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JUST DO IT

CHAIM BITTERMAN ('13)

Perek 28 pasukim 20-21 state: "Then Yaakov took a vow, saying, "If G-d will be with me, will guard me... And give me...and I will return in peace to my father's home, and Hashem will be a G-d to me."

Rashi interprets this as a conditional vow. Yaakov is saying only if God provides for me will I take Him as my God. This is a very difficult idea to digest, for how could Yaakov doubt Hashem or make a condition with Him when he has *nevuah* that *Hashem* will take care of him?

There are many answers to this troubling question. The Rambam says not to read it as Yaakov having a lack of faith in Hashem, but rather in himself. Yaakov thought that perhaps he is not worthy because he has sinned.

The Sforno and Kli Yakar suggest that Yaakov is not demanding physical protection and sustenance from Hashem, but rather, he is requesting that Hashem help him refrain from sinning. Yaakov is merely telling Hashem that if He would help him not to falter, then His service would be much greater.

The Daat Zekeinim and the Ohr HaChaim say Yaakov's declaration is not a condition at all, but rather a promise. The *pasuk* says "When God will be with me, will guard me..." as opposed to "If God will be with me, will guard me..." This interpretation stems from the word "אם" within the *pasuk*, which is usually translated as "if" but in a few rare cases, like this one, it is translated as 'when'. The Abarbanel says that Yaakov is asking Hashem whether his *nevuah* is real or if it has just come to him because he has been at the holy place of *Har Hamoriah*.

LIGHT IN THE DARK

JACOB EPSTEIN ('13)

In *Parshat Vayeitzei*, Yaakov left *Be'er Sheva* in order to travel to *Charan*. On his way, he came to a place, took some of the stones, placed them around him, and rested upon them. It is here that Yaakov experienced one of the greatest revelations of G-dliness in history. Why, despite his greatness, does Yaakov only merit to have a great revelation at night? Furthermore, why does Yaakov have to be asleep for this revelation to occur?

Our Sages explained the answer to this question through a metaphor. When a person lights a candle in an illuminated room, the effects are difficult to perceive. However, when one lights a candle in a dark room, the effects are magnificent and reveal things that had previously been totally undetected. Perhaps Hashem made Yaakov's revelation happen at night, rather than during the day, so that Yaakov would be able to fully grasp and comprehend what Hashem was trying to show him.

There is another answer to this question. It can be said that the way each of the three *Avot* lived is equivalent to a time of day. Avraham lived in the night and early dawn, when the world did not yet know of the one true G-d. Yitzchak lived in the day, when the world was bright; now that the world had the teachings of Avraham. Yaakov lived at sunset, returning to a darkened era, a time during which the Jewish people would go down to Egypt and become enslaved. This dream in the night was to assure Yaakov that during the darkest night of the Jewish people, we would experience our greatest revelation.

This concept of night can be applied to our own lives. Right now, we, the Jewish people, are in the darkest night of our history- our most prolonged exile. Perhaps G-d wasn't only trying to assure Yaakov that the Jews would be fine in Egypt and will come out even stronger than before. Maybe He was also trying to assure us, the Jews in the year 5771, that our greatest light is yet to reveal itself and on that day we will experience the greatest revelation of G-dliness in our history.

DIVINE ELECTION

ADAM POLIAK ('11)

In *The Parallel Between Yaakov and Abraham*, Rav Yonatan Grossman stresses the similarities between the lives of Yaakov and his paternal grandfather Avraham. Not only are both Avraham and Yaakov forced to flee “from [their] land[s], [their] birthplace[s]” (12:1), but the Torah’s language is strikingly similar in regards to both journeys.

Just as Hashem tells Avraham “*lech lecha*” in the introductory sentence of *Parshat Lech Lecha*, Isaac tells Yaakov in chapter 27 verse 43 “*berach lecha*” when he commands his son to run from Esav. Furthermore, while fleeing, both patriarchs are comforted by Hashem: “I will bless you...” (12:2) and “...Behold I am with you...” (28:15). This connection between grandfather and grandson is further implied by the strange language in chapter 28 verse 13. When Hashem introduces Himself to Yaakov, Hashem describes Himself as “I am Hashem, God of Avraham **your father** and God of Yitzchak.” In his commentary on Chumash, the Or Hachaim explains that “your father” is emphasized because “*Yerushat Avraham nitna l’-Yaakov, lo l’-Esav*” – “the inheritance of Abraham,” i.e. his legacy, which Rabbi Meir Soloveichik describes in *How Not to Become a Jew* as “Abraham’s love of justice and righteousness” (*Commentary*, Jan 2006, pg 44), “was given to Yaakov, and not to Esav.”

This begins to answer the following question: why must Yaakov be so similar to Avraham? Yitzchak is portrayed as completely pure, evidenced by his inability to leave the *kedushah* of *Eretz Yisrael* despite the famine. Yitzchak’s stature has raised the bar- why should Yaakov now have to flee?

Rav Grossman proposes the following answer. Unlike the tension between Yitzchak and Yishmael, Avraham’s other son, the rift between Yaakov and Esav creates a major issue since “Yaakov and Esav were meant to comprise the joint continuation of Yitzchak’s legacy” (Grossman). When this ideal is forced to be abandoned, the process of choosing must begin again.

This system of divine election does not come without pain and suffering. Yaakov’s stay at his uncle’s home is filled with constant turmoil; when Yaakov is fortunate enough to return home, he suffers the loss of Rachel, his most beloved wife. These tribulations are the results of Yaakov’s exile, which is caused by his conflict with Esav. Currently, it is important for us to be inclusive and to close the widening schism within the Jewish community, in order to prevent the tragedies caused by infighting and internal conflict.

ANYTIME ANYPLACE

AVINOAM FOONBERG ('12)

Rashi comments on the word ‘*vayeitzei*’, saying that when a *tzadik* leaves, there is a profound impression that a locale’s beauty, glory, and grandeur depart as well. In reality, Yaakov did not want to leave Israel, and felt that departing would be a disastrous move. He felt that he belonged in the Holyland. However, after he spent the night “*ba’makom*”, he became happy, because he experienced an encounter with Hashem and received assurance regarding his departure.

Why did Yaakov need the reassurance from Hashem? Furthermore, what did Hashem say to Yaakov that helped ease his pain of having to leave *Eretz Yisrael*?

