

TOWER OF STRENGTH

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Vayeitzei

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Vayeitze
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Today's Learning:
Keraitot 3:5-6
O.C. 240:9-11
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Kiddushin 59
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Nazir 43

King Shlomo writes in Mishlei (18:10), "A tower of `oz' / strength - the Name of Hashem; through it a tzaddik will race and be strong." R' Yaakov ben Chananel Sakly z"l (Spain; 14th century) explains:

This verse refers to one who has bitachon / trust in G-d. Such a person is always under Hashem's protection, like one who lives in a fortress, a "tower of strength." Only Hashem can grant a person complete protection. A human cannot, since some forces are stronger than he is. Furthermore, a human guardian will die eventually. In contrast, G-d's tower of strength contains all possible blessings, as we find in Tanach that the word "oz" / "strength" is used to refer to many things, including: water (Mishlei 8:28), sweet delicacies (Nechemiah 8:10), powerful rulers and their weapons (Kohelet 7:19), war (Yishayah 42:25, 43:17), and a solid foundation of a building (Shoftim 6:26).

Alternatively, the only "tower of strength" we can see is the "Name of Hashem." We cannot fathom the essence of Hashem, but only His deeds, which are referred to as His "Name." Just as a person is known by his name, G-d is known to us by His deeds.

Or, the "tower of strength" is to know the "Name of Hashem." One who knows the ineffable Name will be protected from harm. "Through it a tzaddik will race and be strong," the verse says. Likewise, understanding the various names by which we call G-d gives a person a certain strength. Thus we find that Yaakov Avinu speaks of G-d as "Kel Shakkai." This name refers to G-d's attribute of giving each person and thing its due and then drawing a line. It is this attribute of G-d that draws a line around the righteous, including Yaakov, and protects them from harm. (Torat Ha'minchah)

"He encountered the place . . ." (28:11)

Rashi z"l writes: Our Sages explained it in the sense of "praying." Thus we may learn that Yaakov originated the prayer of Ma'ariv.

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael) writes: Through prayer, one can approach the level of prophecy. Nighttime is particularly suited to this, as explained by Rabbeinu Bachya z"l. [See below]. Prayer also prepares those who are on a lofty level to experience meaningful visions in their dreams.

This, continues R' Kook, explains why prayer is called an "encounter." When one wishes to understand a complex intellectual matter, one must build a structure of information and logic slowly and methodically, piece-by-piece. In contrast, one who prays experiences an "encounter" in which closeness to G-d is felt very suddenly. (Ein Ayah I p.109)

Rabbeinu Bachya ibn Pakudah z"l (Spain; 11th century) writes: Prayer at night is more pure than prayer offered during the day, for a number of reasons:

First, a person has fewer demands on his time at night. Second, the desire for food and drink is less at night [perhaps in contrast to the morning, when one has not eaten since the previous day]. Third, one is less likely to be interrupted by friends, business associates and creditors at night. Fourth, [before electricity] a person was more alone at night and able to meditate and reflect in solitude. Finally, because nighttime is a time to focus on one's closest and most intimate relationships, one may be inspired to form an intimate relationship with G-d as well. (Chovot Ha'levavot: Sha'ar Ahavat Hashem ch.6)

"Then Yaakov took a vow, saying, 'If Elokim will be with me, will guard me on this way that I am going; will give me bread to eat and clothes to wear . . .'" (28:20)

R' Shlomo Kluger z"l (rabbi of Brody, Galicia; died 1869) writes: Many commentaries have asked - why did Yaakov say, "If Elokim will be with me," after Hashem already said (in verse 15), "Behold, I am with you"? He answers:

Verse 13 says, "Behold! Hashem was standing over him, and He said, 'I am Hashem . . .'" G-d appeared to Yaakov via the four-letter Divine Name which we pronounce "Hashem." That Name refers to the Divine Attribute of chessed / kindness. Yaakov, however, was not satisfied with the promise that Hashem would be with him, i.e., that Hashem's kindness would accompany Yaakov. Yaakov wanted to deserve G-d's presence. Thus, Yaakov said, "If Elokim" - a reference to the Divine Attribute of din / justice - "will be with me."

R' Kluger adds: This explains why Yaakov concluded his vow (verse 22), "Whatever You will give me, I shall tithe to You [for charity]." Specifically through the mitzvah of tzedakah, one can deserve G-d's kindness [because we deserve to be treated by G-d as we treat others]. (Imrei Shefer)

"An angel of G-d said to me in the dream . . . 'Raise your eyes, if you please, and see that all the he-goats mounting the flocks are ringed, speckled, and checkered, for I have seen all that Lavan is doing to you.'" (31:11-12)

Rashi z"l writes: Although Lavan had separated the marked sheep so that the sheep should not give birth to young marked similar to them, angels brought them from the flock which had been placed in charge of Lavan's sons to the flock in Yaakov's charge.

