



PARSHAS VAYETZEI

5772

SHALOSH SEUDAH
TORAH

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Yaakov Avinu Paved the Way for the Exiled Jew

Introduction

After Yosef was born, Yaakov wished to leave Lavan. Lavan wanted Yaakov to continue working as his shepherd, and offered to pay him. Yaakov requested the following wage; first Lavan would remove any speckled, spotted or brown sheep from the flock. Afterwards, any sheep that was born speckled or spotted would belong to Yaakov.

Yaakov then took rods from poplar, hazel and chestnut trees. He peeled the bark in many spots so that the white flesh of the branch would be visible, and the rods would appear spotted. He placed the rods in the drinking pools of the animals so that the animals would gaze at these rods and fit the image in their minds. The animals thereby gave birth to speckled and spotted sheep, and Yaakov became very wealthy.

The Zohar states that Yaakov, through peeling the bark and placing the sticks in the pools, produced the same spiritual effects as when we put on Tefillin¹. Before the giving of the Torah, it was possible to perform Mitzvos (commandments) in many manners. It is only afterwards that they must be done precisely according to the way that we were commanded at the Giving of the Torah. (Although it may seem to us strange that Yaakov fulfilled the Mitzvah in such a manner, it is in no essence stranger than binding one's left hand in leather straps; we are just used to it.)

Why did Yaakov focus on the mitzvah of Tefillin during his stay at Lavan? This entire episode calls for explanation.

When Yosef was six years old, Yaakov escaped from Lavan with his family and wealth but Lavan chased after him. When he caught up with him he told him, "Essentially, I'm capable of harming you, but G-d revealed himself to me in a dream last night and warned me not to do you 'from good to evil'".

This is very difficult to understand. Lavan was the ultimate two-faced, conniving, sinister evil-doer, yet he was also a gentlemanly diplomat. The only thing truly white about him was his name. He said what suited him only, regardless of the facts. Why would he make himself vulnerable by letting Yaakov know that Hashem forbid him from harming him? He could have left that detail out.

A Story from the Gemara²

The verse in Mishlei³ states, "ויש נספה בלא משפט", 'there exists death without justice'; a person can die even if his time to pass away did not arrive. The Gemara relates a story that portrays this concept.

The Angel of Death was a frequent visitor of the sage Bibi the son of Abaya. The Angel of Death related an episode that occurred to him: He was commanded to take the soul of Miriam the hairdresser. He mistakenly took the soul of Miriam the one who raised children. Bibi asked him, what happened to the years that Miriam who raised children still had left? Who receives them? The Angel of Death replied, one who is "מעביר על מידותיו", isn't insistent that his rights be upheld and forgives anybody that wrongs him.

This narrative from the Gemara is very puzzling. We have heard of great Tzaddikim (righteous people) meriting to have Eliyahu Hanavi as a frequent visitor, but what kind of specialty is it to have the Angel of Death stopping by repeatedly?!

We also need to understand why the Angel of Death specifically related to the sage Bibi the son of Abaya the secret that anybody who is "מעביר על מידותיו", merits receiving the years of people who die before their time.

Transforming Enemies Into Friends

When a Tzaddik conquers an angel, the angel befriends him, and reveals secrets to him.

When Moshe ascended to heaven to bring down the Torah, the angels ganged up on him saying, 'What is a human being doing between us?' Moshe answered, 'To receive the Torah'. They countered, 'A precious thing hidden for 974 generations before the creation of the world, will be given to flesh and blood? What is man [anyways] that you should make note of him? Rather let your glory [the Torah] remain in the heavens.'

Hashem told Moshe Rabbeinu to answer the angels. Moshe expressed his fear, 'They'll burn me with their breath!' Hashem protected Moshe, and he challenged the angels, 'In the Torah it is stated, 'I am your G-d who took you out of Egypt.' Were you in Egypt? The Torah states, 'Don't serve Idols', is Idolatry a possibility for angels? Etc'⁴

Because Moshe defeated the angels in their quest to destroy him and prevent the Torah from being given, they became his friends and each one, even the Angel of Death, gave him something. The Angel of Death revealed to him the secret that that Ketores (incense) stops an epidemic. He later made use of the information when a plague smite the Jewish People⁵.

