

Gently Angry

Lavan was the grandfather of all tricksters. He deceived Yaakov Avinu in every possible way. Yaakov wanted to marry Rachel. Lavan sent Leah to the *chuppah* (marriage canopy) in her place. Yaakov worked for Lavan for twenty years. Lavan lowered his wages 100 times! Yaakov amassed his own fortune by breeding his own flocks. Lavan claimed that Yaakov's sheep were all his. He claimed that Yaakov had stolen all of his wealth.

Yaakov took his family and his possessions and secretly fled from Lavan. Lavan was not informed until three days later. He ran after Yaakov, pursuing him at lightning speed. He caught up to Yaakov and showed no mercy. "Why did you secretly flee and cheat me? You did not even allow me to kiss my sons and daughters! Why did you steal my gods?" (Bereshis 31:27-30). Lavan then began rummaging through Yaakov, Leah, and Rachel's tent looking for his idols. That was the last straw. Yaakov could contain himself no longer.

"And Yaakov became angry and he fought with Lavan. 'What is my transgression? What is my sin that you have hotly pursued me?' Did you find your idols? I served you faithfully for twenty years, going beyond the letter of the law." (paraphrased from Bereshis 31:36-42). Yaakov became angry? Is this the reaction of an angry man? The Medrash relates that one would expect Yaakov to come to blows with Lavan. Instead, he spoke words of appeasement. He tried to calm his father-in-law and stop the argument. Even in his anger, Yaakov Avinu did not lose his poise. On this the Medrash says, (Let me have) "the impatience of the fathers (Holy Forefathers) and not the humility of the sons."

Kinderlach . . .

Your desk partner in school just stepped on your shoes for the 1000th time (it seems). You have told him so many times about it. Now you feel that you can take it no longer. You begin to feel yourself getting angry. How will you react? Will you lash out and speak angry words? Or will you be like Yaakov Avinu. "I'm sure you didn't realize . . . It's really nothing but . . . I have a small request." Stay calm. The true test of a tzaddik is how he behaves when he is angry.

The Straight Book

Hashem looked into the Torah (the blueprint) and created the world. Sefer Bereshis, the beginning of the Torah, is therefore the foundation of the world. The Netziv zt"l, in his introduction to Sefer Bereshis relates that our prophets refer to this first book of the Torah as *Sefer HaYashar* (The Straight Book). Why? The book is about our *Avos HaKedoshim* (Holy Forefathers), Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, and the spiritual paths that they blazed in this world. They are the strong pillars that form the basis of our spiritual world. How did they lay such a strong foundation that has lasted for almost 4000 years? They were *yashar* (straight). They behaved with impeccable *derech erez* (genuine respect and concern) toward everyone. Even those who stood opposed to them. Lavan sought to uproot the entire Jewish nation by destroying Yaakov. Yet, Yaakov treated Lavan with respect, even in anger. There can be no greater spiritual opponents to Avraham Avinu than the people of Sdom. His whole life was kindness and giving, while they were mired in cruelty and taking. Yet, Avraham pleaded with Hashem to save their lives. He was *yashar*.

This is the quality that Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov used to build the world. When we behave with *yashrus*, the world stands. The generation that saw the destruction of the second Beis HaMikdash excelled in their performance of mitzvos *bein-adam-limakom*. However, they were not *yashar*. They mistrusted each other and harbored hatred in their hearts. Hashem has no use for such false tsaddikim. Therefore, He destroyed the Beis HaMikdash. It can only be rebuilt (speedily in our days) when this problem is corrected.

Kinderlach . . .

It certainly is good to behave nicely to people. But if I don't, so what? Am I really doing anything wrong? The Netziv zt"l explains that *derech erez* is the foundation of the world. Without genuine concern and respect for people, the world cannot stand. When you treat people properly, you are building up this world. Beautiful majestic mountains, lush forests, deep blue seas, fertile plains and valleys, they are all yours. Be nice. The world stands on it.

A Dream Ending

"That tree looks very strong and healthy, Abba."

"That is because it has good, solid roots, Aharon. Those other weak trees were not planted and watered properly. Their roots never had a chance to develop and therefore the trees suffered." The Malbim zt"l relates that the *Avos HaKedoshim* are the "roots" of our nation. The events that they experienced guide our lives, just as the roots guide the development of the tree.

"And Yaakov left Beer Sheva" (Bereshis 28:10). Thus began his personal *golus* (exile), which is compared to the current *golus*. "He spent the night there because the sun had set" (28:11). The *golus* is like a long night. The cause of the *golus* is *sinas chinam* (senseless hatred). Redemption will not come until we unite; just as the stones that Yaakov placed around his head (for protection while he was sleeping) united and formed one stone. And so, Yaakov fell asleep and dreamed his famous dream about a ladder connecting heaven and earth, with angels ascending and descending. This dream is compared to the third Beis HaMikdash, which unites heaven and earth.

Kinderlach . . .

Dovid HaMelech writes, "When Hashem will return the captives of Zion we will be like dreamers" (Tehillim 126). This long, bitter *golus* will be like a dream. We want to wake up from that dream. It is on our hands. Replace the *sinas chinam* with *ahavas chinam* (unconditional love). Unite and feel at one with all Jews. Connect heaven and earth. Give this story a dream ending.

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