

PARSHAS VAYEITZEI

תשפ"ב

While I normally discuss only the parsha in my weekly shmues and I don't discuss individuals, this week's shmues will be a departure. I want to talk about a dear friend of the Yeshiva for many years who was niftar a year ago – Reb Yisroel Horowitz.

The gemara asks: who is a ben olom habboh?

The gemara describes him as someone who enters a room without fanfare and leaves without drawing attention to himself, and is constantly involved in learning Torah. And he doesn't take credit for it.

The Mishna in Ovos says don't take credit for your learning a lot of Torah because this is what you were created to do. This is a crucial idea. The purpose of Hashem creating a Jewish neshomo is to learn Torah. This is a Mishna. This is why Hashem shaped you and formed you as a Jew.

Another Mishna in Ovos says mankind is precious, for he was created with a tzelem Elokim. Klal Yisroel are precious, etc. To show us that we are precious, Hashem gave Klal Yisroel a kli chemdoh – the Torah through which Hashem created Heaven and Earth. Hashem gave us a Torah to learn, and it is the basic blueprint through which Hashem created the world. It is to connect our minds to daas Elokim.

Just as we don't take credit for breathing and our heart beating, we shouldn't take credit for learning Torah. It's simply what we need to do to live.

One posuk starts by saying Yaakov took stones to put around his head before going to sleep, but a later posuk says when he woke up there was only one stone. Rashi explains that the stones fought over which one would be under Yaakov's head, and they all merged into one stone. The midrash has three opinions regarding how many stones were there at the beginning before they merged into one. One opinion says it was two, another says it was three, and the last says it was twelve.

According to the first opinion, Yaakov took two stones – one stone represented Avrohom who gave birth to Yishmoel, and one stone represented Yitzchok who had Eisov. The Ovos had a mesorah that the one who would have twelve sons would be the one to start Klal Yisroel. Yaakov said: if I can take these stones and wake up in the morning and they will be one stone, I know I can give rise to the Shivtei Koh.

The next midrash is about three stones – representing Avrohom Yitzchok and Yaakov. The third opinion has twelve stones representing the 12 shivtei koh.

The idea is as follows.

Avrohom Ovinu was the embodiment of the middas hachessed in the world. He expressed chessed to the extreme. But this extreme form of chessed produced Yishmoel who was full of taivoh. Seforim in many places go into this in detail and we see it play out in society today. Look at leftist culture and you see they are promoting ideas of chessed to the extreme. But at the same time they pursue lives of unrestrained taivoh. This is where unlimited chessed leads to – Yishmoel and theft – a breakdown of law and order and total social collapse.

Yitzchok is gevuroh – single minded avodas Hashem on the highest level with nothing to distract his self-development. The Rambam says Avrohom was completely self-made with no one to mentor him. Yitzchok built on Avrohom's middoh but then went on his own path and focused exclusively on his own development. He created himself. Yaakov said if one is too focused on developing himself exclusively, it can lead to cruelty – and Eisov was cruelty. Yaakov realized that he needs to be the balance between Avrohom's extreme chessed and Yitzchok's extreme

gevuroh.

The Ramban in Parshas Vayigash says Yaakov knew well that he has to combine the two types of avodoh of his father and grandfather, but which one is the foundation and which one is added to balance it? He began with the gevuroh of Yitzchok and balanced it with the chessed of Avrohom.

The Ramban continues to explain that there is an emes shel maaloh and an emes shel mattoh. The emes shel maaloh is without compromise and without straying one iota from the absolute truth – absolute din. The emes shel mattoh is the truth which Hashem told us how we need to function in the real world. It is the truth of Torah which guides us. Sometimes the halacha says you are permitted to lie. The truth of Yaakov is Torah which is a balance of din with chessed to operate in this world.

One opinion in the midrash said Yaakov combined two stones and one said he combined three stones. The difference is that some people are simply a product of a combination of their parents. Others create themselves – they take parts of what they received from their parents and integrate it with the unique aspect of their own personality to create something totally new. The third opinion says Yaakov took twelve stones – twelve unique darkei avodoh of the shevotim which all drew from Yaakov Ovinu.

