

DEPARTURE OF THE 'TENT DWELLER'

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion: Tape #74 Honoring Parents Who Are Not Observant. Good Shabbos!

Even The Departure of a "Tent Dweller" Makes an Impression

At the start of this week's parsha, we find one of the most famous comments of Rash"i in Chumash. The pasuk [verse] says, "And Yaakov went out from Beer Sheva and went to Haran." [Bereishis 28:10] Rash"i quotes the statement of our Sages that this pasuk teaches us that the departure of a Tzadik [righteous person] from a city makes an impression. "The Tzadik is the beauty and glory of the city. Once he leaves, the beauty and the glory of the city have departed."

We can question this, because we see that prior to this incident, Avraham left where he was living and went down to Egypt. Yitzchak, too, left where he was living and went down to Gerrar. This Rash"i, one might think, is a couple of parshiyos late! Rash"i should have made this comment in Lech Lecha when Abraham left, or at least in Toldos when Yitzchak left, and then it would have been obvious that the same applied when Yaakov left. Why does Rash"i wait until Parshas Vayeitzei to tell us that when a Tzadik leaves a city, it makes an impression?

I saw an answer to this question from the Avnei Shoham. The Avnei Shoham says that it is obvious that when an Avraham leaves the city, it makes an impression. Avraham, after all, is the very personification of Chessed [generosity, kindness], who puts up every single guest who passes through the city. Avraham was an activist, well-known by all. Obviously, his departure made an impression.

Yitzchak, too, was a well-known man. He had dealings with his neighbors. He had dealings with Avimelech. He was wealthy. Certainly his departure from the city had an impact.

But Yaakov Avinu was a "simple man who sat in the tents." Yitzchak was still alive at the time. Yaakov, at this time, spent his time sitting in the Beis Medrash [house of study], learning! He was not involved, perhaps, in outreach activities. He wasn't involved, perhaps, in communal Chessed projects. That was still Yitzchak's domain. Yaakov was sitting and learning!

Therefore, Rash"i has to tell us that even in this case, the departure of a Tzadik makes an impression. Perhaps, we do not sense his presence. Perhaps, Yaakov does not do anything for us other than sit and learn. But if he closes his Gemara [volume of Talmud] and leaves the city, that makes an impression. The Strength of Torah will be diminished in that city.

Let us not, G-d forbid, minimize the strength of outreach and the strength of Chessed. But let us not make the mistake to think that if a Tzadik who does nothing more than "sit in the tent" leaves town -- that it makes no difference. If, perhaps, it is not recognizable on a physical level, certainly on a spiritual and on a metaphysical level it does make an impression. It is no longer the same city.

The mere fact that a person sits and learns is an amazing thing. If we want to truly appreciate the importance of Torah, we must remind ourselves constantly that Torah study has an impact on larger society, even when we don't realize it ourselves. Whether a person directly benefits from that learning or not, the Tzadik learning in the city makes an impression. If (G-d forbid) that learning were to stop, it would make a terrible impression on the city. That is why Rash"i has to wait until Yaakov to tell us that the departure of a Tzadik from a city makes an impression.

The "Special Torah" Taught in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever

Where did this Tzadik, Yaakov, go after he left Beer Sheva? Our Sages say that he went to study for 14 years in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever. This is a strange thing. Until now, Yaakov has also been sitting and learning. Now it is time to go -- time to go into exile. So what does he do? He goes and sits and learns literally day and night for another 14 years!

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky says that Yaakov had something to learn, and that is why he had to go to the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever. We all know that the holy patriarchs had their own schools of learning. The Talmud [Yoma 28b] says that our patriarchs constantly had their own Yeshivas. But, nevertheless Yaakov had something specific to gain from the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever. What was it?

Shem was the one who withstood the Generation of the Flood. He had a "special Torah" to teach -- the Torah of how to exist in a hostile society, one filled with theft and immorality and corruption. Ever was the one who withstood the heresy of the Generation of the Dispersion (at the Tower of Babel). He, too, had a special Torah to teach.

So now, when Yaakov knew that he was going into Exile, to live with the deceitful Lavan, he had to learn a "different Torah" than he had learned with his father and his grandfather. He had to learn how a Jew survives in Exile, outside the Land of Israel. That is why he had to go to the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever.

