



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת היום

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

פרשת ויצא תשע"א

UNCOVERING THE WELLSPRING

One of the events related in this week's *parshah* involves Ya'akov's arrival in Charan. Having left his parent's home en route to the house of his uncle Lavan, Ya'akov notices a strange sight as he approaches the city. A large group of shepherds, with their flocks nearby, are lounging around the village well. Ya'akov asks them why they don't take up their staffs and return to pasture.

The shepherds of Charan explain to Ya'akov that, as much as they'd like to, they are unable to return to work right then. Because it was topped by a great stone, the operation of this particular well required them to wait until all the people were gathered. Only through the combined efforts of all the shepherds was it possible to move the stone and water the sheep.

Someone else then appears on the scene – Rachel, who is destined to become Ya'akov's wife and a matriarch of Israel. Upon seeing her, Ya'akov is overcome with a surge of emotion, runs over to the well, and *single-handedly* removes the stone.

We might form a picture of this scene in our minds' eye in which Ya'akov struggles under the weight of this huge lid until he finally succeeds in prying it off. Rashi (*Bereishis 29:10*) clarifies that this is not the case. In his words, Ya'akov removed the stone with the ease of one who "removes a cap from a bottle."

Taken all together, this episode appears impressive, as Ya'akov Avinu accomplished an amazing feat in an almost supernatural way. Yet, we know that the Torah's purpose is not merely to entertain us with fascinating stories. What does the Torah mean to impart with this

narrative?

As if anticipating the question, Rashi adds a few more words of comment. He states that the Torah's purpose in relating this story is: להודיעך שפחו גדול "To teach you that his (Ya'akov's) strength was great."

The apparent difficulty with Rashi's postscript is that it doesn't seem to tell us anything new. Was the monumental purpose of the inclusion of this event in the Torah to show us that Ya'akov was strong? Isn't that kind of obvious? And why, pray tell, is that so crucially important to the life of a Jew?

FASHIONING PEOPLE

The truth is that this story – like everything recorded in the Torah – contains valuable lessons for each and every one of us. The intent is not merely to portray the magnitude of Ya'akov's physical prowess. Rather, Rashi's words allude to the fact that something much deeper is at play. This can be understood in light of the Mishnah in Avos (5:2), which states:

עֲשָׂרָה נְסִיוונוֹת נִתְּנָה אֲבִרָהָם אֲבִינוּ עָלֵינוּ הַשְּׁלוֹם וְעָמַד בְּכֵלָם, לְהוֹדִיעַ כְּמָה חֲבָתוֹ שֶׁל אֲבִרָהָם אֲבִינוּ עָלֵינוּ הַשְּׁלוֹם.

"Avraham Avinu (our forefather) was tested with ten trials, all of which he successfully withstood, which reveals the extent of the devotion of Avraham Avinu, peace be unto him."

One of the noteworthy aspects of this Mishnah is the appellation by which Avraham is called here. The term "Avinu" is not automatically appended to Avraham's name every time it is mentioned in the Talmud; why specifically in this Mishnah was it

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deemed particularly apropos?

R' Chaim Volozhiner explains: the usage of this term in the context of this Mishnah is very revealing about the unique power and overall role of the *Avos* (Patriarchs). Obviously, the *Avos* had the distinction of being the forerunners and founders of the Jewish nation. But their significance goes far beyond merely being “the first.” The *Avos*’ actions had an everlasting impact on their offspring, as all of the many traits and abilities inherent to the Jewish people were implanted in them by the *Avos*.

Many times throughout the ages, the Jewish masses readily sacrificed their lives rather than betray their allegiance to the One True G-d. The ability of so many “regular” people to endure such hardships and attain such heights was made possible by their progenitors. The *Avos* risked their lives to serve Hashem; they bequeathed this ability to their descendants.

By undergoing the trials, Avraham continuously perfected himself and climbed to ever-increasing

levels in the service of Hashem. The refinement and strengths he attained in this endeavor he passed on to the entire Jewish people for all time. As such, he is referred to here as *Avinu*. He was fulfilling the role of a parent leaving behind a treasured inheritance for his children after him (*Ruach Chaim, Avos, ibid.*).

SPIRITUAL ADRENALIN

It could very well be that this idea forms the backdrop for Rashi’s comments regarding Ya’akov *Avinu*. R’ Shmuel Berenbaum explained that, obviously, in reporting Ya’akov’s escapades by the well of Charan, the Torah means to convey great principles. It was not simply trying to depict how Ya’akov was prying off the stone as if he was unscrewing the cap off a Pepsi. Rather, this act was demonstrative of all of Ya’akov’s actions. A person has great, latent *kochos* (strengths) within him of which he may be unaware. But that doesn’t mean they don’t exist. At the right moment, Ya’akov was able to tap into this great reservoir of strength.

This was not necessarily a one-time event, however; nor was it restricted to the physical realm. להודיעך, שפכחך גדול, states Rashi. This was one illustration of what Ya’akov did throughout his life. He would constantly seek out his inner abilities and then employ them in the service of Hashem.

As we said before, the effects of the deeds of the *Avos* were not confined to the *Avos* themselves; rather, they extended to all generations. So it is with this example from our *parshah*. We all have the ability – bequeathed to us all from Ya’akov *Avinu* – to uncover our true value and hidden strengths. Often, we can discover abilities we never knew existed and apply them to Torah, *avodah* (Divine service), and *gemilus chasadim* (acts of kindness). In this way we, too, can grow in ways we might never have thought possible.

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