

## The Path To Follow Vayeishev

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### Guard Your Tongue!

#### Listening to Disparaging Remarks

In certain cases, it is actually a mitzvah to listen to disparaging remarks if we believe that by doing so we can help clear up a misunderstanding.

Ruth complained to Esther about her mother-in-law. Ruth had given birth a month earlier, and Passover was soon approaching. With her hands full, Ruth was unable to clean her house and fully prepare for the upcoming holiday, and in her mind her mother-in-law should have come over to help out during that difficult time. Esther understood that it was possible to make Ruth realize the mistake in her thinking. After listening to Ruth's embittered complaint, Esther said to her: "Didn't you tell me that your mother-in-law was recently ill? I'm sure she simply had too much work to do at home and didn't have the energy to come over and help." Ruth realized that what Esther was saying made sense, and she understood that she had no reason to complain.

It is written, "Jacob dwelled in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan" (Genesis 37:1). Rashi cites the Sages in stating that the word vayeishev ("and he dwelled") indicates that Jacob wanted to dwell in tranquility, yet the troubles of Joseph sprang upon him (see Bereshith Rabba 84:3). Rashi states: "[When] the righteous seek to dwell in tranquility, G-d says: 'Is what is prepared for the righteous in the World to Come not enough for them, such that they seek to dwell in tranquility in this world?'"

The commentators are surprised at this, for was Jacob not entitled to a little peace and quiet in life, especially after all the years of suffering with Laban, Esau, and Dinah? That goes without even mentioning the war brought about by the murder of the inhabitants of Shechem (Genesis 34:30). Here was a chance for Jacob to finally have some peace and quiet, a time to devote himself to Torah study and serving Hashem after seeing that all his children turned out to be tzaddikim. We must also understand why his peace was disrupted precisely by the events surrounding Joseph, rather than in another way.

There is another problem here. As a Rav once told me, citing some great Torah figures, the land of Canaan carries a name that designates submission (keniah and hachna'ah). A person who lives in the land of Israel, the palace of the King and the place where Hashem's glory appears, must be especially filled with humility and reverence before the glory and grandeur of Hashem. The word megurei ("sojournings") also suggests fear, as in "Vayagar was Moab" (Numbers 22:3), which Rashi explains as meaning fear. It follows that Jacob served Hashem in humility and fear, and he also cared for his father with self-effacement and submission, even though he himself was already at a high level at that time. This is difficult to understand, for how can these two things – peace on one hand and fear on the other – go together, since they seem contradictory? If we say that the peace in question consisted of serving Hashem in fear and submission, then why would Jacob actually be refused this?

We may say that the tzaddik bears a resemblance to the Holy One, blessed be He, in miniature. This is similar to the idea expressed by, "The fear for your teacher [should be as] the fear of Heaven" (Perkei Avoth 4:12). Hence everyone should learn from him with regards to the service of Hashem, character traits, prayer, and Torah study. As a result, the slightest deviation in the conduct of a tzaddik is liable to provoke disaster. We see that the Holy One, blessed be He, punished the tzaddikim on several occasions because they caused a profanation of His Name, even if it occurred in the minutest way possible.

In general, however, the tzaddikim teach us that the service of Hashem should be accompanied with arduous work and effort, as it is written: "Man is born to toil" (Job 5:7). Here the Sages explain that man "was created to labor in the Torah" (Sanhedrin 99b). Nevertheless, there are some who learn from the tzaddikim that we must indeed work, yet they do not use this understanding to actually toil in the study of Torah. Instead, they are content on applying themselves to mitzvot that have a connection to this world. That is not the right path to follow. From the tzaddik we must learn to put our efforts only into the