Rash"i cites that all that Yaakov learned in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever he gave over to Yosef. It

was this Torah of how a Jew exists in a hostile society, that Yaakov had to give to Yosef, specifically. For Yosef also went down to a hostile environment (Egypt). He, too, needed this "special Torah."

Ladder = Money = Poverty: With Each One Can Go Up or Down

The Medrash comments on the verse "And behold, a ladder was standing on the ground, and its top reached the Heavens" [Bereishis 28:12] that G-d showed Yaakov two individuals: Korach (who was swallowed up by the ground) and Moshe (who ascended up to the Heaven).

Why are Korach and Moshe hinted to by the ladder? There is a very interesting Ba'al HaTurim on this week's parsha. The Ba'al HaTurim says that the numerical ["Gematria"] value of the word ladder (samech-vov-lamed-mem) [60+6+30+40=136] is equal to the numerical value of the word money (mem-mem-vov-nun) [40+40+6+50=136], and it is also equal to the numerical value of the word poverty (ayin-vov-nun-yud) [70+6+50+10=136].

A ladder can be used as a parable for money. Just as a ladder can be used to climb to great heights or descend to the depths, so is the case with money. A person can be blessed with money, do the right things with money, and go up the ladder. On the other hand, money corrupts. Money can be a terribly destructive force.

The same applies with poverty. Poverty can be a terrible thing. The Talmud says that poverty can cause one to transgress the Will of his Creator. On the other hand, the 'Test of Poverty' if dealt with correctly, can make a person the happiest person around. He will no longer be encumbered by money and the problems that it brings.

There are some people that can cope beautifully with poverty, such that they don't even know that they are poor. I heard a true story that happened here in Baltimore, MD. The woman involved went shopping for a "shaitel" [a head-covering (wig) commonly worn by married Orthodox women] with her 12-year-old daughter. All of a sudden she saw a "shaitel" that she liked and she said "I like that one." The saleslady tells her, "That one is not for you." But the woman insists, "I like it; I like it." Again the saleslady tells her it is not for her and again the woman insists she wants it.

Finally the saleslady is forced to tell her the truth. She told her "You can't afford that 'sheitel.'" The customer responded, "Honestly, I can't afford any of them; let me at least, however, take the one I like." The woman's 12-year-old daughter was sitting there and said to her mother incredulously, "We can't afford it? We're poor? We're not poor! Why can't we afford it?"

Come and hear. It is so well-known that the family is poor, that the saleslady knows she has to keep the customer away from her expensive "sheitlach," and yet the daughter is blissfully unaware of the economic situation in her own home. That is dealing with poverty. Those parents are using poverty to go up the ladder.

This perhaps is what the Medrash means when it says that Yaakov was shown Korach and Moshe. Our Sages tell us that Korach had exceptional wealth. He was so wealthy that he did not crave additional money, he only craved power. It was his money that corrupted him and made him challenge the leadership of Moshe and Aharon. Yaakov was shown the ladder (sulam = mammon), and was shown what money can do to a person.

Yaakov was also shown Moshe. Our Sages comment on the words "Pesol lecha" (carve out for yourself) [Shemos 34:1] that G-d told Moshe to take for himself the material removed from the carving of the two tablets on stone - from which he too became very wealthy. But how did that affect him? Not at all. He went on to become the Master of all Prophets, the Rabbi of all Israel. Money is the ladder. It can bring up (as in the case of Moshe) or it can bring down (as in the case of Korach).

It is our test -- whether it be the ladder of poverty or the ladder of wealth -- that we should cope with it and deal with it -- that we should go up the ladder and not down the ladder.

Glossary

sheitel -- (Yiddish) wig; sheitlach (plural)

sulam -- ladder

mammon -- money

oni -- poverty

Personalities & Sources:

Rash"i -- (1040-1105) R. Sh'lomo ben Yitzchak; Troyes and Worms, France; "Father of all Torah Commentaries."

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky -- (1891-1986) Rav of Tzitevian, Lithuania; Toronto, Canada; and Rosh Yeshiva of Mesivta Torah Vodaath, New York.

Ba'al HaTurim -- (1268-1340) Commentary on the Torah by R. Yaakov ben Asher. The son of the Ros"n also is most famous for his authorship of the Tur, one of the early codes of Jewish Law.

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