

Inspired Torah perspectives for our wondrous generation

Eilecha weekly



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WRITTEN BY: R' YAAKOV KLEIN AND BINYAMIN CASPER
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וישב יעקב בארץ מגורי אביו בארץ כנען:

MEKOR

BEREISHIS 37:1

Yaakov settled in the land of his father's sojourning, in the land of Canaan.

MEANING

CHIZKUNI, KLI YAKAR, RASHI

After describing the settling of Eisav at the end of parshas Vayishlach, the Torah now turns to Yaakov Avinu. In order to ensure that we don't read the word "אביו" as a reference to Avraham Avinu and assume that Yaakov settled in *Ur Kasdim*, the *pasuk* specifies that Yaakov settled in the land of Canaan. The *pasuk* changes its preferred word for "settling" (from "וישב" to "ימגור") as a veiled criticism of Yaakov: while Yitzchak Avinu only saw himself as a sojourner in *olam hazeh*, only passing through, Yaakov Avinu "sought to settle in peace" and achieve a sense of comfort in this fleeting world.

MESSAGE

MEI HASHILOACH

The Ishbitzer understands this *pasuk* on a deeper level: **בארץ מגורי אביו** - Having reached the exalted levels of his father, Yitzchak Avinu, **בארץ כנען** - and having attained the spiritual ideal of humility (כנען - הכנעה), **וישב יעקב** (קִיבַּץ) - Yaakov Avinu felt that he had reached the ceiling of his personal growth. He sought to settle, to kick into a lower gear and enjoy the fruits of his labor. Ultimately however, as Chazal tell us, **קִיבַּץ עָלָיו רוּחוֹ שֶׁל יוֹסֵף**, a new challenge was about to arise, one that would elicit ever-greater levels of spiritual greatness.

The message is clear: as long as we are breathing and life courses through our veins, there is always more we can accomplish, always new horizons for which to lift anchor and set sail. Certainly, we must value and celebrate our efforts and accomplishments. Every inch of ground gained is so precious to Hashem! But the growth mindset encouraged by the Torah should ensure that we never become settled or complacent with our level of spiritual engagement. The Torah's description of Yaakov's ladder, "וראשו מגיע השמימה" evokes a ladder that is infinitely tall, perpetually stretching heavenward. Like the Chanukah flame which seeks to leap off the wick, may we merit to tap into our inner fire - the **נר ה' נשמת אדם** - that constantly seeks more elevated heights and profounder depths in our avodas Hashem.

VESSLS OF LIGHT

IN HIS SEFER *Hachsharas HaAvreichim*, the Piacezner Rebbe Hy"ד teaches that one of the primary revelations of the Baal Shem Tov and his students was the idea that while the reality in which we live contains both the coarse vessel of physicality and the spiritual light of life and vitality, this is only one level of truth. On a deeper level, in addition to *containing* spiritual light, the vessels *are themselves made up of spiritual light* as well. This elevated awareness of "אין עוד מלבדו", that there is quite literally nothing else but G-d's Infinite Light, served as the foundation for the Chassidic masters' stress on the ability to elevate physicality and use the natural world for spiritual means, their teaching that even the most mundane areas of life offer opportunities to serve God, their appreciation of the journey toward a goal, and their focus on the presence of Hashem that can be found in all things.

Virtually all of the Chassidic masters write that Yaakov Avinu personified this outlook and the lifestyle it engendered. Going out to work in the fields of Lavan, Yaakov attained the level of being able to serve Hashem even with the most mundane and physical acts. The Kabbalists revealed that the episode of Yaakov's breeding the cattle to produce streaked, speckled, and spotted animals hints at the some of the loftiest levels in the system of Hashem's creation of our realm of existence. This is Yaakov Avinu: the tzaddik able to perceive the deepest spiritual insight within the darkest depths of physicality.

In this week's parsha, the Torah tells us that Yaakov loved Yosef כי בן זקנים הוא לו – for he was born in Yaakov's old age. Targum Onkelos translates this verse as, "אָרִי בֶר חֲכִימֵי הוּא" – for he was a wise son. The Degel Machaneh Ephraim sees a deep message hidden in these words.

The Zohar teaches that Yaakov and Yosef share the identical spiritual aspect. Like his father, Yosef HaTzaddik had the ability to discern Hashem's presence from behind the mask of physicality. Chazal tell us that when Yosef was confronted with the seductions of Eishes Potiphar, the likeness of Yaakov Avinu appeared to him in the window. Seeing Yaakov's image in that moment reminded Yosef of his father's mission: the importance of sensing Hashem's presence in even the most physical challenge, looking past the lowly temptation to find the spiritual significance shining from deep within. Indeed, the method Yosef used to escape (breaking away from the grasp of Eishes Potiphar by casting off his outer garment) itself hints to the spiritual process taking place – the casting aside of the coarse, external temptation to find and heed Hashem's bidding in this difficult challenge.