service of Hashem, Torah study, and prayer. It is in this way that we must serve Hashem – with laborious effort – since in peace and tranquilly we are liable to relax and stumble. This is not the case when we actually exert ourselves, for this maintains our alertness and pushes us to constantly yearn for greater progress and to elevate ourselves in Torah and the fear of Heaven, including the performance of mitzvot that deal with our world. Consequently, let us say that Jacob certainly wanted to serve Hashem through laborious effort. The Sages said (Tanhuma Vayeishev 1) that the word vayeishev denotes pain, as it is written: "Vayeishev Israel [And Israel dwelled] in Shittim, and the people began to commit harlotry" (Numbers 25:1). Furthermore, the word megurei denotes the fact of being a sojourner, for Jacob studied the Torah in exile, in accordance with the Sages' adage: "Exile yourself to a place of Torah" (Perkei Avoth 4:14). There is no greater pain than the pain of exile, for exile atones in the same way as death (see Sanhedrin 37b and Rashi starting from the word shelosha).

From all this we learn that Jacob certainly served Hashem in pain (vayeishev), fear, and in exile (megurei), as well as with humility (Canaan). However he did this with a great deal of discretion, to the point that none of this could be seen on the outside. On the contrary, he gave people the impression that he was living in peace, acting in this way so as not to become proud and begin loving honor. Jacob also did this in order not to damage his father's honor, for perhaps people would respect Jacob more than his father. The result, however, was that people did not learn how to act and serve Hashem from Jacob. Hence the Holy One, blessed be He, was not satisfied with Jacob's conduct. In fact people did not pay attention to him and thought that this was how a person should serve G-d, namely in peace and tranquilly. Now this is incorrect, and Jacob should have demonstrated the importance of effort on the outside, not to abstain out of fear that people might overly respect him.

This is why the tragedy involving Joseph struck Jacob. He did not teach everyone – for his generation and the generations to come – that there can be no peace for the tzaddikim in this world. He did not teach them that peace resides in the self-effacement and humility that tzaddikim demonstrate in serving Hashem. There is no other peace than this for the tzaddik, and he must serve Hashem openly in order for everyone to learn this from him. If he acts with discretion, he should not do so because of some potential risk to the honor of another – such as Jacob's fear of infringing upon the honor of his father Isaac – but because of the importance of discretion itself. Now since Jacob did not teach this to everyone, he was assailed with the tragedy of Joseph, making it impossible for him to continue living in peace, as he had wanted.

From here we learn that the primary component of Torah study is laborious effort, something that the tzaddik must teach to the entire generation. In turn the generation must learn this from the tzaddik. They must not believe that the Torah can be acquired in peace and tranquilly. This is why the Torah revealed in our parsha that even when something appears peaceful on the outside, lofty things are hidden on the inside, namely a life of pain and submission. This is vayeishev – denoting pain – which teaches that our effort is the primary component in the path of Torah, and that the tzaddik must teach this to everyone. If the generation of the tzaddik manages to learn this from him, it will be good for it in this world and the World to Come.

# MUSSAR FROM THE PARSHA

## The Wrong Number was the Right One

*It is written, "Their camels were bearing spices, balm, and lotus" (Genesis 37:25).*

Rashi writes, "Why did Scripture publicize their burden? To let you know the reward of the righteous, for it is customary for Arabs to carry only naphtha and tar, whose odor is foul, but for this one [Joseph] it was arranged [that they should be carrying] spices, so that he should not be afflicted by a foul odor."

Rashi's statement seems surprising, for what pleasure could Joseph have derived from smelling spices rather than being afflicted by a foul odor? After all, he was being sold as a slave! Was this supposed to be a pleasurable outing for him, such that we could say that not even a foul odor bothered him?

Furthermore, Scripture testifies that the Shechinah rested on Joseph in every situation he was in. Thus when he arrived in Egypt, it is stated that "the L-RD was with Joseph" (Genesis 39:2). When he was in his master's home, and even in prison, the Torah states that Hashem was with him, and we know that the Shechinah only rests on someone in joy. Here we may ask how Joseph managed to remain joyful after all the misfortunes he experienced.

To understand this, let us recount a true story drawn from the book *Alenu Leshabeach*. A Jew was suffering from a certain ailment that was extremely dangerous whenever it surfaced, a situation that required immediate medical attention. He once felt an attack occurring on a Friday night, and in such a situation it was obviously a duty and a mitzvah to call a doctor, since his life was in danger. He therefore picked up the phone and called his doctor, who promised to come right away.

