

Parshas Vayeitzei is a very critical and important parsha. In between this parsha and the last, there is a gap of 14 years. At the end of Parshas Toldos, Yaakov Ovinu is running away from Eisov. He was sent by Yitzchok to go to the house of Lovon to find a wife. Lovon is a master thief and a swindler and Yaakov is going to be spending over two decades living in his household. He will be bringing up a family who will eventually become the Shivtei Koh. We know that Yaakov is an 'ish tom yoshev ohalim'. He was sitting and learning in Yitzchok's yeshiva. How is he going to manage and maintain his integrity in such an extremely dishonest environment?

For 14 years, Yaakov goes to learn in the yeshiva of Shem and Ever to prepare for this difficult environment. What is the difference between these two yeshivos?

Yitzchok's yeshiva was an open house. Like Avrohom Ovinu, he taught Torah to everyone and anyone who wanted to come and learn. But Yeshivas Shem and Ever was very closed, very secluded – it was an environment of total immersion in a life of kedushoh and taharoh with no distractions from the world outside. It is interesting that this is how Yaakov prepared to live in the house of Lovon.

There was a mesorah from the Ovos which said that Klal Yisroel would come from a family of 12 children who would become the Shivtei Koh. Avrohom had 8 children and he didn't merit to found Klal Yisroel himself. He passed it on to Yitzchok, but he had two children and he also didn't merit to found Klal Yisroel. Yitzchok passed it on to Yaakov, and Yaakov was intensely working on himself to be worthy to have those 12 sons who would become the Shivtei Koh.

Yaakov left Be'er Sheva and came to Har Hamoriah, and took from the stones of the place to put under his head. The midrash has a few opinions about how many stones were taken. One says it was 2 stones, another says it was 3 stones, and another says it was 12 stones. The first opinion understood that these two stones represented Avrohom Ovinu and Yitzchok Ovinu. They both didn't merit to raise Klal Yisroel. Yaakov said if I wake up in the morning and these stones fuse into one, then it is a sign I can be worthy of building Klal Yisroel.

The midrash is telling us that Avrohom had both the middoh of chessed and gevuroh but developed the middoh of extreme chessed. But this was not in balance and this produced Yishmoel. Therefore, Avrohom didn't merit to raise Klal Yisroel himself. Yitzchok developed the middoh of gevuroh to the extreme. It too was not in balance and this produced Eisov. Therefore, Yitzchok didn't merit to raise Klal Yisroel. Yaakov said that if he would be successful in striking the perfect balance between Avrohom's chessed and Yitzchok's gevuroh and fuse both of them within himself in the right proportions, then he will know that he will be worthy of raising Klal Yisroel.

Yaakov goes to sleep on top of these stones and has a dream of a ladder with malochim going up and down on it. The midrash says they were going up to see the kisei hakovod which had four sides, each with a different face. One was a lion, one was an eagle, one was an ox and one was a man. The Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim explains that these were really three human faces with a semblance of these three animals, and one that was the face of the perfect human being with no animalistic tendencies. The malochim saw the face of the perfect man on the kisei hakovod, and then went down and saw that this was the face of Yaakov Ovinu. He struck the perfect balance in his personality with no excesses in any direction – not towards chessed

and not towards gevuroh.

The Ramban comments on the possuk at the end of Parshas Vayigash where Yaakov made a mizbeach to Hashem the G-d of his father Yitzchok. He says it means that Yaakov started with the middoh of gevuroh of Yitzchok, and then added the middoh of chessed of Avrohom to balance it out. This was Yaakov Ovinu – the perfect human being.

The other opinion says Yaakov took 12 stones – each one represented a different middoh of the future 12 shevotim. They were all subsumed within Yaakov and came out of Yaakov.

There were four malochim going up and down this ladder – this refers to the four goluyos that Klal Yisroel will go through – Bavel, Poras, Yovon and Edom. The first three were going up and then eventually coming down. The last one – Edom – was just going up and up and not coming down! Yaakov asked Hashem, will the last golus of Edom ever come to an end? Hashem answered that he will eventually come down when Moshiach comes. Yaakov sees all future Jewish history unfolding in front of him, and he is hoping to be the one to merit giving birth to an entire nation that will serve Hashem.

Hashem promised Yaakov he will be the one who will eventually inherit this land and continue the task that the Ovos started. He will be protected and eventually come back. What request does Yaakov ask of Hashem before going on this important journey? It is interesting. When Eliezer came to Choron to get Rivka, he came with camels and servants and gifts – very impressive things to offer the family. But Yaakov has nothing! But he doesn't ask from Hashem anything more than bread to eat and clothing to wear! He walks all the way to Choron on foot!

We learn the essence of bitachon from Yaakov Ovinu.

