

At the beginning of this week's *Parashah*, Yaakov sends a message to his brother Esav: "Im Lavan garti / I have sojourned with Lavan." Based on the fact that "Garti" (גרתי) has the same Hebrew letters and *Gematria* (613) as "Taryag" (תריג), *Rashi z"l* explains Yaakov's message: "I kept the *Taryag* / 613 commandments and did not learn from Lavan's evil ways."

Why would Esav care if Yaakov kept the *Mitzvot* while living with Lavan?

R' Nachum Mordechai Friedman z"l (1874-1946; *Tchortkover Rebbe* in Vienna, Austria and *Eretz Yisrael*) explains: Esav maintained that this world belongs him and only the World-to-Come belongs to Yaakov. By what right then, does Yaakov enjoy this world also? The *Mishnah* (*Pe'ah* 1:1--recited every morning following the blessings over Torah learning) teaches: There are *Mitzvot* whose "fruits" we "eat" in this world, though the primary reward is reserved for the World-to-Come. Yaakov was saying, explains the *Tchortkover Rebbe*, "I performed those *Mitzvot*, too, so I am permitted to enjoy this world."

Alternatively, the *Tchortkover Rebbe* explains, there are multiple ways to defeat the *Yetzer Ha'ra*. One way is to deprive oneself of the pleasures of this world. A higher level, however, is to sanctify the pleasures of this world. When one truly enjoys this world for the sake of Heaven, the *Yetzer Ha'ra* is fooled: it sees a person enjoying this world, so it is satisfied, but it does not realize that this pleasure is actually an expression of holiness. [Yaakov was saying: "True, I keep enjoying this world, but I kept all 613 *Mitzvot*. My enjoyment of this world is actually an act of sanctity, which does not infringe on your rights."] (*Doresh Tov*)

Shabbat

R' Moshe ben Nachman z"l (*Ramban*; 1194-1270; Spain and *Eretz Yisrael*) writes: "The Torah commands us to remember *Shabbat* every day and not to confuse it with any other day, because, when we remember *Shabbat* at all times, we will always recall the act of Creation, and we will acknowledge at all times that the world has a Creator." (Commentary to *Shmot* 20:8)

R' Yissochor Weisberg z"l (Lakewood, N.J.; died 2022) elaborates: One would have thought that the purpose of recalling *Shabbat* every day is to honor *Shabbat*. However, *Ramban* tells us that it is not so. Rather, recalling *Shabbat* is an expression of *Emunah* / faith, helping us to remember that there was an act of Creation and there is a Creator.

If so, asks R' Weisberg, why do we need *Shabbat*? Let us simply have a *Mitzvah* to remember that *Hashem* created the world in six days--just as we have a *Mitzvah* to remember the Exodus, not a *Mitzvah* to remember *Pesach* for the sake of reminding us of the Exodus.

R' Weisberg answers: We read (*Devarim* 4:39), "You shall know this day and take to your heart that *Hashem*, He is the *Elokim*--in heaven above and on the earth below--there is none other." This verse teaches that there are two types of *Emunah*: "You shall know" refers to faith based on intellect ("*Emunah B'sechel*"), knowing something as a dry fact. "You shall . . . take to your heart" refers to faith based on experience ("*Emunah B'chush*"), actually sensing the truth of the matter.

R' Moshe ben Maimon z"l (*Rambam*; 1135-1204; Spain and Egypt) writes (in *Hil. Yesodei Ha'Torah* 8:1) that *Bnei Yisrael* did not have faith in Moshe because he performed wonders, including the Ten Plagues. After all, wonders can be the result of magic. Rather, they had faith in Moshe because they experienced *Hashem* speaking to him at *Har Sinai*. R' Weisberg explains: Having faith in Moshe because of the Plagues would have been an intellectual belief, since it is based on the probability that Moshe caused the Plagues miraculously, rather than by magic. In contrast, faith that is based on hearing *Hashem* speak to Moshe is experiential *Emunah*--a higher level of faith.

Similarly, R' Weisberg concludes, believing in Creation only because we have a tradition about it from our ancestors would be merely *Emunah B'sechel*, an intellectual exercise. But, when we observe *Shabbat*, "resting" because *Hashem* did so after He created the world, we are, in a small way, experiencing for ourselves the days of Creation. (*Yoma D'nishmeta*, ch.1)

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“I have been diminished by all the kindnesses . . .” (32:11)

Our Sages teach that Yosef was taken away from his father Yaakov for 22 years (beginning in next week’s *Parashah*) to punish Yaakov for the 22 years that he was away and did not honor his own parents. R’ Meir Hakohen Popperos z”l (1624-1662; Poland and *Eretz Yisrael*; arranger of the writings of the *Arizal*’s students and a prolific author in his own right) writes:

True, Yaakov was honoring his parents when he listened to them and went away. However, our Sages say that Esav excelled at honoring his parents, and he was actively honoring his parents for all the years that Yaakov was away. Thus, said Yaakov, “I have been diminished by all the kindnesses [that Esav performed in my absence].”