Before hanging up, however, the doctor asked the man, "How did you get this phone number? I'm not at home right now, and in fact I'm at another patient's home!"

It turned out that the man had dialed the wrong number, but Heaven made him call the number where his doctor could be found at that time, namely the home of his other patient. If the man had called the correct number, his doctor would not have been there to answer! Perhaps we have all experienced "coincidences" like this, but under much less serious conditions. The Holy One, blessed be He, could have arranged things such that the man would not have had an attack to begin with. However He wanted to demonstrate how precious he was to Him, to the point of performing a miracle to save his life.

This can help us to understand the righteous Joseph's state of mind. He realized that even in such a terrible situation, when he was being brought to Egypt to be sold as a slave, Hashem was with him, not even allowing him to be afflicted by a foul odor. It may have been a minor thing, but it was enough for Joseph to understand just how precious he was in Hashem's eyes. So too when he was living in his master's house in Egypt, and he perceived that Hashem was with him even in prison. Everything that Joseph did, Hashem made him successful, and he found favor in the eyes of all who saw him. We may consider these things as being trivial in comparison to the gravity of his situation, however they were enough for Joseph to feel Hashem's love for him, and there is no greater joy than that. Concentrating on a point of light in the middle of the darkness, that's the secret!

## A Pearl From the Rav

*It is written, "Jacob dwelled in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan. These are the generations of Jacob: Joseph..." (Genesis 37:1-2).*

The Sages state, "Jacob wished to live at ease in this world, whereupon he was attacked by Joseph's Satan" (Bereshith Rabba 84:3).

In his book *Pehad David*, Rabbi David Pinto Shlita asks: Why is vayeishev used here instead of another word, such as vayagor?

The Rav explains that vayeishev signifies sitting down to study Torah (as in a yeshiva). Jacob wanted to establish a permanent yeshiva in the land of Canaan in order for the study of Torah to annul the decree that the descendants of Abraham would go into exile, for Torah study can actually annul evil decrees. However the tragedy surrounding Joseph struck him at that point in time, for the Holy One, blessed be He, wanted to show Jacob that Torah study does not come easy or without thought. Instead, even during the suffering of exile we must study Torah without respite, even in times of tragedy. Actually, instead of staying in Egypt for 400 years, they only remained there for 210 years, all because Jacob did not live in peace. This occurred because he continued to study Torah despite the hardships that he experienced. That is what enabled him to eliminate 190 years from the decree, thus annulling a portion of it.

## I Don't Have the Time

*It is written, "A man found him" (Genesis 37:15).*

Rashi states, "This is Gabriel."

It is said that a certain Rebbe once arrived in a town that he was unfamiliar with. He wanted to find a synagogue, but didn't know where to go. He suddenly noticed a Jew walking by quickly, and he asked him where the synagogue was. Before even listening to the Rebbe's entire question, however, the man exclaimed: "I don't have time. I have to get to synagogue."

That being said, the Rebbe realized that he merely had to follow the man in order to get to synagogue. When they both arrived, the Rebbe spoke to the man: "I have a question for you. The Torah recounts that a 'man' fought with Jacob, and our Sages said that this 'man' was the Satan. With Joseph as well, it is said that a 'man' found him and asked him what he was looking for, and our Sages said that this 'man' was the angel Gabriel. My question to you is: In both cases the Torah describes a 'man,' yet in one case he is the Satan and in the other he is the angel Gabriel. How do we know who is who?"

