

Nothing Is Everything

Rashi explains that whilst Yaacov was dwelling in Lavan's house, Yaacov kept all 613 mitzvot. However, certain mitzvot aren't allowed to be observed in unclean places and how much more so places of spiritual uncleanness such as that of an idol worshipper – Lavan!? Furthermore, as there are certain Mitzvot that can only be observed within the Holy Land of Israel and as Lavan lived in Charan — outside of the land of Israel, then how could he have observed all of the commandments?

The answer can be seen by a beautiful story of the Baal Shem Tov.

While traveling with a small group of his chassidim, the Baal Shem Tov turned to them and said: "The Master of the Universe — the Creator of all things, is beyond the comprehension of the wisest of man. Yet The Almighty has given us His 'wisdom' in the form of the Holy Torah. If one fulfills the Mitzvot (commandments) he comes to 'know' G-d in the most sublime way - with his physical being. But G-dliness fills this world so completely, that even by doing nothing one can create a dwelling place in this world for The Almighty."

The Baal Shem Tov's chassidim (pupils) drank in their Rebbe's words, but could not fathom their meaning. They sat for a while in pondered silence as the wagon made its way along the muddy road though a small town.

The Baal Shem Tov unexpectedly asked his wagon driver Alexei to stop the wagon in front

of a certain house. The Baal Shem Tov climbed down from the wagon and entered the house without explanation. The Chassidim were quite surprised, as the occupant of this house was well known as a heathen who kept an icon in his house. When the Baal Shem emerged from the house, he was in a joyful mood. The Chassidim looked at each other in confusion, and seeing their faces the Baal Shem Tov only smiled. The Baal Shem Tov, after instructing Alexei to continue on their journey, turned to his Chassidim and said: "I have good reason to be so joyful. In the last hour I observed the entire Torah!"

The Chassidim sat with blank faces not understanding what their Rebbe was telling them. "The Torah forbids one to meditate on any holy words of Torah in an unclean place. A place of idolatry is considered even worse, as it is spiritually unclean — not simply physically unclean. With the help of The Almighty, I was able to control my thoughts from contemplating even a single thought of Torah, and that may be counted as having observed the entire Torah."

When Yaacov lived with Lavan — in a house that was full of icons and idols - he was forced to guard his thoughts from the teachings of the Torah. Therefore, we can understand Rashi's explanation that Yaacov observed all of the 613 Commandments of the Torah, and thus truly "lived" by not thinking thoughts of Torah while he was in the house full of icons and idols.

By Daniel Lefkowitz
Story adapted from 'Stories Of The Baal Shem Tov'

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מס' רצ"ח

וישלח מלאכים לפניו אל עשו אחיב... כה אמר עבדך יעקב עם לבן גרתי... (ל"ב:ד-ה)
And Yaakov sent angels before him to Esav his brother...I have sojourned with Lavan...(32:4-5)

Rashi says on this pasuk that Yaakov sent 'M'lochim mamash,' genuine angels. The Noam Elimelech asks on this; why did he have to send angels and not just normal human messengers? Why did he also refer to Eisav as 'Adonai,' my master when he is not? Firstly, the Noam Alimelech answers, Yaakov was a tzaddik, and the way of a tzaddik is to do this. What does he mean by 'this'? A tzaddik will, whenever he can, try to ensure that his messenger is one who is seen as prestigious in the eyes of shamayim, in the eyes of heaven.

This seems very honourable but what does Eisav care for importance in heaven? Hardly something that he himself treasures? Yaakov wanted these angels to bring a message to those who do value importance in the eyes of heaven, and who more so than angels? He was sending with them a prayer to Hashem. By choice, Yaakov sent before him the two angels Michael and Gavriel who are always associated with good things for the house of Israel. In addition to this they were asked to go to Eisav and deliver a message to him as well as giving testimony before Hashem Yisborach.

But to what were these angels to bear witness? What was this case that Yaakov so needed to be brought before Hashem? The pasuk says, 'Coh te'amrun la'adonai' (and so you shall say to my master) and this master is the master of all of

heaven, Hashem Himself! This is in reference to him having a good recommendation so that it will be good for him (concerning his confrontation with Eisav). Yaakov then says 'and Eisav' which is referring to them continuing along the simple meaning and going to Eisav with the same message for him.

When Yaakov also says 'im Lavan garti' he is saying that he sojourned with him and did not become considered principal in his time there, rather remaining a stranger. After this he also says 'la'adonai' which tells Eisav that whilst in his uncles house Yaakov still kept all 613 commandments without learning from the deeds that he saw. This is then followed by telling Eisav that he has an ox and a donkey. The Noam Alimelech brings a Medrash to say that by these animals he meant **the** ox, a reference to Yosef whose symbol was the ox (and by Yosef he also meant Moshiach ben Yosef), and he also meant **the** donkey which is a reference to Moshiach ben Dovid.

In this message that Yaakov sent to Hashem and his brother Eisav, he asks for a good name in the eyes of heaven (which Eisav is warned that he now has), and also tells them that he has been true to his roots as a G-d fearing individual even in the house of Lavan and he reminds them of the future when his descendants have been guaranteed the coming of Moshiach.

By Tony Cohen
Adapted from the Mayneh Shel Torah

Times for Shabbos - זמני שבת

In: 3:36

Out: 4:46

The Concubine

And Timna was the concubine of Elifaz 36:12

Of what possible use is this piece of information to us? It tells us of the origin of Amalek, whose bitter hatred of the Jewish people and subsequent sneaky attack on the liberated Jews, after the exodus from Egypt, resulted in the statement, "The name of Hashem is not complete and the throne of G-d is not perfect as long as Amalek survives" (Rashi, Shemos 17:16).