R' Yisrael Meir Kagan z"l (the Chafetz Chaim; died 1933) asks: Isn't that stealing? He explains:

G-d decrees on Rosh Hashanah what income and how many assets every person will have during the coming year. One will never earn a penny more, nor a penny less, than what G-d decreed on the preceding Rosh Hashanah. Understanding this fact is the key to many good character traits, including not losing one's temper and having bitachon / trust in G-d. It is impossible for another person to deprive you of the income and assets that G-d decreed would be yours that year.

If one person steals from another, cheats another in business or damages another's property, halachah permits the victim to institute legal proceedings to recover what was his. But, halachah does not permit a person to get angry or take revenge. Indeed, it makes no sense to do so. Rather, one must recognize that the perpetrator was merely the unwitting agent to fulfill G-d's decree.

By the same token, the Chafetz Chaim asks, what sense does it make to steal? If G-d decreed on Rosh Hashanah that one will earn a certain amount of money, one will earn that money. There is no shortage of ways that G-d can bring money to a person honestly, and there simply is nothing to be gained from stealing or cheating. Moreover, if one steals more than he was meant to have, he can be assured that it will not remain with him. As the Gemara (Sanhedrin 8a) teaches: "G-d says to the wicked, so-to- speak: 'Why do you trouble me to return stolen property to its owners?'" [Ed. note: The reason it appears to us that cheaters and thieves prosper is because we cannot see the whole picture. For example, we do not know whether the person who cheated on his income taxes would have received a large bonus or won the lottery had he been honest.]

Lavan cheated Yaakov repeatedly, thus forcing G-d to reimburse Yaakov. That is what the angels that Yaakov saw in his prophetic dream were doing. Lest you ask: How could sheep that belonged to Lavan be transferred to Yaakov? The verse answers this by saying, "I have seen all that Lavan is doing to you." G-d knows what rightfully belongs to whom and He ensures that no one has more or less than was decreed to be his share. (Shemirat Halashon: Sha'ar Hatevunah)

This Week in History, Halachah, and Minhag

8 Kislev: Some have a custom to fast on this date because it is the date when King Yehoyakim, one of the last kings of Yehuda in the First Temple period, burned the original version of the book of Eichah, as described in Yirmiyahu chapter 36. Others say this event occurred on the fifth, seventh, or 28th of Kislev (see Shulchan Aruch O.C. 580:2, with the commentaries of the Be'er Heitev and Mishnah Berurah). The prophet Yirmiyahu later rewrote and added to Eichah, giving it its present form.

December 5: Some have the custom not to recite tachanun on the first day that we pray for rain in the Diaspora. (Luach Davar B'lto p.357)

Shabbat Parashat Vayeitzei: There are various customs regarding the pronunciation of the name of Leah's fifth son. Some read it "Yisaschar" the first time and "Yisachar" thereafter (i.e., pronouncing both letters "sin" the first time and only one letter "sin" after the first time). Others read it "Yisaschar" until Parashat Pinchas, and "Yisachar" thereafter. Finally, some always pronounce it "Yisachar." The following explanation has been offered for these differing customs:

Those who always leave one of the letters "sin" silent explain that the Torah hints at two reasons for Yissachar's name. Before Leah conceived this son, she said to Yaakov (Bereishit 30:16), "It is to me that you must come, for sachor secharticha / I have clearly hired you with my son's [Reuven's] dudaim [flowers]." After she gave birth to a son, she said (verse 18), "G-d has granted me sechari / my reward because I gave my maidservant to my husband." Each verse contains the root "sin-chaf-reish," and the double letter "sin" in Yissachar's name alludes to these two verses. However, Leah's statement in verse 16 is considered unseemly; thus, one letter "sin" is not articulated.

Those who pronounce both letters "sin" until Parashat Pinchas explain the Yissachar "lent" one of his letters to his grandson Yov / Yoshuv at the time of the census in that parashah (see Rashi to Bemidbar 26:24). (Likkutei Maharich: Hashmatot L'chelek Bet)

13 Kislev 4260 (499 C.E.): Death of Ravina son of Rav Huna, co-editor with Rav Ashi of the Babylonian Talmud. This event marks the end of the era of the Amoraim / Sages of the Talmud. (Luach Davar B'lto p.365)

14 Kislev 2193 (1567 B.C.E.): Birth of Reuven, firstborn of Yaakov Avinu (as related in our parashah). Reuven died on this date as well, at the age of either 124 or 125. (Seder Ha'dorot)

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.

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