Rav Avrohom ben HaRambam says bitachon means that I have sincere goals in avodas Hashem and I ask Hashem to give me the necessary material needs to achieve those goals. If I do my maximum effort, then I can rely on Hashem. That is bitachon. This is what Yaakov asks for. Bitachon is not that you can rely on Hashem to give you endless millions and luxuries just for the asking – without doing anything to justify it. The Ramban says when you want material wealth, there is no guarantee that you'll get it. But if you are focused on spiritual goals and you do your maximum to achieve it, Hashem will guarantee success. This is the bitachon the Ovos had. Yaakov just wanted the means to achieve success in founding Klal Yisroel. He engaged in hishtadlus, but he relied on Hashem to get the basic means he needed to fulfill his spiritual goals – no more than that.

Yaakov worked for Lovon who is the master swindler. Yaakov is completely honest throughout all the years working for him. Finally, after 14 years, Yaakov says it's time he works for himself. He told Lovon that when he first came to Lovon's household, Lovon was not well-off at all. Only because Yaakov came along did Lovon become very wealthy. So now he wants to work for himself to build up his own wealth. Yaakov made an elaborate plan to separate the flocks into white ones and different colored ones to ensure there will be no trickery. He has a genetic theory to make all the sheep give birth to colored and speckled sheep. It seems to work in a fantastic manner. Yaakov thinks his hishtadlus paid off.

The sons of Lovon accuse Yaakov of stealing back all of Lovon's wealth

and Lovon is furious! Yaakov realizes it is time to leave. He explains to his wives that he worked for their father Lovon with all his power – even though Lovon tried to swindle me out of my hard-earned wages a hundred times. Hashem protected me all these years. I had a dream last night that all my hishtadlus to genetically affect the sheep's offspring was really worthless. Hashem sent a maloch at night to bring all my female sheep to be impregnated by speckled males far away in order to make me wealthy.

We could really understand if Yaakov would have justified being dishonest with Lovon. After all, Lovon is being so dishonest with him! He tried to rob me blind! Why should I be honest? But that isn't how Yaakov responded to Lovon's trickery. Yaakov insisted on remaining honest. The Rambam at the end of Hilchos Sechirus learns from this approach of Yaakov that if you remain completely honest in business and not take unfair advantage of employees or employers, in the end you will become wealthy. This is one of the most important halachos of the Rambam you will learn. A hired worker has to be careful to not waste his employer's time. He has to work day and night with all his might as Yaakov worked for Lovon. And he will be rewarded in this world as well as the next.

The whole story is telling us that Yaakov had very serious goals in avodas Hashem. He wanted to raise 12 shevotim. He didn't ask Hashem for anything but simple survival. He made a deal with Lovon. Lovon tried to undercut the deal. Yaakov tried to make a hishtadlus which in the end didn't work. But Hashem made sure he would emerge wealthy despite everything. Why? Because Yaakov remained honest and did his work the way he understood to be the proper hishtadlus. Because of this, Hashem made Yaakov wealthy.

At the end, Lovon chased after Yaakov to get back his idols. He searched through all Yaakov's belongings with a fine-toothed comb and came up with nothing. Yaakov got angry and started to berate Lovon. Why do you accuse me of taking anything? You just went through all my belongings and didn't find anything that was yours! Chazal point out that Yaakov and his family lived with Lovon for 20 years and Lovon didn't find a single item that didn't belong to him? Not a spoon? Not a fork? This is the greatest testimony to Yaakov's impeccable honesty.

This is why Yaakov is the embodiment of emes. This is why Hashem made him wealthy.

Yaakov only asked for what he needed to survive and raise 12 shevotim. He never asked for wealth. So he had bitachon that Hashem would take care of the bare minimum. But Hashem gave him enormous wealth anyway because of his absolute honesty.

Now Yaakov comes back and he confronts Eisov. This is a very complex meeting. The last time Eisov saw Yaakov, he saw this simple, studious person who knew nothing about the world outside the beis midrash. Eisov was always the practical one who knew how to handle things in the outside world. And now Eisov sees that Yaakov is coming with massive wealth. What happened? Where did all this come from? It came from Hashem because of Yaakov's complete honesty.

There is a reason why the Torah tells us these stories and why Chazal expound on them in such great detail. It is so we can learn from them how to live our own lives. We have bitachon and we rely on Hashem to provide for us – if we are dedicated to pursuing spiritual goals. We only ask for the bare minimum to survive and accomplish those goals. Then Hashem will take care. Yes, you have to do hishtadlus, and Hashem is in back of it to make sure it happens.

The essential difference between a crooked and an honest person is their beliefs. They have a different understanding about who is in charge of their life and how one becomes wealthy and successful. The crooked person thinks he is on his own. It's all up to him. So he feels has no choice but to do whatever is necessary to ensure his success – even if it means stealing and cheating and cutting ethical corners in his business. But the honest person believes his wealth and success comes from Hashem. His hishtadlus is just for show. It is pointless to do anything against Hashem's will since Hashem is in charge of the outcome no matter what one does.

When you follow Hashem's rules, when you put yourself in Hashem's hands, He will help you. If you think you're in charge, then Hashem abandons you. You are much less likely to succeed if Hashem is not inclined to help you. This is a very key parsha with lessons by which one can live his entire life.