

RABBI GOLDBERG'S *Parsha Perspectives* **FOR TODAY**

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Vayishlach for your Shabbos Table
Delivered on Tuesday, 12 Kislev, 5783/December 6, 2022

Sponsored by Eli & Sara Malka Neger as a zechus for a refuah shleima for Chaya Esther Tehila bas Arielle Tsiporah and lilui nishmas Yitzchok Moshe ben Aaron Yaakov Yehoshua.

DVAR TORAH FOR THE FRIDAY NIGHT MEAL

Remembering the Beat of Our Own Heart

Yaakov begins his conciliatory message to Eisav by saying, *עם לבן גרתי* – that he had been living with their uncle, Lavan, over the last twenty years (32:5). Rashi famously comments that the word *גרתי* in *gematria* equals 613, and thus Yaakov was indicating to Eisav that *“I have lived with Lavan, but I observed the 613 commands, and I did not learn from his evil ways.”* Yaakov professed that although he spent many years with his evil, corrupt uncle, he remained loyal to the Torah and was not influenced by Lavan’s sinful conduct.

What was the source of Yaakov’s extraordinary resilience? How did he succeed in maintaining his religious standards while living with such an evil person for so many years?

Rav Shlomo Wolbe (*Shiurei Chumash*) finds the answer to this question in the word *גרתי*, which is related to the word *גר* – “foreigner.” Avraham Avinu told the *benei Cheis* (Bereishis 23:4) – *גר ותושב אנוכי עמכם* – that he was a foreign resident, physically residing among them without actually being one of them. Similarly, throughout the twenty years that Yaakov spent with Lavan, he was a *גר*, a foreign resident who was just passing through. He didn’t “unpack,” get settled, or officially change his address, so-to-speak. This is how he succeeded in maintaining his commitment to Torah. He always saw himself as a foreigner, as somebody different, who did not fully belong where he was. This is the key to resisting the natural process of assimilation. Although we must feel grateful for the freedoms we are given here in the Diaspora, at the same time, we must live with a sense of *גרתי*, that we are foreigners, that this is not where we belong, that we are different, and that we need to be different. This is how we can say *גרתִי* while living among other peoples.

The Torah commands in Sefer Vayikra (18:3), *ובחוקותיהם, לא תלכו* – that we may not follow gentile customs. Even if a custom is not inherently forbidden, nevertheless, if it is associated with foreign nations, we must refrain from it. The word *חוק* used in this *pasuk* is related to the word *חיק* – “chest.” If we accustom ourselves to the “heartbeat” of other nations, we forget about our own heartbeat. If we feel too comfortable with the *חיק* of the people around us, we are prone to abandoning our own *חיק*, neglecting our own heartbeat, our own cherished values and customs. We must therefore live with a sense of *גרתי*, recognizing that we are different, that we are just *גרים*, that we do not fully fit in, and this is the key to preserving our commitment to the *מצוות* *גרתִי*.

It’s Not “All or Nothing”

In preparing for his dreaded encounter with Eisav, and fearing the worst, Yaakov divided his family and his property, figuring that *אם יבוא עשוי אל המחנה האחת והכהו, והיה המחנה הנשאר לפליטה* – if Eisav attacked one camp, the other would survive (32:9).

Yaakov’s strategy is an example of what is known today as diversification, spreading one’s investments in order to mitigate losses and minimize risk. If one places all his assets in one investment, he is at risk of losing everything. The prudent policy is to diversify, so that if one investment is lost, the others will remain intact. Similarly, Yaakov divided his family and property in order to avoid a total loss.

Rav Nosson of Breslav, in *Likutei Halachos* (Rosh Hashanah, 6:52), applies this strategy, which Yaakov employed when confronting a physical enemy, to our daily confrontations with our spiritual enemies. In life, we are constantly fighting and struggling against the *yetzer ha’ra* in all its many different forms. And we need to acknowledge that we are not always going to win. Sometimes, the *yetzer ha’ra* will overpower us, and we will fail. Rav Nosson warns us never to think that just because we were defeated in one area, we should not

bother trying in other areas. As in the case of Yaakov Avinu, אם יבוא עשיו אל המחנה האחת והכרו – if one “camp” is defeated, nevertheless, והיה המחנה הנשאר לפליטה – we can still salvage the other “camp.” If a person stumbled at night and saw something on his screen that he shouldn’t be seeing, he should still make an effort to get up on time the next morning for shul. And if a person did not get out of bed in time for *shacharis*, he should still try hard to make it to *mincha* and *ma’ariv*. And he should not let himself fly off the handle when talking to his children. Failing in one area does not mean that we should not try to succeed in others.