Why the Sage Bibi the Son of Abaya Was Befriended by the Angel of Death

It was decreed upon Eli, the final Judge of the era of the Judges and the Kohein Gadol (high priest), that his male descendants would die before their twentieth birthday, due to a failure on his part.⁶ The sages Rava and Abaya were descendants of Eli. Rava occupied himself with learning Torah, so he lived forty years. Abaya engaged in Torah learning and in acts of kindness, so he lived sixty years⁷.

The sage Bibi, was the son of Abaya, meaning, he too was a descendant of Eli. The Angel of Death tried getting him many times during his life, because he was on his list of people to take from this world. With Torah and acts of kindness, he defeated the Angel of Death many times.

Being that he defeated him, the Angel of Death became a friend of Bibi, and told him a secret that was very pertinent to him. As a man who had very few years to live on his own account, he needed many more years than he had. The Angel of Death told him that the secret to meriting a longer life was to be a "מעביר על מידותיו". Then he would receive the years that those who died an untimely death had not lived.

A Parsha of Golus (exile)

The entire Parsha of Vayetzei is about Yaakov in golus. Yaakov left the haven of his father's home in Eretz Yisroel, and descended to Charan, a place which aroused the חרון אף של מקום, the ire of Hashem. There he married, raised a family, and flourished. He thus paved the way for his descendants to remain strong and prosper despite their being in exile.

His journey began with a portentous dream. He visualized a ladder upon which angels were ascending and descending. The Midrash⁸ states that this vision foreshadowed the four exiles that would befall Yaakov's descendants.

In Lavan's house, Yaakov wrestled with the Sitra Achra (the angels of the 'other side', the side of evil that fights the 'side of holiness') itself. To guard oneself from tumah (impurity) and sin in such circumstances was a tremendous feat. In exile, his descendents would face similar challenges but would retain their Judaism through his merit.

The Purpose of Exile

There are fifty levels of tumah (impurity). Trapped therein are sparks of holiness. The purpose of the descent of the Jewish People into the exile is to release these sparks from their confinement and connect them to holiness.

In Egypt, the Jewish People descended to the forty-ninth level of tumah, thereby elevating the sparks of holiness trapped there. Correspondingly, they merited reaching the forty nine levels of holiness.

However, they did not descend to the fiftieth level of tumah and therefore did not merit entering the fiftieth level of holiness. For the generation of those that exited Egypt, entering the fiftieth gate of tumah would have been spiritually fatal.

However, when Mashiach will come, we *will* merit the fiftieth gate of holiness, because we will have descended into the fiftieth gate of tumah. For our generation, entering the fiftieth gate of tumah is not critically dangerous, because we have the power of the Torah.⁹

The fiftieth level of tumah is heresy. Today, the world is full of it.

By the Splitting of the Sea, the Jews Merited to Temporarily Reach the Fiftieth Level of Holiness

In Egypt, the Jewish People were trapped in the forty nine levels of tumah. During the redemption from Egypt, these levels of tumah were conquered and the Jews were released from them. Therefore, all the idols in Egypt that corresponded to the forty-nine levels of tumah were destroyed during the last plague.

However, the idol 'Baal Tzefon' was not destroyed, because it corresponded to the fiftieth level of tumah, which the Jews had never fallen into and was therefore never broken through.

The verse states, "וּחְמוּשִׁים עָלוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל"¹⁰, 'the Jewish People went up [from Egypt] armed'. The word חְמוּשִׁים is written without the 'ו', חמשים, fifty. The Zohar infers from this, that the Jewish people did merit attaining the fiftieth level of holiness during the splitting of the Yam Suf (Sea of Reeds).

The Jewish encampment at the Yam Suf (Sea of Reeds) was opposite the idol 'Baal Tzefon', the fiftieth level of tumah. Because they touched upon the fiftieth level of tumah before the sea split, they merited temporarily attaining the fiftieth level of holiness.

During the splitting of the sea, the Jewish People merited a hint of the future redemption.

צפון, when we spell out the letters, צדיק פא ואו נון, is gematria (has the numerical value of) וחמשים (they both equal 404). The idol 'Baal Tzefon' was in opposition to the fiftieth level of holiness.

The Power of Shalosh Seudos

The Baal Shem Tov instituted that the last meal of Shabbos be eaten not as the first two, with the family, but together, as a community, with loving brotherhood, friendship, and exalting the name of Hashem with song.

During his time, the exile entered its most intense stage called Ikvise DiMeshicha (the time so close to the arrival of Mashiach that we already hear his footsteps), the last stage before Mashiach's arrival. It was then that the Jewish People began to fall into the fiftieth level of tumah.

