

A PILLAR TO MANKIND

by Rabbi Dovid Green

A Torah scroll does not contain the familiar kind of punctuation which we are used to seeing in a paragraph in English. Instead, the main form of punctuation is done with spaces. There are two functions for these spaces as follows. The appearance of the text in a Torah Scroll is that of a vertical rectangle, or pillar. This is achieved by beginning and ending most lines in alignment with each other. The Torah Scroll is made up of many such pillars. When a topic comes to an end, the words stop before the end of a line, and the remainder of the line is left open. The new topic begins on the next line in this case. When a new yet related topic begins, the line is not open at the end, but a significant space is left between the words.

This week's parsha is the only parsha that does not have these paragraph breaks within it. The Sfas Emes takes note of this and offers the following explanation. Yaakov, our forefather, left Be'er Sheva and his pious parents, to go to Charan. He knew he would encounter his uncle, Lavan, who did not by any means espouse the same values as his parents. Nevertheless, Yaakov remained the same Yaakov that he was from the time he left Be'er Sheva until he returned to his father 22 years later. Yaakov's goals and his relationship with G-d remained the same through all those years. His lifestyle throughout that time reflected his direction and goal orientation.

The aforementioned idea is alluded to by the lack of interruptions in this week's portion. The entire time that Yaakov spent in Charan was one consistent unit in his life as a servant of G-d. It was one continuous era beginning with his life while drinking from the spiritual Be'er (wellsprings) in Be'er Sheva, and ending with the very same. Yaakov teaches us by example that in every new situation we find ourselves in we must follow our values and be true to our morals, rather than allow our surroundings to influence our behaviors and attitudes.

It was 1945. The German army was retreating. In their "employ" was a battalion of Jews whose job it was to help the Germans dismantle and destroy anything of value that might contribute to the allied war effort against them as they retreated. It was the eve of Yom Kippur. This group of Jews had decided that come what may, they would not violate the prohibition of eating on this holy day. When given their morning "coffee", they quietly poured it out on the ground, and they saved their meager rations for after the fast. It seemed to have turned out a success until after the day came to a close. Their captors had discovered their secret. The German soldiers offered them an alternative. Anyone who steps forward and shows regret publicly for having fasted will not be punished. Not one person stepped forward. As a punishment they were taken to a hill which at the time was wet

and muddy, and were forced to slide down the hill on their bare stomachs. Again the offer was made to show regret, and again not one Jew stepped forward. This repeated itself numerous times and not one Jew gave in and showed regret for having fasted on Yom Kippur...

What is the basis of our attitudes and actions? Are we directed by internal values, or do we allow the expectations of our peer groups to shape our own expectations of ourselves? Do we really feel that we are doing enough to live up to our own personal values, or do we satisfy ourselves as being relatively good? Yaakov teaches us that our value system should be independent of the prevailing attitudes and practices of the society we find ourselves in.

Good Shabbos!

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