At the beginning of Parshas Vayeishev, Rashi says Yaakov thought he was at the end of his development and needed no more nisyonos. Hashem said no. He still needed to grow more and continue to create that perfection to found Klal Yisroel. He needed to undergo more nisyonos. We need nisyonos in order to bring out our potential. These nisyonos mold us and change us. This is our avodoh – all the ups and downs throughout our lives – day after day, month after month, year after year. They help us create who we become. Finally when Yaakov came to Egypt, he had reached his destination and needed no more nisyonos.

Yaakov is emes to an incredible degree. We see how honest he was even when living in Lovon's house. Hashem had to push Yaakov to develop his middas ho'emes to the maximum. How? By putting him in an environment of extreme sheker and deceit. That is how you perfect your middos.

When one acquires a middoh, it becomes an integral part of one's being. One may forget that the middoh is not a value per se, but it is only a way aligning one's self with Hashem's middos. To remind one of this fact the Torah sometimes tells us to deny that very middoh. Yaakov was told by Hashem through his mother to deceive his father. We must recognize that truth is important because Hashem says that it is important. Therefore when Hashem says the opposite we must follow through.

Avrohom was extreme chessed. How did Hashem push Avrohom to perfection? By the Akeidoh – which meant suppressing his middoh of chessed in order to bring his own son as a sacrifice – going to the opposite extreme. Then Hashem knew that Avrohom acquired chessed as a way of serving Him.

Some people think middos like chessed and mishpot are just very good values and ideals. They aren't connected to the derech Hashem. How can you tell the difference? When Hashem tells Avrohom to offer Yitzchok and act with the opposite of chessed – against all that you have been developing your whole life, He was showing Avrohom that the middoh of chessed has to come from Hashem. If Hashem tells you to be cruel then you have to act with cruelty and suppress your natural chessed and show that it comes from Hashem.

Yaakov begins as the ish tam yosheiv ohalim. He was developing the

middoh of emes. His mother came with the authority of prophecy and told him that he has to deceive his father. It becomes a nisayon to go against his natural middoh of emes and use deception. But Yaakov realized it was the will of Hashem and he had to do it. But, he did it while minimizing the sheker as much as possible in his words. In the end he did deceive his father. But he was told to do so by Hashem and it was a nisayon in order to show that the middoh of emes comes from Hashem.

Then Yaakov has to live through an unbelievable test of sheker by living with the master swindler for twenty years! When Yosef is born, Yaakov decided to start building his own wealth. He made a deal with Lovon in a way that it will be clear that he is not taking any sheep that don't belong to him. But now he has to produce his own flock without any speckled males! So Yaakov devised a plan using his own theory of genetics. It seemed to actually work and Yaakov became very wealthy. He decided it was time to leave, and before doing so he consulted with his wives. He told them he worked for Lovon with all his might after being tricked a hundred times. He thought he succeeded due to his own theory of genetics. But Hashem showed him that He had made miracles and brought male speckled sheep to impregnate the females.

But throughout the whole ordeal, Yaakov never cheated. He was a devoted shepherd and never cut corners. Lovon searched through all Yaakov's belongings and never found anything that was taken from his house! Imagine living in someone else's household for twenty years and then packing up suddenly and leaving – without taking a single thing from the host's belongings? Only someone who is honest through and through can do such a thing.

The Rambam at the end of Hilchos Sechirus makes an important point. Just as an employer is forbidden to withhold any wages, an employee cannot steal from his employer by slacking off during the time he is hired. We learn this from Yaakov the tzaddik whom Hashem made fabulously wealthy because of his scrupulous honesty. He never compromised and never cut corners.

Yaakov didn't ask for all this wealth. He only asked for food to eat and clothes to wear. But since he survived with his middas ho'emes intact after being put through this environment of complete dishonesty, Hashem rewarded him in this world as well as the next.

Some people think the only way they can succeed in business is by cheating and bending the rules. But Hashem tells us what is allowed and not allowed. They think that halacha and the will of Hashem are getting in the way of success and you need to make money dishonestly. Hashem is in charge of money. He guarantees that if you follow the Torah's ethics in business, you will succeed in some unexpected way.

Yaakov is a blending of Avrohom's middoh of chessed – but we don't see Yaakov's chessed in Chumash. Some people's chessed is very pronounced and they wear it on their sleeve. They make big donations to this popular cause and that popular cause and make sure that it gets plenty of publicity. Other people have a middoh of chessed as such a deep part of their being that it comes automatically with everything they do. It just isn't a big deal to them. They don't think they deserve any special recognition for it.

