yaakov Really Shomer all the Mitzvos?

Written by Menachem Freedman, Y.C. '19

The *parsha* starts with Yaakov sending messengers to his brother Esav with the message that “*Im Lavan garti v’acher ad atah*,” “I lived with Lavan and was delayed until now” (Bereishis 32:5). Rashi famously quotes the statement of Chazal that “*garti*” is a reference to Yaakov keeping all 613 *mitzvos* even in his less than ideal environment. A simple question can be asked based on this Rashi. If this is true, how could Yaakov have married two sisters (Vaiykra 18:18)?!

Rema (*Shut HaRama*, Siman 10) answers this question based on a *Gemara* in *Yoma* (Daf 28). The *Gemara* says that Avraham kept the whole Torah even though it wasn’t given yet. Rema learns from this *Gemara* that only Avraham kept the Torah, but Yitzchak and Yaakov did not. This answer is very difficult. Not only is it against our Rashi, but it’s also against a *passuk* in *Chumash*. When Hashem is trying to figure out whether to tell Avraham about the impending destruction of Sedom, the *passuk* says, “For I have singled him out, that he may instruct his children and his posterity” (Bereishis 18:19). This implies that Avraham ensured that his descendants followed him in keeping the *mitzvos*.

Ramban in *parshas Toldos* writes that the *Avos* only kept the Torah in *Eretz Yisroel*, but in *chutz l’aretz* they only kept the *sodos haTorah* and the *ta’amei hamitzvos*. This means that since Yaakov was in *chutz l’aretz* at the time, there was no problem with him marrying two sisters. Rav Asher Weiss (*Minchas Asher*, Bereishis, page 280) points out that this may be Ramban *l’shitaso*. Ramban (Vayikra 18:25) writes that the ideal place to keep the *mitzvos* is *Eretz Yisroel*, and therefore it makes sense that the *Avos* would only keep the Torah there.

The Maharsha (*Chiddushei Aggados*, *Yoma*, *Daf 28*) suggests that Yaakov converted them, and since we say that “*ger k’katan she’nolad dami*,” Rachel and Leah were no longer related, and Yaakov was not violating the prohibition of marrying two sisters. This answer would seem to be dependent on what status the *Avos* had. If one assumes that they had the status of *Yisroelim* then *geirus* makes sense, but if one holds that they had the status of *Bnei Noach* then *geirus* wouldn’t even get off the ground. Rav Asher Weiss (*ibid.*, page 281) argues, based on the *Gemara* in *Yevamos* (*daf 47a-b*) which says that one of the things necessary for conversion is *kabbalas hamitzvos*, that the whole argument is moot because there could not have been *kabbalas hamitzvos* since the Torah wasn’t given yet. Therefore, even if one assumes that the *Avos* had a *din Yisroel*, conversion still wouldn’t work.

Rav Chaim Volozhiner, in *Nefesh HaChaim* (*Shaar 1*, *Perek 21*), gives a fascinating answer. He says that the *kiyum hamitzvos* of the *Avos* was radically different from the way we are *mikayem mitzvos* post-*matan Torah*. Their *kiyum hamitzvos* was being *misaken* the world even if they were not actively doing any *ma’aseh mitzvos*. Rav Asher Weiss (*ibid.*, page 282) points out that this does not mean that they never did any *ma’aseh mitzvos*, but merely that when something came up that required them to violate the Torah they did. Since Yaakov decided that there was a real need for him to marry both Rachel and Leah, he had the ability to marry both.

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