

PARSHAS VAYEITZEI

תשפ"ד

Yaakov leaves Be'er Sheva to Choron to get a wife. He travels by foot with no worldly possessions – he just has a walking stick. He stops at Beis-El and davens, then sets up some stones to sleep upon. In the morning, after his dream, he finds there is only one stone. The midrash teaches us that Yaakov set up these stones for a very important reason. The Ovot has a mesorah that the one who is destined to set up Klal Yisroel will have 12 sons. Yaakov is going to Choron to find a wife because he intends to have those 12 sons and be the one to found Klal Yisroel. But he isn't sure if he will be successful.

How many stones did Yaakov place? One shittah says 2, one says 3, and one says 12. Yaakov says, if these stones will merge into one, then I know that I will merit to build Klal Yisroel. What is the message of this midrash?

The shittah which says he set up 2 stones is saying that one stone represented Avrohom and the other represented Yitzchok. Yaakov is saying that Avrohom didn't merit to found Klal Yisroel. He had a son Yishmoel who wasn't worthy. Yitzchok didn't merit to found Klal Yisroel because he had Eisov. But if these two stones merge into one, it means I can embody the perfect balance between Avrohom's middoh of chesed and Yitzchok's middoh of din and then be worthy of founding Klal Yisroel with my children.

The shittah which says Yaakov set up 12 stones which merged into one, is saying that these 12 sons need to express the different types of kochos hanefesh and middos and darkei avodoh. If I can contain all those middos and kochos and then successfully pass them on to my 12 sons, then they can become the 12 shevotim of Klal Yisroel.

Let us go back to the two stones. Avrohom represented unlimited chesed, which turned out to be destructive. He gave birth to Yishmoel. Chesed needs to be restrained by logic and discipline.

A number of years ago there was a massive public campaign to free a single captured Israeli soldier called Gilad Shalit. The government acquiesced and freed 120 Hamas terrorist prisoners as an exchange. At the time, everyone celebrated. They thought it was a wonderful thing. Today, years later, the IDF is busy trying to hunt down those freed terrorists because they were the ones who planned and executed the horrific attack on October 7th. It was an excess of chesed which the Torah would never condone because it lacks balance. The Maharam MiRuttenburg sat in prison until his death and refused to be ransomed for the exorbitant amount his captors were demanding. Why? Because the halacha says it would set a clear precedent which will inspire future abductions, and would endanger all the rabbonim of Germany.

There is chesed and there is a balance which is needed. The Torah tells you when to apply chesed and rachamim and when not to apply it.

Shaul Hamelech had mercy on Agog and spared his life. Why? Because he felt sorry that he lost his kingdom and everything. But Agog took advantage of that mercy and fathered a child that night in captivity, and this led to Homon. This misplaced chesed of Shaul put the entire nation of Klal Yisroel in extreme danger down the line.

This is why Yaakov is Torah. He is the perfect balance between the middos of chesed and gevuroh. Unbalanced gevuroh leads to the evil of Eisov.

Yaakov is the highest of the Ovot. This is why he merited to father Klal Yisroel.

Yaakov owns nothing when he comes to Beis-El and he davens and goes to sleep. He has a vision of a ladder and the four malchuyos who will subjugate Klal Yisroel in the future. The malochim representing these four world empires first go up the ladder and then down, except for Edom's maloch. He seems to be going up and up and never coming down. Hashem reassures Yaakov that when Klal Yisroel will have widespread limud haTorah, this maloch of Edom will come down as well.

Yaakov Ovinu is shown the future of all Jewish history in this vision.

He reaches Lovon's house and starts to work for the master thief. You have the Ish Ho'Emes working for the Ish HaSheker. People make all kinds of excuses when they work for dishonest people. They rationalize that they can get involved with the sheker in order to make a living. But they are making a mistake because emes is a middoh that you live with. It is not just a description of statements – if it is true or false. It is an entire way of life. Once you start to be dishonest, it is habit-forming. It becomes a part of your personality. Yaakov never justifies acting in ways of sheker just because Lovon is a master swindler.

Yaakov wants to leave to go back to Yitzchok, and Lovon is desperate to keep him around because he is bringing so much brocho to Lovon's house. So, Yaakov makes a deal. I will stay to work if I can take all the newly born speckled and colored sheep as my salary – so it will be clear to everyone who owns it. I don't want any suspicion of geneivoh. Lovon has his genetic theory to take all the speckled and colored sheep away from Yaakov and leave him with only white ones so they couldn't produce his salary for him. Yaakov decided to make hishtadlus and had his genetic theory that could cause white female ewes to give birth to speckled and colored offspring without colored male rams. He exposed them visually to certain kinds of sticks during the breeding season.