The Gemarah explains that this hate originated from Timna, Amalek's mother who was a member of a royal family. She desired to convert to Judaism; however Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov refused to

convert her. She then said, "I prefer to be a maid (i.e. concubine) to this nation rather than a princess elsewhere," and so she married Yitzchak's grandson, Eliphaz the son of Esav. She then bore Amalek the archenemy of the Jewish People, "because Timna had been rudely rejected" (*Sanhedrin 99b*)

We revere the patriarchs and we dare not be critical of them in anyway. However the fact is that the Talmudic sages' veneration of the patriarchs far exceeded ours, yet they still made the point of saying that the patriarchs should not have rudely rejected Timna. R'Chaim Shmulevitz points out that Avraham was tireless in bringing pagans to the realisation of the true God. This legacy was

transmitted to Yitzchak and Yaakov. If the patriarchs refused to accept Timna when she asked to be converted, it was only after much consideration which led them to conclude that she was not suitable for conversion. They were definitely correct; however, the Gemarah is informing us that they should not have done it in a manner that would cause her to feel rejected. Timna's bitterness at being rejected was infused into Amalek, from whose hatred Jews have been persecuted throughout history. As we know our archenemy Haman was himself, a descendant of Agog, king of Amalek.

On a practical level, there are many times when we must turn down a request, but at all times we must maintain sensitivity to a person's feelings. This is where Hillel's principle must be applied: "Do not do to another person what you would not wish done to you". We have all experienced refusals. We are constantly disappointed when our requests are denied, but we are not always hurt. We may not be able to avoid disappointing others, but we can certainly avoid offending them.

*By Asher Weisz
Adapted from "Twerski on Chumash"*

Laws of 'Cooking on Shabbat'

There are distinctions to be made with regard to the food in question being;

- A) a liquid and not fully cooked,*
- B) a warm and fully cooked liquid,*
- C) a cold and fully cooked liquid,*
- D) a solid and not fully cooked and*
- E) a fully cooked solid either warm or cold.*

*Adapted from Sefer 'Shemirath Shabbath'
By Rav Y.Y. Neuwirth*

Ya'akov and the Angel

ויותר יעקב לבדו ויאבק איש עמו עד עלות השחר (ל"ב:ב"ה)

And Ya'akov was left alone and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn (32:25)

In this week's parasha we are told of the confrontation between Ya'akov and a "man" who wrestle with each other until daybreak when the angel has to leave in order to sing praises to Hashem. The Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim famously explains that whenever there is a meeting between an angel and a human it must be taking place in a prophetic vision.

According to the Rambam, why is it that when Ya'akov "wakes up" from this experience that he has a limp? If the fight never physically took place, then how can it be that Ya'akov has picked up a physical injury? One may not argue that this injury was only a spiritual one because if so why would we learn the mitzvah of not eating the Gid Ha'nashe - the sinew of the thigh - from here. To say this is the source for the mitzvah there must be some kind of physical injury. The Ralbag answers that our body is affected by our mental feelings. If one is (chas veshalom) mentally unstable then this can have a profound effect on that persons physical wellbeing. Therefore when Ya'akov was hit by the angel on his thigh even though it was in a prophetic vision it still physically affected him.

The Abarbanel offers an alternative explanation. He says that even according to the Rambam any prophet vision has two parts, the mental and abstract part and the tangible and physical part. Ya'akov's thigh was hit in both parts of the prophecy, so we can understand why he was

limping.

The commentators differ as to how literal we are meant to understand the parasha. On the one hand you have the Rambam who says it is a prophetic vision. On the other hand the Rashbam, in his usual style, takes the whole parasha as literally as the text allows.

The Rashbam explains that the angel came to stop Ya'akov from fleeing. Ya'akov was undergoing a lapse in his level of bitachon and therefore wished to run away rather than confront his brother. When the angel saw that he could not hold Ya'akov back from running away all day because he had a previous appointment, singing Hashem's praises, he struck Ya'akov's thigh crippling him, thus preventing him from fleeing. He says that Ya'akov's injury is to be seen as a punishment for not having bitachon that Hashem will save him no matter what.

The Sefer Ha'chinuch says the reason for the prohibition of eating the Gid Ha'nashe is to tell us to always have hope and emunah in Hashem. The Shem Mi'shmel learns from this "maaseh avos siman lebanim"- "the actions of the fathers is a sign for the descendants"- just as Ya'akov's injury of lack of bitachon was healed by the sun, so too our lack of bitachon will be cured when Mashiach comes and we will see the ultimate light. Bim'hera Veyameinu Amen.

By Aharon Goldwater

Riddle of the Week

What tragedy in history that is mentioned in the Torah caused the annihilation of one quarter of mankind?

(Answer in next week's Living Torah)

Answer to Last Week's Riddle

What is forbidden on Rosh Hashana but permissible on Pesach?

*Answer: Nuts are allowed and are the main diet on Pesach, however, on Rosh Hashana they are forbidden due to their bitter taste
Congratulations to all those who answered correctly!!!*

Prizes have been sponsored by various local Jewish shops to be raffled off monthly to those who successfully answer the weekly general knowledge question!!! Everyone is welcome to submit an answer by emailing us at LIVINGTORAH@HASMONEAN.CO.UK