The Seudah (meal) of Shalosh Seudos rescues from the travails of the war of Gog U'Mugog, the apocalyptic world battle before the coming of Mashiach. Tzaddikim taught that this war is primarily a spiritual one. It is the struggle of atheism verses faith.

Shalosh Seudos, when eaten in company of G-d-fearing friends, discussing topics of Emunah (faith), and singing songs of longing for G-d, is a most powerful defense against the bombardment of blasphemy in Ikvise DiMeshicha.

We sing the Zemiros (liturgy) "בני היכלא", composed by the Ar"i at the beginning of Shalosh Seudos. He described the auspicious time of Shalosh Seudos as one in which "לבטלא בכל קליפין", 'all Kelipos [impure spirits] are nullified. צפון, when we spell out the letters, is gematria, לבטלא בכל קליפין (they both equal 404). The destruction of the Kelipos of Shalosh Seudos is synonymous with the Kelipah of the idol 'Baal Tzefon'.

The Parallelism of Yaakov's Escape and the Splitting of the Sea

Targum Yonasan ben Uziel relates that the water level of the well fo Charan was noticeably higher throughout Yaakov's stay there. When the shepherds went to the well on the day Yaakov departed, they found it dry. After waiting three days, they related the development to Lavan. Lavan understood that Yaakov must have fled¹¹.

So too, the spies that Pharaoh sent along to keep tabs on his former slaves returned on the third day to tell Pharaoh that the Jewish People had no intention of coming back after the three day like they had said they would.

Both Lavan caught up with Yaakov, and Pharaoh with the Jewish People, on the seventh day after their departure.

By the Yam Suf, the Jewish Nation faced the fiftieth gate of tumah. Yaakov, in the last moments of his portentous exile by Lavan, battled the same war that the Jews' before the splitting of the sea and his descendants in Ikvise DiMeshicha would; the battle against the fiftieth level of tumah.

Lavan's Final Attack at Yaakov

Lavan took along all his powers of tumah in his pursuit of Yaakov. The verse states, "ארמי אבד אבי"¹², '[Lavan] the Aramite [wished to] destroy my father [Yaakov]'. He wanted to destroy him with his tumah.

The Yalkut Reuveini states that Lavan was the embodiment of the מ"ו, the chief angel of the Sitra Achra itself. When he chased Yaakov, it was his final attempt to vilify him with the tumah of the fiftieth level.

The fiftieth time in the Torah where the redemption from Egypt is mentioned is in the paragraph which begins with the phrase mentioned above, "ארמי אבד אבי". We learn that Lavan tried to ensnare Yaakov into the fiftieth level of tumah with the fiftieth mention of the redemption.

The fiftieth level of holiness is Emunah.

Therefore, after the Splitting of the Sea, when the Jewish People attained the fiftieth level of holiness, the verse relates, "ויאמנו בה' ובמשה עבדו"¹³, 'They believed in Hashem and in Moshe his servant'; they attained Emunah.

Similarly, after winning the battle with Lavan in the fiftieth level of tumah, Yaakov attained the fiftieth level of holiness, the highest level of Emunah.

The Danger of Friendship with Reshaim (Evil People)

As they met each other after many years of separation, Eisav fell onto the shoulders of his brother Yaakov and, "וישקהו"¹⁴, 'he kissed him'.

The Midrash¹⁵ states that the word "וישקהו" should be understood as "וישכהו", 'and he bit him', being that a ק and a כ are interchangeable letters (because that they are both sounds that emanate from the throat). Eisav wanted to bite Yaakov, but his neck became hard like marble, and all his teeth fell out. Therefore, he kissed him.

The Sfas Emes asks the question, if one wishes to bite his enemy, but is unsuccessful, does he kiss him? The answer, of the Sfas Emes, reveals the essence of the relationship between Yaakov and Eisav, "He tried biting him with a bite. When he saw that he was unsuccessful, he bit him with a kiss."

What the church couldn't accomplish with more than a millennium of persecutions, the emancipators of the European Ghetto did with tragic ease. By bestowing upon the Jews the classification of equal human being (!), allowing them into their institutions of education, and giving them the right to vote, the gentiles befriended the Jews and effected the spiritual devastation of the vast majority of European Jewry (which was followed by their physical destruction). The bite of Eisav was painful, but his kiss, fatal.

