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אור ישראל

Self Inspired

PARSHAS
VAYEITZEI

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KNOWING THE TRUTH

Parshas Vayeitzei offers a contrasting world view. On the one hand, we have Yaakov, who, though taken advantage of time and time again, does not veer from doing what is upright. And on the other hand we have Lavan, constantly swindling, anything to gain some sort of advantage.

These unlikely business partners find some sort of uneasy peace, lasting for two decades. Finally, Yaakov is told to leave, and he does so, only to have his father-in-law chase him down and accuse him of thievery. Though the accusation couldn't have been farther from the truth, it forces one to ask, "What did Yaakov do to deserve this?" If there was one place on earth that Yaakov should have felt most uncomfortable, it would have been in Lavan's house.

Yaakov was known as the man of truth,¹ and every interaction with Lavan must have been painful. What purpose could there have been in putting Yaakov in such a distressing situation?

R'Yechezkel Levenstein² (1885–1974) explains that a person may excel in a particular area, they may know the complexities, intricacies and outcomes of that topic. However, all that knowledge is not a substitute for real-world experience.

Thus, explains R' Chatzkel, Yaakov excelled in the character trait of truth, and *because* of that, Hashem sent him to stay with Lavan. The crucible of Lavan's house was not a punishment, it was the key factor in making Yaakov the person he was meant to be. By standing up to Lavan's treachery, by experiencing the lying, the thievery, the absolute misconduct of Lavan, Yaakov experienced the difference between falsehood and truth, and it made him stronger for it.

We may find ourselves in difficult situations. Sometimes we may wonder why we are here at all, what is the purpose of this adversity? It may very well be that this is our opportunity to strengthen our commitment to Hashem, to grow in the particular *middah* needed for that exact situation.

1 Michah 7:20

2 Yad Yechezkel on Bereishis 31:38

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Mind the Gap - Taking the Next Step

We ask Hashem every day not to give us challenges or tests.¹ If so, how can we take advantage of this powerful tool in *avodas Hashem*, of using our experience to further enhance our *middos*?

There is a similar tool we can utilize, known as 'החיצונה מעוררת הפנימית', - the outer actions affect the inner feelings.

When we act in a certain way, it will affect our inner being. Thus, if we act calm, or magnanimous, or cheerful, we will become the person we are initially only pretending to be.

Thus, we don't have to stand up to a particular challenge before utilizing any particular *middah*, rather, we can tap into it whenever we want.

However, it is important to note that this is not a simple task. This method only works if one is already internally similar to the person they are trying to become. For example, if one is miserly, giving away large amounts of money won't affect a person positively, it will just make them upset. One must first understand where they are, and then take small steps from there.²

1 Tefillas Shacharas, Birchas HaShachar

2 Chidushei HaLev on Devarim 3:3-5

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... we must learn Mussar with great joy, and the attitude that we're so happy to have the guidance of Mussar to instruct us what to do to draw ever closer to Hashem. - Rav Gamliel HaKohen Rabinowitz *shlit"a*, Tiv HaSimcha (Eng. ed.) pg. 300

PATIENCE IN PARENTING

I always thought of myself as a pretty even-keeled fellow. Sure, I would get upset or even angry at times, but it was pretty rare. I didn't think about my patience too much, but I knew it was definitely one of my better attributes. That is, until I had Meira.

I was in my young twenties, and my wife had given birth to our first child, a beautiful baby girl. Meira grew up surrounded by love, as my parents lived nearby, and spent time with her every day. Nevertheless, by the time she was two years old, we felt that we had brought a disaster into our home.

I don't think a two year old can be malicious, but she was certainly trying to prove me wrong. Everything she did had a negative impact. She would deliberately spill her food on the floor, write on the wall, and make a scene in the supermarket. But those things, though frustrating, were relatively minor. When she started throwing batteries at my wife, or attempted to light a curtain on fire, we knew we had to do something.

I had taken parenting courses, and spent many hours speaking to my *rebbeim*. There was a lot of good advice, some that helped, some... not so much. But one thing I found that stood out. My *rebbe* told me that whatever I do to help Meira, I need to keep my cool. For my sake, my wife's, and the family's, I needed to stretch my patience as far as it could go.

And some days, I was ready to burst. I would sometimes go into my own room just to take a few deep breaths and calm down. When we needed to correct Meira, we did it firmly, but calmly. It was hard work, but both my wife and I became accustomed to the routine. Deep breaths, even smiles, and plowing ahead.

It's hard to believe that was almost thirty years ago. Since then, Meira has grown up into a wonderful young lady, married, and with children of her own. And they are much more docile than she ever was!

However, for me personally, this episode has become a cornerstone of my career. I had become a *rav* of a (then) small *shul*. With Hashem's help, people took to my calm demeanour, and sought me out for marriage and parenting advice. I can only assume that they somehow felt the patience that I exuded, patience acquired through years of toil.

I now have a large *kehilla*, with countless couples that I have helped over the years. And it is all due to my precious Meira.

For my sake, my wife's, and the family's, I needed to stretch my patience as far as it could go.

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

DID YOU KNOW?

- A life without challenges is a life that does not allow one to rise to their full potential.¹
- The challenge for Yaakov in tricking Yitzchak was being able to mislead for the sake of *avodas Hashem*.²

¹ *Da'as Torah, Devarim* Vol. II, pg. 197

² *Michtav M'Elياهو*, Vol. III, pg. 155

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