"The answer," continued the Rebbe, "is that the difference is alluded to in the verse. When someone arrives in town and asks for directions to a certain place that he is unfamiliar with, and a local man meets him and asks him how he is, what he is looking for, and how he can help him – that's the angel Gabriel. However there is another kind of man, one who doesn't even answer when a stranger asks him where the synagogue is, but instead exclaims: 'I don't have the time. I have to get to synagogue.' That man is the Satan, for when Jacob was fighting against him and asked for a blessing, he answered, 'Let me go, for dawn has broken.' Our Sages said that his time for singing before Hashem had arrived. In other words, he didn't have the time to give Jacob a blessing. On the other hand, concerning the man who encountered Joseph it is written, 'A man found him...and the man asked him, saying: "What do you seek?"' Not only did he answer Joseph, but he also asked him what he was looking for. This was proof that he was the angel Gabriel!"

## Fooling the Birds

*It is written, "In three days, Pharaoh will lift your head from you and hang you on a tree. Birds will eat your flesh from you" (Genesis 40:19).*

Why did Joseph interpret the baker's dream to mean that he would be hanged?

We can better understand this with a parable: There was a painting exhibition taking place in which a famous painter's work was being showcased. He had painted an image of a man who was holding a basket of fruit in his hand. The painting was so lifelike that the birds thought they were real fruit. Thus they began landing on the canvas in an attempt to eat them! This painting garnered great admiration from the crowd, and a large prize was offered to anyone who could find a flaw in it. A crafty fellow arrived and said, "It's true that the fruit were painted extremely well and appear real. However the man holding the basket in his hand didn't come out so well. If he was as real-looking as the fruit, the birds would have been too afraid to approach and take the fruit from his hand."

# REASONS FOR THE MITZVOT

## Being Grateful

*It is written, “Go now, look into the welfare of your brothers and the welfare of the flock” (Genesis 37:14).*

The Midrash states that the reason Jacob inquired about the flock was because he benefited from it, from its milk and fleece (Tanhuma Yashan Vayeishev 13).

The great Torah figures of Israel in every generation have recognized the obligation to be grateful towards every creature, not only to people who have helped us, but also to animals and even plants.

It is said that when Rabbi Yisrael Gustman Zatzal (one of the judges on the Beit Din of the gaon Rabbi Chaim Ozer Zatzal) arrived in the land of Israel, he would personally water his garden every day. He said that he did this in gratitude to the plants that had saved him from starvation. Prior to the Second World War, Rabbi Chaim Ozer had brought him into the forest and pointed out to him the edible and poisonous plants. He didn't understand why Rabbi Chaim was showing him this, until some time later, during the Holocaust, when he was forced to hide in the forest with nothing to eat. It was then that he remembered what Rabbi Chaim had said, and he began living off the edible plants in order to survive. Since that time, he had demonstrated his gratitude by watering such plants himself.

Moses did not strike the river to begin the plague of blood because he had been saved by the river as an infant. Furthermore, the Torah commands us, “You shall not despise an Egyptian, for you were a stranger in his land” (Deuteronomy 23:8), even if their only intention for having us in their land was for personal gain. One who shows gratitude should do so not only with others, but also with his greatest benefactor – his Father in Heaven – Who sends him an abundance of blessings and life, sustaining him at all times.

Let us add that individual gratitude greatly benefits the Jewish people, an example of which involves Rabbi Shlomo Adani, the author of Melech Shlomo on the Mishnah. Everyone benefits from this work of his, which itself stemmed from an act of gratitude. What happened was the following:

In the year 5231, when Rabbi Shlomo was only a child, his father Rabbi Yehoshua took him and moved to Sefat. There his father died, and Rabbi Shlomo remained alone and abandoned. He then went to Jerusalem to study with Rabbi Chaim Vital, but in his poverty and shyness he was forced to sleep outside. Eventually a kind person found him and brought him to live in his home. In order not to suffer from the “bread of shame,” he succeeded in writing a marvelous commentary on the Mishnah in order to help his host understand it. This book, Melech Shlomo, has been with us ever since!

The same applies to the baker's dream. When he told Joseph that the birds were eating from the basket that was on his head, Joseph concluded that the man was dead, for the birds would have been afraid of a living person and avoided eating off his head. This inevitably meant that the baker was going to die, which is why Joseph interpreted his dream in that way.