The Gift Lavan Imparted to Yaakov

[As explained above, when a tzaddik defeats the Sitra Achra, they become his friends, and reveal secrets to him.] After Yaakov's final defeat of Lavan, Lavan became his friend. He revealed to him the great secret that the Sfas Emes taught.

He said that Hashem warned him not to speak to Yaakov "מטוב ועד רע", 'from good to evil'. From the wording we understand that the טוב is worse than the רע, because its mentioned as 'Not only good, also evil' don't speak to Yaakov. Lavan taught Yaakov that the good of Reshaim makes their evil seem benign.

Rashi comments on these words, 'The good of Reshaim is bad for Tzaddikim'. Lavan gave Yaakov a legacy for the last generation of Ikvis DiMeshicha.

The Tefillin are from the Fiftieth Level of Holiness Which is Emunah

We place Tefillin on the forehead, above the brain, our organ of reasoning. We have Emunah in Hashem even when our understanding falls short of grasping the meaning of his ways.

In the Tefillin are scrolls upon which are written the verses of Shema, with which we accept upon ourselves the belief in Hashem.

The Tefillin are from the fiftieth level of holiness, Emunah. The Zohar states that one who doesn't put on Tefillin can't have Emunah in Hashem.

The Tefillin are in Opposition to the Terafim of Lavan

The first time Tefillin are mentioned in the Torah, it is in the clause that begins with the commandment to sanctify a firstborn son. The fiftieth level of holiness is the 'Reishis', first, as it contains the original expression of holiness. (Although this seems counter-intuitive since we reach this level last, it is nevertheless the first from an objective perspective.) Therefore, the Tefillin are first mentioned in the Torah together with the commandment to sanctify the firstborn.

Lavan's power came from the fiftieth level of tumah. His Terafim, magic apparatus, were produced in a very gruesome manner. A firstborn male was slain, his head preserved and names of tumah inscribed and placed in his mouth. The head would be pasted on the wall and would answer the queries presented to it¹⁶. Lavan's power came from the firstborn of tumah.

In opposition to Lavan's Terafim, Yaakov occupied himself with the Mitzvah of Tefillin (with the rods in the pools of water), the Mitzvah that is connected to the firstborn. בני בכורי ישראל, my firstborn-son Yisroel, is gematria תפילין, and He commanded us to lay Tefillin (they both equal 841). The Tefillin come from the fiftieth level of holiness which is Reishis.

During the last six years of his stay at Lavan, Yaakov prepared himself for his final encounter with him. Through the Mitzvah of Tefillin, which is from the fiftieth level of holiness, he fortified himself to withstand Lavan's future attempt to destroy him with the fiftieth level of tumah.

Maintaining Vigilance in Exile

The Sfas Emes states that the entire twenty years that Yaakov was by Lavan, he didn't become distracted from his task for even a second.

The Torah usually puts a space between different topics. These are called 'Parshios', passages. In Parshas Vayetzei there is not even one Parsha, there is no break¹⁷.

Yaakov knew that in order to survive the spiritually brutal conditions of exile, one cannot let his guard down for even a moment. This message was immortalized for his descendants in the lack of any Parshios in the Parsha of Vayetzei.

Liberating the Sheep of Lavan with the Mitzvah of Tefillin

The Zohar states that 974 generations of souls were reincarnated in Lavan's sheep. Before Yaakov's arrival at Lavan's house, they were trapped by the Sitra Achra whose chief headquarters was Lavan's home¹⁸.

Yaakov brought them into holiness by implanting Emunah in them. He did so through the Mitzvah of Tefillin that he fulfilled with the rods in the water.

The sheep gazed upon these rods and were thereby released from their tragic fate of being trapped by Lavan, the chief of the Sitra Achra. They then gave birth to lambs which complied with the requirements that would enable them to be part of Yaakov's flock. The Midrash¹⁹ says that Yaakov had 600,000 sheep and the Zohar says that Yaakov brought them down with him to Egypt, where they were reincarnated into the 600,000 Jews who left Egypt.²⁰

"שמע ש"מ, 'he [Yaakov] made separate herds of his own', is gematria, "וישת לו עדרים לבדו"²¹ (they both equal 1118). Through the Mitzvah of Tefillin in which the words of Shema Yisroel are contained, and with which their message of Emunah is absorbed, Yaakov redeemed the sheep of Lavan and they merited becoming part of his possessions.

Tefillin of Rashi or Rabbeinu Tam?