Although the word "בן" is Aramaic for "son", it can also mean "outside" (ss in the phrase "תוכו כבדו") The Degel says that this ability of Yosef was the reason why Yaakov loved him so intensely:

"בן" – even in the most physical arenas, outside the tangible realms of holiness, "חֲכִימֵי הוּא" – he was able to find divine Wisdom and spirituality.

EVEN OUTSIDE THE REALMS OF TANGIBLE SPIRITUALITY, HASHEM'S PRESENCE CAN BE DISCERNED.

- Rebbe Ephraim of Sudlykov zy"א

In *Bereishis* 39:8-9, when *Eishes Potiphar* attempts to seduce Yosef, Yosef's response and resistance is dual-faceted:

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 וַיִּמָּאן Unequivocal refusal | 2 וְכָל אֲשֶׁר-יִשְׁלוּ נָתַן בְּיָדִי, וְאִיךָ אֶעֱשֶׂה הַרְעָה הַגְּדֹלָה הַזֹּאת... Explanation of his position and adherence to avoid sin |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

An examination of the text reveals that Yosef's refusal *precedes* his explanation and reasoning. When we're presented with a decision to make, we state reasons for and against the choices and then finalize the decision. The order of Yosef's response appears to be inverted; once he refuses her advance, why is there need for an explanation?

 Why does Yosef choose to first list his decision and then his explanation, and what exactly is his explanation?

Two strategies to employ against the *Yetzer Hara*:

|  Resistance / Avoidance | Firm Devotion / Bonds of Honour  | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
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| Strength of character | Strength of duty, code and loyalty | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Courage to just say 'no' to something sinful or harmful. Instinctive knowledge that a person/location/action is simply not for me and runs counter to my essence. | On account of the fact that I have been entrusted with something special, I do not want to abuse that faithfulness; instead, I retain allegiance to the person who trusted me. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Not every moral crossroad requires weighing. Not every issue needs to be reasoned; sometimes my thoughts or justifications work against me / what's correct. | Just as I wouldn't abuse jointly-held money with a partner, I feel honour-bound not to abuse my free will. I have a code that obligates me not to violate or pervert the gifts I've been given. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| The thought of committing the sin or the object of the sin itself is disgusting or repulsive to my sensibilities, therefore I reject or avoid it entirely. Pragmatic decision-making; when I realize the fleeting nature of sin versus the reward of eternal life afforded by Torah and mitzvos, I choose the way of Torah and nullify myself entirely to the <i>Ratzon Hashem</i> . | <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="background-color: #D3D3D3;">Torah Text</th> <th style="background-color: #FFD700;">Sfas Emes</th> <th style="background-color: #D8BFD8;">Further Explanation</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">הֵן אֲדֹנָי</td> <td style="text-align: center;">I have a Master.</td> <td style="text-align: center;">i.e., Hashem.</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">לֹא יָדַע אֱתֵי מַה-בְּבִית</td> <td>He doesn't know my head (i.e., I have free will, so He 'doesn't control' my psyche).</td> <td>Hashem didn't make a world without free choice, devoid of sin; I control my domain.</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">וְכָל אֲשֶׁר יֵשׁ לוֹ נָתַן בְּיָדִי</td> <td>With His unbounded freedom of choice, He has granted me free will in my hand.</td> <td>I intend to use this gift of free will properly, to wholeheartedly accept עול מלכות שמים.</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">אֵינְנִי גָדוֹל בְּבֵית הַזֶּה מִמֶּנִּי</td> <td>There is nobody quite like me in this world.</td> <td>Nobody confronts the exact challenges I am given, but I'm confident in my ability & loyalty.</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> | Torah Text | Sfas Emes | Further Explanation | הֵן אֲדֹנָי | I have a Master. | i.e., Hashem. | לֹא יָדַע אֱתֵי מַה-בְּבִית | He doesn't know my head (i.e., I have free will, so He 'doesn't control' my psyche). | Hashem didn't make a world without free choice, devoid of sin; I control my domain. | וְכָל אֲשֶׁר יֵשׁ לוֹ נָתַן בְּיָדִי | With His unbounded freedom of choice, He has granted me free will in my hand. | I intend to use this gift of free will properly, to wholeheartedly accept עול מלכות שמים. | אֵינְנִי גָדוֹל בְּבֵית הַזֶּה מִמֶּנִּי | There is nobody quite like me in this world. | Nobody confronts the exact challenges I am given, but I'm confident in my ability & loyalty. |
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The same instrument can't be used for everything; the more strategies we have against the *Yetzer Hara*, the better off we are:

- At times, the best weapon is the strength to **instinctively avoid** temptation or immediately retreat. This is the ideal first tool.
- Resultingly / at other times, we regard Hashem as our **partner** and this inspires us to ensure we don't abuse His trust in us.