

TURN, TURN, TURN...

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This week we read the parsha of Vayaitzay. Yaakov left Beer Sheva, fleeing from Esav's murderous intentions. On the way, he slept at the place where the Beis Hamikdash would ultimately be built. There he had his prophetic dream: "And behold, there was a ladder standing on the earth and its head reached toward the heavens, and behold, angels were ascending and descending. And Hashem was standing above it. [28:12-13]." The Ramban explains that Yaakov was being shown that everything that transpires in this world emanates from Hashem.

Hashem then promised Yaakov that he would receive Eretz Yisroel and that his descendants would be as numerous as the dust of the earth. Hashem also promised that he would guard Yaakov and ultimately return him to that land.

Yaakov awakens early in the morning, realizes the holiness of the place, builds an altar and then continues on his way to Lavan's house. The verse relates this in an interesting way: "And Yaakov lifted his legs and went to the land of Bnei Kedem [29:1]." Rashi explains that when he heard the good news of Hashem's guarantee of protection, his heart lifted his legs and it became easy to walk.

The actual wording of the Medrash upon which Rashi is basing his explanation is as follows: When he heard the good news his heart lifted his legs, as the expression goes, the stomach carries the legs [Medrash Rabbah 70:8].

The Yalkut Lekach Tov offers the following thought provoking explanation of this Medrash.

Shlomo HaMelech [King Solomon] teaches: "For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven. A time to be born, a time to die [Koheles 3:1-2, The Byrds: Turn, Turn, Turn]." Koheles is replete with penetrating lessons on life. What profundity is Shlomo HaMelech teaching with this seemingly simple statement?

Imagine two couples who had gone many years unable to have children. One couple, throughout their ordeal, had been seeing many doctors and trying every new option that modern medicine had to offer. Finally, a new fertility drug hit the market and the wife became pregnant. Their natural thought is: If only this drug had been available a few years ago, we could have had a child that much sooner.

The other couple, throughout their ordeal had approached many tzaddikim [righteous individuals], asking them to pray and intercede on their behalf. After many years, a renowned tzaddik visited their

area and they approached him for a bracha [blessing]. Nine months later, a child was born. They too have the natural thought that: If only they would have seen that tzaddik a few years earlier, so much painful waiting could have been avoided.

To address this misconception, Shlomo HaMelech teaches: "A time to be born!" The 'time' brought the cause -- the cause didn't bring the time... Their time to have a child had arrived. Therefore, heavenly help in the guise of the fertility drug or in the guise of the tzaddik's bracha, instantly became available for them. Had their time arrived earlier, the earlier drug or bracha would have helped. Had their time not yet arrived, this drug and bracha would also not have helped. A time to be born...

When we hear about a death, our first thought is how old was the person. If he was elderly then we attribute the death to that. If he was young, we wonder if he had an illness, if he smoked or if he was overweight. We desperately seek to connect the death to a cause (and preferably one that doesn't apply to us...).

"A time to die." The 'time' brought the cause -- the cause didn't bring the time... His time had arrived and therefore Hashem sent the cause. Many elderly, overweight smokers didn't die on that day. Stop deluding yourselves with the causes, Shlomo HaMelech teaches.

This point was brought home to me in a very painful but clear way. I had a sister, a "h, who died from cancer of the brain stem. At that time it was considered inoperable. The doctors tried what they could but the outcome was a foregone conclusion.

Many years ago, I read an article about a certain doctor, I believe his name was Fred Epstein, who was pioneering successful operations on cancer of the brain stem. My first reaction was a bitter 'where was he when we needed him'. I then reminded myself that my sister's time had come -- she therefore contracted a disease which there was no way to treat. If a person now has such a cancer, I told myself, it no longer means that their time has come. Someone whose time comes, contracts one of the many diseases for which today we have no cure.

A few years later I was having a personal talk with one of my students. As he was telling me about his family, he hesitated a bit and then got a bit teary-eyed. I waited to see if he wanted to continue. He then told me that he has a sister with brain stem cancer. Her continuing ordeal had included many operations and it was very draining on her and on the entire family. "Dr. Fred Epstein!" I shouted triumphantly! He looked at me in wonder. "How did you know the name of the doctor who operated on her?" he asked me. I told him my whole story, including the article that had served as a catalyst for me to deepen my understanding and acceptance of that painful chapter in my life. It was so clear to both of us. His sister had the illness at a time when it could be dealt with. His sister's time had not arrived...

This is what the Medrash meant with the expression that the stomach carries the legs. It appears that the legs are carrying the stomach. However, were it not for the energy supplied to the body via the

food breakdown of the stomach, the legs would be unable to carry the body. Don't be misled by the superficial -- in truth, the stomach carries the legs.

The Medrash uses this expression to explain the verse that Yaakov lifted his legs. "His heart lifted his legs." The person decides where he's going to go and the legs respond accordingly. The legs don't lift the heart -- the heart lifts the legs.

At the outset of Yaakov's journey, his legs were carrying his heart. The 'causes' were leading to his having to leave his parents and his home. His leaving was caused by all of the Esav related problems. When the legs, the 'causes', carry the heart, one feels heavy-hearted.

Yaakov then had his prophetic dream. He now had perfect clarity that the events he had gone through weren't the cause of his present predicament. >From the heavens it had been ordained that he should endure all of that with Esav. "And Hashem was standing above the ladder." Every detail came from Hashem. The 'time' had come. It had brought about the causes. Not vice-versa. At that point, Yaakov's heart lifted his legs. He went with a renewed vigor and sense of purpose. The time had come. His time had come. It was time for him to marry and build Bnei Yisroel. His heart lifted his legs.

If we could only see past the superficial, see past the 'causes', and recognize the true cause of "Hashem was standing above it," we too would have renewed vigor and purpose in the many pursuits which fill our days...

Good Shabbos,

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