It is occasionally going to happen that יבוא עשיו אל המחנה – our yetzer ha’ra will get the best of us, and we will fail. We are not always going to triumph over our evil inclinations, our faults and our weaknesses. But Torah life is not an “all or nothing” enterprise. When we fail, we must try to ensure that והיה המחנה הנשאר לפליטה – we don’t collapse completely, that we continue maintaining everything else. We must not give up entirely just because of our struggles and failings in one area. Our *mitzvos* are always precious, even if one “camp” was defeated.

DVAR TORAH FOR THE SHABBOS DAY MEAL

The Tefila Mindset

Rashi (32:9) famously observes that Yaakov prepared in three ways for his encounter with Eisav – דורון (sending a gift), תפילה (prayer), and מלחמה (mobilizing for war).

Surprisingly, Yaakov first prepares for war before turning to God in prayer. We might have assumed that his initial reaction to the news that Eisav was approaching with an army would be to *daven*. Why did he first prepare for war by dividing his family and belongings (32:8), and only then beseech Hashem to help him (32:10-13)?

Rav Yosef Sorotzkin, in *Meged Yosef*, explains that *davening* requires a mindset of truly depending on Hashem. The Torah relates in Parshas Bereishis (2:5) that even after God created vegetation, He did not make rain fall until the creation of Adam. Rashi explains that rain falls only when there are human beings who have a need for rainfall, and pray for it. God did not bring rain before Adam’s creation, because rain comes in response to the prayers of those who desperately need it and rely on it. Prayer, Rav Sorotzkin writes, requires a sense of dire necessity. We are to *daven* with humble subservience, and with a feeling of dependence on Hashem’s grace.

And for this reason, Rav Sorotzkin explains, Yaakov first prepared for the eventuality of violent conflict before *davening*. His preparations for war put him into the *tefila* mindset, making him realize the extent of the danger he faced, and his desperate need for Hashem’s assistance and protection. This is how *tefilla* is to be

recited, and so Yaakov made a point of putting himself into this mindset before turning to God in prayer.

DVAR TORAH FOR SHALOSH SEUDOS

A Jew Never Leaves His Fellow Jew Alone

At one point during Yaakov’s journey back to Eretz Yisrael, ויותר יעקב לבדו – he found himself alone, and he then came under attack by an angel (32:25). Yaakov and the angel wrestled through the night, until Yaakov prevailed. But while the angel was unable to subdue Yaakov, it did succeed in inflicting an injury, dislodging Yaakov’s hip. To commemorate this event, the Torah tells (32:33), we refrain from the גיד הנשה – the part of the animal corresponding to the part of the body where Yaakov suffered his injury.

We must ask, why is this the way we commemorate Yaakov’s triumph over the angel – by refraining from a certain portion of meat? We celebrate our ancestors’ victories through festivity, by eating. (As the old joke goes, “They tried to kill us, we won, let’s eat!”) Why is this particular triumph – Yaakov’s victory over the angel that wrestled with him – commemorated in the opposite fashion, by abstaining from a specific food?

The Chizkuni explains that the prohibition of גיד הנשה does not celebrate Yaakov’s triumph over the angel, but rather punishes us for the neglect that resulted in our patriarch’s painful injury.

Yaakov came under attack, as mentioned, when he was left alone – ויותר יעקב לבדו. After Yaakov brought his family and possessions across the river, he remembered that he had forgotten some small items across the river, and he went back to get them. The Chizkuni writes that his children were at fault for allowing Yaakov to go back across the river alone at night. At least one or several of them should have joined him so he would not alone and vulnerable. Had they been more responsible, Yaakov would not have been attacked, and he would not have been injured in his גיד הנשה. This is why we are commanded not to eat this part of an animal – as a punishment, of sorts, for leaving Yaakov alone, and causing him to suffer harm.

No Jew should ever be left לבדו at any given time. We are all responsible for one another, and our responsibility includes ensuring that no fellow Jew is ever alone and vulnerable. We must never be too tired or too busy to join a fellow Jew in need; no matter the circumstances, no Jew should ever be alone.