– Maharam Shapira

## Our Rabbis Have Taught

*It is written, “What is Chanukah? Our Rabbis have taught...” (Shabbat 21b).*

What exactly does this mean? It means that we inherited the ability to stand up against our enemies – to the point of inheriting the festival of Chanukah – from “our Rabbis have taught,” from the study of Torah and the observance of mitzvot.

– The Gra Shapira of Lublin

## The Snare Broke

*When he was a child, Rabbi Yonatan Eibeshutz Zatzal was once asked how many candles we normally light on Chanukah.*

In his wisdom the child replied, “The snare broke and we escaped” (Psalms 124:7). He meant that the word pach (“snare”) has a numerical value of 88. However since “the snare broke,” it was equal to 44, meaning 44 candles on Chanukah. We light 36 plus 8 shamash (servant) candles on Chanukah, for a total of 44.

## Overview of the Parsha

The era of Jacob's children begins in our parsha, which recounts events concerning Joseph and Judah. The unfolding of Jacob's story starts with his son Joseph and his dreams, which he recounted to his brothers and aroused their jealousy to the point that they sold him into slavery. Before continuing with the subject of Joseph (Rachel's son), now separated from his family, Scripture moves on to the story of Judah (Leah's son), the leader of the brothers, who was humbled by events surrounding Tamar. The parsha then returns to the subject of Joseph, against whom Potiphar's wife conspired. The result was that Joseph was thrown into prison, where he interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh's servants.

## A TRUE STORY

### The Coat That Kept Him Warm for Years

*It is written, “It was on such a day that he came to the house to do his work” (Genesis 39:11).*

Rashi says that during this ordeal, the image of Joseph's father appeared to him.

The Rav of Ponevezh Zatzal said that he once met a Jewish professor in the United States who had assimilated. When the Rav began speaking with the professor, he admitted that he had been ready to convert on several occasions, but that each time the coat of the Chafetz Chaim prevented him from doing so!

When the professor was a young man, he arrived in Radin to study in the Chafetz Chaim's yeshiva. Like everybody else, he went to visit the tzaddik, but fell asleep while waiting to see him. In the middle of the night he felt someone carrying him in his arms and placing him on a bed. That person also placed his coat over him to cover him for the night. As he looked through his half-open eyelids, he realized that it was the Chafetz Chaim himself who had carried him, and he was now studying without his coat, whispering so as not to wake him. In recounting this story, the professor said that the sight of this had stayed with him through the years. Each time he had an impulse to convert, this vivid image stood before his eyes, a sight that did not allow him to part ways with an amazing people, among whom were individuals like the Chafetz Chaim!

# YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

## Rabbi Chizkiya Da Silva – The Author of Pri Chadash

Rabbi Chizkiya was born in Livorno, Italy in the year 5419. From his youth, he was avidly immersed in Torah study with the gaon Rabbi Shemuel Costa Zatzal. He also studied with the gaon Rabbi Yehuda Israel of Egypt, who arrived in Livorno as a shaliach and had remained there for a few years. Rabbi Chizkiya's teachers and mentors were very proud of him, and people could see that he was destined for greatness.

In the year 5439, being about 20 years old, Rabbi Chizkiya left Italy for the Holy Land and settled in Jerusalem. There too he did not neglect Torah study, which he continued to pursue in the yeshiva of the gaon Rabbi Moshe Galanti Zatzal. When Rabbi Moshe passed away, Rabbi Chizkiya was named as Rav and Av Beit Din in his place. People from everywhere addressed him with questions of Halachah, which he warmly answered. While studying Torah with the great Sephardic sages of Jerusalem, Rabbi Chizkiya developed his own personal system for learning, which is why many rabbis decreed a ban on his books. When this ban was enacted, Rabbi Chizkiya was in Europe as a shaliach. He therefore knew nothing of the ban on his writings. He only learned of it when he returned to the Holy Land, news that weakened him to the point of becoming extremely ill. Not long afterwards, on Kislev 29, 5458, he left this world to join the celestial academy, though he was only 39 years old. Among his many books, he is best known for his work on the Shulchan Aruch entitled Pri Chadash, a name by which Rabbi Chizkiya has become known. The memory of the tzaddik is truly a blessing.

