

GREAT FOR SHARING
AT THE SHABBOS TABLE!

בשבת



PARSHAS
TOLDOS

BY RABBI NETANEL NAAMAT
RABBI NAFTALI ZIONS
RABBI AVICHAI BENSOUSSAN

DIGGING IN YOUR HEELS

Parshas Toldos moves on from the story of Avraham, and continues with Yitzchak Avinu. Like his father Avraham, Yitzchak faced a famine,¹ one in which he was forced to move in order to find sustenance. However, unlike Avraham, Yitzchak did not end up leaving Eretz Yisrael for Mitzrayim. Though Yitzchak had intended to leave, Hashem stopped him, telling Yitzchak that Hashem would watch over him in Eretz Yisrael.

In response, Yitzchak remained in Gerar, where he was living when Hashem told him to stay in Israel. As Yitzchak's wealth grew, Avimelech, the king Gerar, requested that Yitzchak leave the area, so as to not incite the inhabitants with jealousy. Yitzchak then moved his retinue to the outskirts of Gerar, further out from the city.

Subsequently, Yitzchak attempted to dig wells, which were needed to accommodate his servants and sheep. Yet, every time a well was dug, the shepherds of Gerar would do what they could to interfere. This scenario occurred more than once, with the shepherds of Yitzchak digging a well, and the shepherds of Gerar claiming that it was theirs.

With this background, the Ralbag² (R' Levi ben Gershon, 1288–1344) questions Yitzchak's actions. Why did Yitzchak insist on remaining in Gerar? Avimelech wanted him to leave, the shepherds of Gerar wanted him to leave, what value did Yitzchak find in staying in Gerar?

The Ralbag explains that Yitzchak understood that Hashem, by telling him to remain in the land, wanted Yitzchak to remain in Gerar. Thus, despite the fact that the residents, and even the king, wanted him out, Yitzchak chose to obey Hashem.

It would have been so much easier for Yitzchak to leave! It would have been so much easier for Yitzchak to acquiesce to the king's demands. But Yitzchak understood what was truly important, and these challenges were trivial compared to the goal of avodas Hashem.

We too may find ourselves in difficult situations, instances where those around us are indifferent or perhaps even hostile to our avodas Hashem. It may be easier to give in to peer pressure, to surrender in the face of a challenge. But this is not the way — our job is to rise to the occasion, and do whatever is in our power to serve Hashem.

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Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

Yes, we know it's important to do the right thing, but sometimes it's very difficult when we know those around us will think, or even say, that we are acting strange. How do we combat these feelings?

Perhaps the most important step is to first establish who is doing the right thing, and who is not.¹ This is not a verbal declaration between you and your friends, rather, this is a mental conclusion after thinking the matter through.

Once it is clear that you are indeed doing the right thing, it is much easier to feel comfortable about the actions that you are taking. After all, you're not the odd man out, they are!

Of course, it is important to avoid arguments.² Quiet confidence goes a long way, not just in your own avodas Hashem but even in influencing those around you.

1 Radak on Tehillim 119:46, s.v. ואדברה
2 Mishnah Berurah 1:5

1 Bereishis 26:1-26:22

2 Ralbag on Bereishis, pg. 170 s.v. התועלת הששי

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Kirschner, pg. 135

ON A WING AND A PRAYER

It was only about a week before the flight when I realized I had a problem on my hands. I was excited to go back home for *Pesach Bein Hazmanim* after having been away in *yeshiva* for the first time in my life. I didn't go to Israel like some of my friends, but I was still away from home. Being in *yeshiva* 'full-time' was exciting, gruelling, and eye-opening. I had made good friends, and became close with my *rebbeim*, and realized the priority of keeping Hashem in my life.

Which created the problem. You see, my flight was supposed to leave a bit after six in the morning, and arrive after nine. By the time I disembarked and got my luggage it would be closer to ten. So, what was the problem?

As a friend of mine in *yeshiva* pointed out, there was no allowance for me to *daven* before I got to the airport. And once at the airport, I wouldn't be able to *daven* until I went on the flight. And then... well, then I'd be sitting next to someone. The thought of putting on my *tefillin* with everyone staring at me, well, I didn't want to do it!

But I was stuck. I couldn't *daven* beforehand, and by the time we landed, it would be after the time to say *Shema*. I learned that it's a good idea to speak to a *rebbe* when faced with a challenge, so that's what I did.

Rabbi Sharfman greeted me with a smile on his face. "What can I do for you, Zevi?" I explained the problem, and added my solution of *davening* on the plane, but putting my *tefillin* on after we landed.

"That could work, but the way I see it, you have an opportunity. Here in the United States there are not many chances to really do something for Hashem. Our grandparents may have had to sacrifice for Shabbos, but what do we do, have less varieties of ice cream? Here's your chance, do something against your nature for Hashem."

Rabbi Sharfman proceeded to tell me a story about a law student who was offered an interview at a prestigious law firm, but was turned down when he showed up *without* his *yarmulka*, as the interviewer explained that what interested him in the student was the fact that he was willing to stand up for what he believed in. Or so he thought.

"Who knows, maybe someone will offer you a job," Rabbi Sharfman added with a chuckle.

The fateful day arrived, and I did what I had to do. I furtively looked around, but there was no hiding it. I put on my *tefillin* when the worst possible thing happened. The stewardess came around asking what we would like to drink, and I was in the middle of *shemonah esrei*. I couldn't respond, I just looked down into my *siddur*, as I felt the heat on my face.

"Oh, you're praying! I'm so sorry, please excuse me," she said, and continued down the aisle.

I finished up, and she returned a minute or two later. "I apologize, I didn't realize you were praying. Can I get you something to drink?"

As I sipped the Coke I had asked for, I reflected on my experience. No one offered me a job, or even congratulated me on my bravery. But I knew that I did the right thing, and this Coke really hit the spot.

**Based on a true story, names have been changed.*

DID YOU KNOW?

- One should not be afraid to ask questions in Torah learning, even if one's peers will laugh at them.¹
- Despite the importance of doing what is right in the face of adversity, one should not quarrel with one's detractors, because this will instill brazenness in one's heart.²

1 *Rashi* s.v. אמר רב יהודה *Nazir* 59b

2 *Mishnah Berurah* 1:5