

IT'S WHO YOU'RE DEALING WITH

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This week we read the parsha of Vayaitzay. "Vayaitzay Yaakov [And Yaakov left] Beer Sheva and went to Charan (in order to find a wife). [28:10]" On the way, Yaakov arrived at the place where the Beis HaMikdash [the Temple] would be built and had a prophetic dream. "And behold, there was a ladder standing on the ground with its head reaching the heavens. And behold, Hashem was standing above him. [28:12]"

The Nefesh HaChaim offers a fascinating interpretation of this dream. He explains that our purely physical appearance is, in fact, incredibly misleading. The Medrash in Breishis teaches that a perfect balance and symmetry had existed during creation between the heavenly, spiritual realm and the physical, earthly realm. This was endangered at the point of man's creation. If he'd be created solely from either the heavenly realm or from the earthly realm, this balance would have been upset. Hashem therefore created man from both realms--a physical body formed from the earth with a spiritual neshama [soul] contained within it.

At first glance, it would seem that this had upset the balance even more than if man had been created solely from the lower realm. Now, man exists in the physical realm, holding the heavenly neshama captive!

He explains, however, that man and his soul actually extend from the lowest realm all the way up to the highest realms. The soul is like a beacon of light, emanating from the physical body, the lowest part of man, and extending all the way to the highest spiritual realms. As such, the creation of man maintained that perfect symmetry in the world. Man, by existing in both realms, actually bridges the gap between heaven and earth.

This, he explains, was the vision that Yaakov saw in his dream. The ladder exemplified the essence of man. Standing with our legs resting on the earth and our heads reaching the heavens, connecting to Hashem.

It was the clear understanding and internalization of this concept that carried Yaakov through the difficulties he encountered with his uncle, Lavan.

Yaakov, understanding that Rachel was his soul-mate, offered to work seven years for her father, Lavan, to secure her hand in marriage. Lavan agreed to this arrangement and a seven-year wedding date was set between Yaakov and Lavan's younger daughter, Rachel. We can only imagine how honestly and diligently Yaakov worked for those seven years. His future father-in-law was watching

carefully, hoping for a pretense to demand more from him. Yaakov devoted himself completely to the responsibility that he had accepted upon himself and no efforts were spared during those seven years.

Upon the completion of the seven years, Lavan threw a feast to celebrate the wedding but substituted his older daughter, Leah, in place of Rachel. Yaakov and Rachel had made up certain signs in order to safeguard themselves against Lavan's treachery but when Rachel saw that calling her father's bluff would humiliate her sister, she passed these signs on to Leah. The deception was successful and Yaakov didn't realize that he'd been tricked until the next morning.

Yaakov confronted Lavan who simply brushed him off, condescendingly explaining that, perhaps where Yaakov comes from they do such things, but in his 'cultured' world, they don't marry off a younger sister before the older one. He then made Yaakov the following offer: Wait the seven days of feasting that follow the wedding and then marry Rachel as a second wife, all for the low, low price of "ode sheva shanim achairos [29:27]" another seven years of work.

What was Lavan thinking? How could he dare to make such a scandalous offer and trust that Yaakov would keep to it? Why wasn't he afraid that Yaakov would marry Rachel after the week and then leave without working the additional seven years?

Yaakov agreed to the offer, waited the week, married Rachel and worked "ode sheva shanim achairos. [29:30]" The Medrash teaches the profound lesson that is revealed by the word "ode" another. The conscientiousness of the second seven years was identical to that of the first seven years!

Incredible! Unfathomable! How well do we produce when we feel that we're not being appreciated or compensated properly? And if we were tricked into doing additional work? He started up with the wrong guy! Oh would we make him regret it!

Yet, Yaakov showed Lavan the same dedication and diligence after having been tricked by him!

Let's take this one step further. We know ourselves and how we work. Even if we're willing to go beyond the call of duty, we want it to be recognized and appreciated as such. I'll do it for you as long as you don't demand or expect it. If you think you have it coming to you then you can just forget it.

The words "ode sheva shanim achairos--another seven years" taught us that Yaakov's second seven years were indistinguishable from his first seven years. Lavan, when he was proposing his deal to Yaakov, used those very same words! He was demanding the very same diligence the second time around and still Yaakov delivered!

Lavan knew whom he was dealing with and Yaakov knew whom he was dealing with. Lavan knew he was dealing with a person whose feet were on the ground but whose head was in the heaven. A person whose connection to Hashem filtered down and affected each and every one of his earthly dealings. He knew that if Yaakov would agree to the deal, it would be meticulously fulfilled.

Yaakov knew with whom he was dealing--not with Lavan, but with Hashem. Every interaction and relationship between he and another person was actually a reflection of the relationship between he and Hashem. Stooping to Lavan's level would only serve to sully himself. His head reached the heavens, reached Hashem Himself, as his feet were on the ground, maintaining that perfect symmetry in the world, bridging the gap between heaven and earth.

Good Shabbos,

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