Alternatively, Yaakov meant the following: My parents sent me away to find a wife, which took me seven years. I stayed away another seven years to marry a second wife, and another six years after that to amass large herds of sheep and goats. As such, I cannot really argue that my absence--even the first seven years--was to honor my parents. Rather, “I have been diminished by all the kindnesses [that *Hashem* has performed for me--giving me a second wife and many animals.]” (*Tal Orot*)

“Your name shall not always be called Yaakov, but Yisrael shall be your name.” (35:10)

The *Gemara* (*Berachot* 13a) states that one who refers to Avraham by his former name, “Avram,” transgresses a commandment. Not so if one calls Yaakov by his original name, “Yaakov,” because *Hashem*, too, continued to use that name. [Until here from the *Gemara*]

Why? asks R’ Moshe Yair Weinstock z”l (1899-1982; Yerushalayim; author of 84 Torah works, primarily on *Kabbalah* and Jewish history). He explains:

Our Sages teach that a person has 248 *Aivarim* / limbs and organs. Originally, they say, Avram was master over only 243--the *Gematria* of “Avram” (אֲבְרָם)--of his *Aivarim*. Later, he became master over all 248 of his *Aivarim*, and his name was changed to “Avraham” (אֲבְרָהָם). (The additional letter “*Heh*” has a *Gematria* of five, making a total of 248.) In effect, Avraham subdued his *Yetzer Ha’ra* completely, to the point that there was no chance that he would cease to be “Avraham”--master of all his *Aivarim*.

Not so Yaakov. Yaakov fought a battle to overcome the guardian angel of Esav, an angel who is synonymous with the *Yetzer Ha’ra*. Yaakov won, but only after a battle. Moreover, our Sages say that the angel appeared to Yaakov as a Torah scholar and also as a gentile, signifying that one of the *Yetzer Ha’ra*’s favorite tools is to blur the lines between a *Mitzvah* and an *Aveirah* (for example: “It’s a *Mitzvah* to speak *Lashon Ha’ra* about that person,” or “There’s no *Mitzvah* to help a person like him!”). The *Yetzer Ha’ra* is conniving, and the battle is never-ending. Sometimes, Yaakov defeats the angel of Esav and is called “Yisrael,” but the battle goes on, and there is no guarantee of victory. Hence, Yaakov remains “Yaakov,” as well. (*Divrei Yair*)

“Yaakov became very frightened . . .” (32:8)

Midrash Rabbah teaches: There were two people whom *Hashem* promised to protect, but they still expressed fear. One of those people was the choicest among the Patriarchs--Yaakov Avinu; the other was the choicest among the Prophets--Moshe Rabbeinu.

Regarding Yaakov we read (*Tehilim* 135:4), “For G-d selected Yaakov.” And, *Hashem* made a promise to him, as we read (*Bereishit* 28:15), “Behold, I am with you. I will guard you wherever you go.” Nevertheless, Yaakov was afraid, as we read in our verse.

Likewise, we read about Moshe (*Tehilim* 106:23), “Moshe, His chosen one.” And, *Hashem* made a promise to him, as we read (*Shmot* 3:2), “I will be with you.” Nevertheless, we read (*Bemidbar* 21:34), “*Hashem* said to Moshe, ‘Do not fear him.’” Since *Hashem* said, “Do not be afraid,” we know that Moshe was afraid! [Until here from the *Midrash*]

R’ Avraham Eliyahu Meizes z”l (1901-1961; *Rosh Yeshiva* in the Soviet Union, France, and Israel) writes: In truth, Yaakov and Moshe had nothing to fear. But, we see here a difference between the righteous and the wicked. The righteous do not sin, but they worry that they may have sinned. The wicked do sin, but they do not worry about it.

There are several other things we can learn from here about the behavior of the righteous, R’ Meizes continues. First, even when a *Tzaddik* sees that his enemy’s downfall has begun and salvation seems to be approaching, he does not take for granted that he has merited salvation. For example, even after Haman was humiliated leading Mordechai around Shushan on a royal horse, Mordechai returned to his fasting and prayer (see *Esther* 6:12; *Megillah* 16a). The righteous understand that any enemy is merely an agent of *Hashem*’s Justice. *Hashem* has an unlimited supply of agents; thus, even if Haman was not destined to be *Hashem*’s agent to punish the Jewish People, someone else might be, unless the Jewish People fasted and prayed. Likewise, even after Yaakov defeated Esav’s guardian angel in battle, he did not take for granted that he was safe, and he continued to fear the consequences of any sins he may have committed.

Also, R’ Meizes writes, Yaakov and Moshe may have been afraid because they did not want “favors” from *Hashem*. Our Sages teach that *Hashem* would ideally have created the world with the Attribute of Strict Justice, but He knew that such a world could not survive, so he added a measure of Mercy. *Tzaddikim*, however, prefer to live in the ideal world of Strict Justice. This is what Yaakov meant when he said (*Bereishit* 28:21), “*Hashem* will be *Elokim* to me”--i.e., *Hashem*--the Divine Name that represents the Attribute of Mercy--should act toward me as *Elokim*--the Divine Name that represents the Attribute of Strict Justice.

(*Ben Avraham Al Ha’Torah*)