# IN THE LIGHT OF THE HAFTORAH

## Wagon Wheels

*It is written, "Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, says the L-RD of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6).*

It is said that the gaon Rabbi Dov Berish Wiedenfeld of Tchebin Zatzal put a great deal of effort into trying to exempt yeshiva students from serving in the army. One day an army official came to see Rabbi Dov Berish, telling him that the yeshiva students were going to be drafted into the army because of the dangers facing the country.

The gaon of Tchebin replied with a parable: A wagon driver was traveling over a steep incline with a full load of cargo. When he saw that the terrain was difficult and that the horses were exhausted, he unloaded part of his cargo. However the wagon still weighed too much and the horses refused to move. He then decided to unload still more of his cargo – a package here, a box there – until finally the wagon was completely empty! Nevertheless, the horses still refused to move. Refusing to give up hope, the driver then began to remove the wagon's heavy wheels, naïvely thinking that their weight was bogging the wagon down.

"The lesson here," said the gaon, "is that you are like this naïve wagon driver. By the merit of the Torah being studied by these yeshiva students, the world continues to exist, and you can continue to fight your wars. However if the army drafts into its ranks those who study Torah, it would be like removing the wheels that allow the wagon to move." The gaon ended by saying, "You should realize that without its wheels, a wagon won't be able to advance at all." As the verse says, "Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, says the L-RD of hosts."

# A MATTER OF EDUCATION

## Hashem's Spirit Rested on Yochanan

In the year 213 of the Second Temple, Antiochus told all his ministers and servants: "Let us trick the Jews and remove their Sabbath, circumcision, and New Moon." He therefore dispatched a large army to Jerusalem under the command of his warlord Nicanor, who besieged the city and began massacring the people.

The Spirit of Hashem rested upon Yochanan, the son of Matityahu, and he took a dagger and concealed it under his robes. When he approached the gate of Nicanor's headquarters, Nicanor asked: "Why have you rebelled? You know very well that I have an army powerful enough to crush you to the point of oblivion!"

Yochanan replied, "I have come here with the intention of obeying your every command."

"How can I know that you will obey my orders?" asked Nicanor. "Prove yourself by offering a pig on the altar and then personally sacrificing its lard and blood."

"I will do what you ask of me," replied Yochanan. "But first tell everyone to leave your presence, lest they hear what I tell you and spread it among the Jews, who would stone me."

When Yochanan found himself alone with him, he prayed to Hashem: "O G-d of Israel, incline Your ear and hear...give me the strength of body and boldness of heart to exact vengeance on behalf of the people of Israel."

Concluding his prayer, Yochanan approached Nicanor and plunged the dagger into his heart, killing him. Yochanan had barely fled when he sounded the horn of rebellion and gathered a great multitude to fight. In that war 772,000 of the enemy were slain, besides those who died fighting one another.

– From Midrash Chanukah

# EISHET CHAYIL

## The Sefer Torah Came Towards Her

Rebbetzin Bolisa, the wife of the gaon Rabbi Ezra Attia Zatzal, possessed a love for Torah that was legendary. In her youth, before meeting the man who had been suggested to her as a match, she had a dream in which she saw a Sefer Torah walking towards her. When she awoke in the morning, she understood that Heaven was telling her that her suggested match, Rabbi Ezra Attia the matmid, was destined to be her husband.

After the wedding, they went to live in a one-room apartment in the Bucharim neighborhood of Jerusalem. They began their life together with a common goal, to build a home of Torah.

They lived off the earnings they made from an old, manual sewing mashing that the Rebbetzin purchased. She sewed and repaired garments so that her husband could study Torah without having to work. Her mother-in-law, who lived with them, did some of the housework in order to ease the Rebbetzin's load. In this home, Rabbi Ezra Attia was able to progress in Torah, eventually being appointed to lead the great Porat Yosef yeshiva in Jerusalem.