

IN EVERY GENERATION

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Vayeitzei

In Every Generation

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Sponsored by
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on the 50th yahrzeit of his father
Martin Swartz (Mordechai ben Dov a"h)

Today's Learning:
Eruvin 7:10-11
O.C. 470:2-471:1
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Eruvin 66
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Berachot 68

Nearly all of this week's parashah is devoted to describing Yaakov's encounter with, and experiences in the house of, his uncle Lavan. This encounter is mentioned in one other place in the Torah, specifically in Parashat Ki Tavo. There we read that a person who brings bikkurim / first fruits recites a brief history of the Jewish People, including the verse (Devarim 26:5), "An Aramean tried to destroy my forefather."

How are Yaakov's experiences with Lavan related to the bringing of bikkurim, and what lesson are we meant to learn from this connection? R' Chaim Friedlander z"l (menahel ruchani of the Ponovezh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak; died 1986) explains:

One striking aspect of Yaakov's sojourn with Lavan was that Yaakov would have been completely at his uncle's mercy but for Hashem's protection. Yaakov did absolutely nothing to protect himself. Similarly, when a person brings bikkurim, he acknowledges (Devarim 26:10), "And now, behold! I

have brought the first fruit of the ground that You have given me, Hashem!" -i.e, only because You gave me the land and caused it to produce fruits do I have anything.

R' Friedlander notes further: A significant part of the Pesach Haggadah consists of expounding the verses from Devarim quoted above. Notably, the Haggadah makes little mention of the verses in Sefer Shmot in which the slavery in, and Exodus from, Egypt are discussed in detail. Why? One reason is that, in Shmot, Moshe Rabbeinu appears in nearly every verse, whereas our purpose at the Pesach Seder is to recognize G-d's role in the Exodus and our duties to Him. In contrast, the verses in Devarim, which allude to Yaakov's helplessness in Lavan's house and the helplessness of a farmer in his field, serve that function quite well. (Quoted in Haggadah Shel Pesach Ponovezh p.123)

"Behold! Hashem was standing over him, and He said, 'I am Hashem, G-d of Avraham your father and G-d of Yitzchak'." (28:13)

Rashi z"l comments: In general, we do not find in Tanach that G-d associates His Name with that of the righteous while they are still alive through the use of the phrase, "The G-d of so and so." The reason for this is because it is said (Iyov 15:15) "Behold He puts no trust even in His holy ones" [because man has free choice to sin until the day he dies]. Here, however, He associated his Name with that of Yitzchak because Yitzchak's eyes had become dim and he was confined to the house, so that he might be regarded as dead because the evil inclination had already departed from him and he was unlikely to sin any more.

The above statement by Rashi forms part of the basis for the following idea:

R' Eliyahu Capsali z"l (Crete; 1600s), among others, writes that all mitzvot can be divided into three categories. He calls them: (1) Mitzvot Mekubalot / "Received Commandments," i.e., commandments that we understand but we never would have thought of if we had not received them, e.g., Shabbat, Tefilin and Tzitzit; (2) Chukim / "Decrees," i.e., commandments that appear to be irrational, e.g., the laws of kashrut; and (3) Mitzvot Muskalot / "Rational Commandments," e.g., the prohibitions on stealing on murder.

Why are there specifically three groups? R' Capsali writes that it is because every accomplishment that our nation will ever attain is in the merit of the three Patriarchs--Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. Therefore it is fitting that there should be three categories of mitzvot paralleling the attributes of these three forefathers.

The Mitzvot Mekubalot / "Received Commandments" parallel Avraham. All of these mitzvot serve the purpose of teaching and reminding us about the existence and dominion of Hashem. Avraham's mission in life was likewise to teach people about Hashem's existence and power.

The Chukim / "Decrees" parallel Yitzchak. Our Sages note that the yetzer hara makes especially strong arguments against observing the chukim, specifically, that they seem to make no sense. Out

task is to ignore and eliminate our evil inclinations, just as Yitzchak did (as described above).

Finally, the Mitzvot Muskalot / "Rational Commandments" parallel Yaakov. These are the mitzvot that call upon man's intelligence, i.e., man can understand them intuitively. Similarly, Yaakov, more than any of the other Patriarchs, is portrayed in the Torah as using his intelligence to succeed in difficult situations (for example, to get the blessings from his father) and to save himself from Lavan and Esav. [Ed. note: Compare this to the characterization of Yaakov on the front page.]

