



A VORT FROM THE ROSH YESHIVA

פרשת ויצא

וַיֵּדֶר יַעֲקֹב נֶדֶר לֵאמֹר, אִם יְהִי אֱלֹקִים עִמָּדִי וְשָׁמְרֵנִי בַדֶּרֶךְ הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ וְנָתַן לִי לֶחֶם לֶאֱכֹל וּבִגְד לְלַבֵּשׁ. וְשָׁבְתִי בְשָׁלוֹם אֶל בֵּית אָבִי וְהָיָה ה' לִי לֵאלֹקִים. וְהָאֶבֶן הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַתִּי מִצְבֵּה יְהִיָּה בֵּית אֱלֹקִים, וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר תִּתֶּן לִי עֹשֶׂר אֶעֱשְׂרֶנּוּ לָךְ. (בראשית כח, כ - כב)

Then Yakov took a vow, saying, "If Hashem will be with me, will guard me on this way that I am going; will give me bread to eat and clothes to wear, and I will return in peace to my father's house, and Hashem will be a God to me – then this stone which I have set up as a pillar shall become a house of Hashem, and whatever You will give me, I shall repeatedly tithe it to You." (Bereishis 28:20-22)

רש"י: בשלום. שלום מן החטא, שלא אלמד מדרכי לבן.

והיה ה' לי לאלקים. שיחול שמו עלי מתחלה ועד סוף, שלא ימצא פסול בזרעי וכי'.

Rashi: In peace. Whole from sin, that I shall not learn from the ways of Lovon.

And Hashem will be a God to me. That His name will rest upon me from beginning to end, that no defect should be found in my offspring.

The *parshah* tells the story of Yakov's departure from his parents' home, where he had a vision from Hashem who promised him that he would never be alone on his journey. Hashem assured him that He would protect and support him along the way. After waking up, Yakov made a vow to Hashem that if He kept His promises, Yakov would build a House of Hashem and give *ma'aser*. Rashi explains that Yakov's conditions were based on what Hashem had promised him in the dream - to guard him, sustain him, and return him home to his father.

However, Yakov's condition of **בְּשָׁלוֹם**, *and I will return in peace*, seems inconsistent with the others. Rashi explains that this condition means that Yakov would return **שָׁלֵם** - free of defect caused by sin. But the Mizrachi questions why Yakov felt the need to introduce a new clause in the stipulation that Hashem had not mentioned in the dream.

Furthermore, the Meforshim question why Yakov says **אִם יְהִי אֱלֹקִים עִמָּדִי**, *If Hashem will be with me*, as though he is in doubt, since Hashem had promised these things to Yakov?

The Malbim explains that Yakov was certainly confident that all of Hashem's assurances would be fulfilled. Rather, Yakov innovated with the promise by adding the clause of **וְהָיָה ה' לִי לֵאלֹקִים**, *and Hashem will be a God to me*. Yakov was acknowledging that undeniably Hashem's guarantee would be realized since the promise of protection was that he be saved from physical harm, something that is completely in Hashem's hands. Here, however, Yakov sought assurance for his spiritual welfare. Since he knew, as Chazal (*Berachos 33b*) say: **הַכֹּל בְּיַדֵי שָׁמַיִם חוּץ מִיִּרְאַת שָׁמַיִם**, *Everything is in the hands of Heaven except for the fear of Heaven*, Yakov was afraid that he might not merit the spiritual armour required to survive his stay with Lovon. Therefore, he stipulated that only if he spiritually survives this perilous stopover by Lovon, would all the bountiful promises of Hashem have a purpose. If he were to *chas v'shalom* fall in *madreigah*, all the blessings would be in vain and he would no longer fulfil his vow.

We see here, from Yakov Avinu, something remarkable. He recognised that all these wonderful blessings of protection and sustenance were important, but only if they helped him in his *Avodas Hashem*. All the world's pleasures were of no use to him if they could not bring him closer to his ultimate goal of fulfilling the will of Hashem. He was therefore requesting Hashem's assistance to guide and help him remain loyal even in the face of difficulty.

This concept is demonstrated in what we say daily at the end of *Shacharis*: הוא יפתח לבנו בתורתו, וישם בלבנו אהבתו ויראתו ולעשות רצונו ולעבדו בלבב שלם, למען לא ניגע לריק, ולא נלד לבהלה *May He open our heart through His Torah and imbue our heart with love and awe of Him and that we may do His will and serve Him wholeheartedly, so that we do not struggle in vain nor produce for futility*. In this *tefillah*, we are proclaiming that our purpose in living is to do the will of Hashem. Without serving Hashem, life is worthless and all our toil is pointless. This is what Yakov affirmed: All Hashem's kindness to man is worthless if one is unable to serve Him.

With this background the Mizrahi's difficulty can now be resolved. This stipulation that he should be שלם, *whole*, from sin is crucial for Yakov's vow. Yakov was specifying that even if he were to receive physical security and sustenance from Hashem, he would not be able to feel total gratitude to Hashem if he was defected through sin. Yakov placed great importance on spiritual wholesomeness, and without it, he would have felt severely lacking and not obliged to keep his part of the vow.

We can obtain from here a most crucial lesson. All the gifts and kindness that Hashem gives us are only valuable if we use them to serve Him. If we don't, all our work and even our existence is unfortunately pointless. May Hashem grant us all the goodness we need, enabling us to serve Him and do His will בלב שלם, and by doing so we will be able to lead a productive life!

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