Were we to ponder, what kind of Tefillin did Yaakov fulfill with the rods, Tefillin according to the opinion of Rashi, or according to Rabbeinu Tam?

The answer, of course, is both; like every pious Jew who dons both!

The verse describes the process through which Yaakov prepared these rods, "ויפצל בהן" 'פצלות לבנות מחשף הלבן אשר על-המקלות. ויצג את המקלות אשר פצל ברהטים בשקתות המים"²² 'He peeled white strippings in them, laying bare the white of the rods. He stuck the rods which he had peeled in the runnels in the watering pools etc'.

The words פצלות לבנות, white strippings, is gematria תפילין דרש"י (they both equal 1094). פצל, the rods which he had peeled, is gematria תם דרבנו תם (they both equal 1282). Amazing!

With these rods, Yaakov prepared both pairs of Tefillin for his descendants to be able to strengthen themselves in Emunah during Golus.

Rachel Nullified the Power of the Terafim

Lavan was irate that his Terafim had disappeared and accused Yaakov of stealing them. Yaakov denied the charge, but not believing him, Lavan exerted himself tremendously to comb through all of Yaakov's possessions to search for his precious Terafim.

Rachel hid the Terafim beneath her and excused herself to her father that she was incapable of getting up. Lavan accepted the excuse, and didn't demand that she get up.

This seems strange. Lavan was desperate for his Terafim, and had reason to suspect that Rachel stole them. The excuse she gave him was very unconvincing. Why did he fall for it?

Tzaddikim have the power of detecting holiness with their smell.

There was a controversy in the time of the Sfas Emes surrounding the rediscovery of Techeles, a blue dye that the Torah commands we use for the Tzitzis. When it was bought before him, the Sfas Emes smelled it and said, 'I don't smell Techeles'. Those who felt it was Techeles could not argue against the holy sense of smell of the Sfas Emes.

Reshaim have a sense of smell in tumah. They sense with their smell if tumah is present. When Lavan came near Rachel, he didn't 'smell' his Terafim. Rachel had nullified their power with her holiness and Lavan had no reason to suspect that she was sitting on them.

Chanukah is the Fiftieth Level of Holines

The physical world is comprised of seven dimensions. Seven times seven is forty nine. The eighth corresponds to the fiftieth. Eight/fifty are numbers which represents sublime heavenly spheres.

The essence of Chanukah is eight/fifty. It has eight days and the miracle of Chanukah took place with שמן, oil. The word שמן is similar to the number שמונה, eight.

Reading about the Tefillin of Yaakov in Parshas Vayetzei, the first Shabbos in Kislev, is a preparation for Chanukah. They are both from the fiftieth level of holiness.

The twenty fifth day of Kislev, when Chanukah begins, corresponds to the twenty five letters of Shema, the ultimate declaration of Emunah that is placed into the Tefillin.

ה' נר חנכה is gematria פון הבעל צפון, (they both equal 333). With the power of Emunah of Chanukah, the kelipah of the idol 'Baal Tzefon', the representation of the fiftieth level of tumah, which is atheism, is broken.

May we merit preparing properly for Chanukah, by submitting ourselves with self sacrifice to the sovereignty of Hashem, as the Chashmonaim in the time of Chanukah did, and thereby merit,

אור חדש על ציון תאיר ונזכה כלנו יחד במהרה לאורו

¹ זוהר ח"א קס"ב

² חגיגה ד' ע"ב

³ יג:כג

⁴ שבת פח ע"ב

⁵ במדבר יז:יג

⁶ שמואל א' ג:יד

⁷ ראש השנה יח ע"א

⁸ תנחומא ויצא פרק ב'

⁹ אוה"ח שמות ג:ח

¹⁰ שמות יג:יח

¹¹ בראשית כח: & לא:כב

¹² דברים כו:ה

¹³ שמות יד:לא

¹⁴ בראשית לג:ד

¹⁵ רבה שיר השירים פרשה ז' סימן ט', רבה בראשית פרשה ע"ח סימן ט'

¹⁶ עיין תרגום יונתן בן עזיאל

¹⁷ בעל הטורים כח:י

¹⁸ ובילקוט ראובנו ויצא עה"כ אעבור בכל צאנך (אות קנ"ג)

¹⁹ רבה בראשית פ' ע"ג ס' י"א

²⁰ זוהר, ילקוט ראובני

²¹ בראשית ל:מ

²² בראשית ל:לז