(Meah Shearim Ch.2)

"He will give me bread to eat . . ." (28:20)

R' Meir Chadash z"l (1898-1989; mashgiach ruchani of the Chevron Yeshiva in Yerushalayim) related that he learned as a refugee during World War I how to look at events with the right attitude. One day, he was trudging along a road with four friends during a torrential downpour. As they slowly made their way, the young men complained aloud about the deep mud that impeded their progress.

Suddenly, a farmer passed them and heard their complaints. Turning toward them, he rebuked them angrily saying, "This is not mud. It's bread."

(Quoted in Ha'mashgiach Rabbi Meir p.68)

"Come and learn what Lavan the Aramean wanted to do to our father Yaakov--for Pharaoh decreed only against the male [newborns] while Lavan wanted to uproot everything."

(The Pesach Haggadah)

Why, on the Seder night, would we want to downplay the evil of the Egyptian king? To the contrary, on the night which is set aside for relating Hashem's miracles, we should emphasize how terrible conditions in Egypt were!

R' Levi Yitzchak Horowitz shlita (the Boston-Har Nof Rebbe) explains that the quoted phrase is meant to demonstrate the truth of the preceding statement in the Haggadah: "In every generation they rise up against us to destroy us." We don't necessarily see evidence of this, and we might doubt that it is true. By the same token, though, there is no clear statement in the Torah that Lavan wanted to destroy the fledgling Jewish People. Yet, just as we accept our Sages' assertion that Lavan really did want to uproot everything, so we accept their teaching that our enemies rise up to destroy us in every generation and Hashem saves us from them, sometimes without our knowledge.

(Haggadah Shel Pesach Ezrat Avoteinu p.115)

Why doesn't the Haggadah mention that Esav also wanted to "uproot everything"? R' Chaim

Kanievski shlita answers that the statement quoted above actually alludes to Esav.

How so? R' Kanievski explains: The Torah does not say anywhere that Lavan wanted to destroy Yaakov and his family. If so, to what is the Haggadah referring? It is referring to the Midrash Sefer Hayashar which relates that Lavan sent a messenger to Esav saying, "Yaakov has left my territory and is traveling toward you. Do with him as you wish." In other words, how did Lavan try to uproot everything? By provoking Esav.

(Quoted in Haggadah Shel Pesach Shirat Ha'leviim p.57)

Letters from Our Sages

The following letter was written by R' Chaim Ozer Grodzenski z"l, unofficial rabbi of Vilna, to R' Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz z"l, the "Chazon Ish," who was then living in Eretz Yisrael.

With G-d's help! Thursday, 27 Shevat 5696 [January 1937]

Continuing from my previous letter, I am now immersed in the matter of shechitah. The wife of the Senate President proposed in the Sejm [the Polish parliament] to outlaw shechitah in Poland. This is a possibility that never occurred to our imaginations - that they might outlaw something that affects three million of our people. The situation is very serious and even dangerous. It is quite possible that they will obtain a majority in the legislature, although it appears that the cabinet will oppose the idea. It was my thought to decree a fast day in Eretz Yisrael and the entire diaspora, and I communicated this to a gathering of rabbis in Warsaw - although I could not travel to it for various reasons. However, because of local political considerations, they do not agree to allow the whole world to raise a fuss...

This matter requires [G-d's] great mercy and tremendous effort here and in all countries. I have written to many places regarding this. Also in Eretz Yisrael it would be appropriate to rouse the populace and to pray before the Kotel Hama'aravi, and maybe also to decree a fast, and to do whatever else can be done. Let Poland know about the fuss that is coming from abroad. Even if they do not want to hear this, it will make a proper impression...

Several rabbis from Lithuania are there [presumably Warsaw] all the time. This costs a great deal. I have already spent 1,000 gold coins and I have no source from which to repay this debt... Your brother Meir [i.e., R' Meir Karelitz z"l, later a leading rabbi in Bnei Brak] is in Warsaw all the time, and also Rabbis x and y [the names were deleted by the publisher] and other Lithuanian rabbis are standing guard regarding this matter.

Today is a day of prayer here [in Vilna]. Attached is the prayer text that I composed. May Hashem hurry to our salvation.

[Ed. postscript: The decree was eventually annulled.]

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>.

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