Today is the yahrtzeit of Reb Yisroel Horowitz. He was the most unique baal tzedoko that I have ever seen in my life. Throughout my life I have raised money for many different things. I've raised money for mikvaos, for poor people, and more recently for Yeshivas Toras Moshe as well as many other causes. Yisroel Horowitz had the ability to give large sums of money and be absolutely insistent that no-one know about it. We are talking very large sums of money – beyond imagination. But he never thought it was anything to take credit for.

Some wealthy people have chessed as an intrinsic part of their being, and some people find it very hard to part with their money. They think the money belongs to them – they worked hard and they made it! Kochi v'otzem yodi. Other people know it is a gift from Hashem and they were chosen by Hashem to do something productive with it. When you want publicity to go along with your impressive donation, it means chessed

isn't an intrinsic part of who you are. It is a tool for gaining status and influence in your community.

But others give as intrinsic chessed and they don't want anyone to know about it. The fact that Toras Moshe was able to move into this building and make this very extensive expansion is due to a very large gift from Yisroel Horowitz. But he insisted on not being mentioned. He got upset at me once when I mentioned it on the side at the dinner.

Hashem blessed him with financial success because he was a straight businessman – no tricks and no cutting corners. Somehow everything he invested in went well – without expecting it. When I read the Rambam's promise that Hashem guarantees wealth to someone who is absolutely straight and honest in business, I think about him. It wasn't his genius in investments. Hashem made him wealthy because he was straight.

People look at life too simplistically. They feel that there is a checklist that you go through and they will come out a certain way at the end. I don't believe human beings work that way. They don't develop that way. Each person is an individual who has to create himself with his unique talents and abilities using his free-will.

Some people have to create themselves from absolute scratch with their free-will. This is very difficult to do. You decide who you want to become – which middos and strengths you want to develop within yourself, and you follow through. There is a lot of greatness there because you had no help. Other people are born with certain advantages and influences which get them started on their path to greatness. Avrohom Ovinu built himself up from scratch. But Yitzchok, Yaakov and the Shevotim had role models who they could look up to and draw inspiration and derech avodoh from. Without getting into too much detail, Yisroel Horowitz was a person who had to create himself from scratch.

There are two ways of being zoche to olom habboh. The gemara in Brochos and Sotah says that limud haTorah is the core merit necessary to achieve olom habboh. You can go higher with extra mitzvos. But limud haTorah is the foundation. Nowadays everyone goes to yeshiva to learn Torah. Boruch Hashem it is very popular and it has become part of the culture we grow up in. But bochorim in yeshivah have to ask themselves on a daily basis: how much does limud haTorah mean to me personally? How central and critical is it to my life? You know how central and natural it is when you learn in your spare time as well as during formal seder times. How much are you willing to give up to learn when it is inconvenient? When you are on the plane and there is nothing to do? That's how you know who a person really is.

The gemara says that not only the people sitting and learning get the merit of limud Torah. For those who do not have the opportunity to learn themselves, enabling others to learn also gives them the merit of limud Torah. Just like people shouldn't take credit for the great amount of learning they do – because this is what they were created for – so too those who support Torah. Yisroel Horowitz didn't think he should take any credit for it because this is his way of fulfilling his reason for being created. It was like breathing or having his heart beating.

I don't usually mention individuals in my shmues, but Yisroel Horowitz was a very unique individual. When we redesign our building, the new entrance will be dedicated in his memory. He helped the yeshiva tremendously throughout the years. He was incomparable. But no-one knew about it. He never took credit for it. And after he retired, he went to learning. He completed two daf yomi cycles because Torah was a natural part of who he was.

He came in quietly, and he left quietly, and he was involved in Torah constantly and never took credit for it. He felt that he was simply and genuinely doing avodas Hashem without any fanfare. He was a very rare individual on a high level. The only reason I feel his name should be on the redesigned entrance is because I sincerely believe he is a true representation of a ben olom habboh. During his lifetime he fought with me not to be recognized publically. But after his passing, I feel some things cannot go unrecognized and that's why the new entrance will be named in his memory.