People make fun of the Torah for this genetic theory which is obviously erroneous, but they don't read the pesukim carefully. It says Yaakov used this method as a form of hishtadlus, and Hashem took all of Lovon's speckled sheep and miraculously brought them over at night to impregnate his ewes and brought them back. It would be a smaller miracle than to make Yaakov's genetic theory work.

Yaakov became fabulously wealthy from this new-born flock of speckled and colored sheep, and Hashem says now it is time to return to Yitzchok. Yaakov calls a meeting with his wives and tells them how hard he worked for their father – in complete honesty – while Lovon swindled him 100 times. Hashem saw how badly Lovon was cheating me and He intervened to save my fortune. Now He told me to return to Yitzchok's house.

The entire family leaves in a hurry to avoid being blocked by Lovon, and when Lovon finds out, he races to head them off. When they meet, Lovon berates Yaakov and accuses him of taking away his daughters and grandchildren like captives, and above all that, he accuses them of stealing Lovon's idols. Yaakov responds by letting Lovon go through all Yaakov's belongings and defies him to find anything that doesn't rightfully belong to Yaakov! And Lovon couldn't! The midrash says this is astounding. Imagine living in your father-in-law's household for 20 years and you don't come away with a single fork or a spoon that isn't yours? It is an example of Yaakov's extreme dedication to the middoh of emes.

Then Yaakov unloads on Lovon and reminds him how honestly he acted when he worked for him for all those years. He never took breaks and

he always compensated for any losses. The Rambam says we learn from Yaakov how scrupulously a hired laborer should act regarding earning his wages. The Rambam says this meticulous honesty is what gave Yaakov the merit to have so much wealth. Yes, we need to do our hishtadlus, but Hashem decides who actually becomes wealthy. He makes one demand of us – absolute, unbudgeable honesty, then you are guaranteed success. Emes is a middoh that becomes part of a person. The minute you start to cheat and deceive, it seeps into your personality and corrupts the entire human being.

Now Yaakov is on his way to confront Eisov. This is an entirely different challenge – Eisov lives by the sword. He is physically aggressive and violent. Eisov remembers Yaakov as a nebech who sits and learns all day and knows nothing about the world. Yaakov is now being accompanied by malochim. What zechus did Yaakov have to be escorted by malochim to confront Eisov? His middas ho'emes. This is what made him worthy of raising such a family that will be Klal Yisroel, and obtaining such wealth. Eisov is duly impressed. This is not the shlemiel brother he grew up with! What destroys Eisov in the end of days is Yaakov's dedication to the emes of Torah.

The Torah teaches us how to live our lives. The Shiltei Gibborim says since our income is decreed on Rosh Hashonoh, the hishtadlus we make is just a façade. There is no way to earn more than that which was decreed, no matter how much we try. If we lie and cheat to get ahead in our business, we reveal that we don't believe Hashem is in charge

of our parnossoh. It then makes no sense that Hashem will reward our cheating with extra wealth, and these attempts are bound to backfire.

Therefore, the Shiltei Gibborim says, if it was decreed that someone make 10 million dollars one year, and you decide to steal a million, this million will be subtracted from the original decree and you will wind up with only nine in the end. The Maharshal in Bava Kamma remarks that the laws of geneivas daas are not to protect the potential victims of geneivas daas. They are to protect the sensitivity of the potential perpetrator and to prevent him from corrupting his neshomo. It doesn't matter who the victim is – Jew, non-Jew, Israeli government, American government. Sheker is sheker and it corrupts your personality.

Emes is a very deep middoh. Sheker is sheker.

Yaakov Ovinu's experiences in this week's parsha send us the clear message that Torah, founding Klal Yisroel, and material success all come from scrupulous honesty. Compromises in our integrity don't lead to success in the end. Emes is a middoh and sheker is a middoh. It becomes a part of you. There is no such thing as just a little bit of sheker.

There are times when sheker is allowed for the sake of other Torah values. But a tzurboh mi'rabbonon has to know that his word is his word and there can be no compromises with the emes. This is the demand of everyone who learns Torah.