
פרשת וישלח

פרק לב פסוק כה

וַיִּתֵּר יַעֲקֹב לְבָדוֹ וַיֵּאָבֶק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ עַד עֲלוֹת הַשָּׁחַר:

חז"ל

שְׁנֵשְׁתֵּייר עַל פְּכִים קִטְנִים, מִכָּאן לְצַדִּיקִים שֶׁחֲבִיב עֲלֵיהֶם מְמוֹנָם יוֹתֵר מִגּוּפָם, וְכֹל כִּי לְמָה? שְׂאִין פּוֹשְׁטִים יְדֵיהֶם בְּגִזְל (חולין צא).

מושג

מִכָּאן לְצַדִּיקִים שֶׁחֲבִיב עֲלֵיהֶם מְמוֹנָם יוֹתֵר מִגּוּפָם.

Translation:

From here we learn that a Tzadik's possessions are dearer to them than his body.

Explanation:

Yaakov returned alone to retrieve small jugs, showing he cared more for his possessions than he did for his physical welfare. This is because Yaakov, as is the case with all Tzadikim, was careful never to steal, making the things they own very dear to them. A Tzaddik realizes that everything he has is a gift from Hashem and even small and inexpensive objects must be treated with care¹.

Looking in the Pasuk:

In the previous Pasuk we had learned that Yaakov had transferred all of his belongings over the river, so why did he return? Chazal explain that he realized that he had forgotten some small jugs and returned to retrieve them. Also, the word וייתר is unusual, usually referring to something extra, leading Chazal to believe that he returned for things that were rather insignificant².

Musag Learning Outcomes:

Know: Tzadikim treat all objects with care. Even small, inexpensive things are important to them as they do not steal.

Understand: When one truly believes that all comes from Hashem, and not as a direct result of his or her hard work, then all things are seen as gifts from above and must be fully appreciated.

Think: Every Pasuk must be read in the context of surrounding Pesukim to fully understand each Pasuk's intent. In addition, the Torah will frequently use unique words to draw our attention to a lesson to be learned from the text.

¹ See note #1

² See note #2

NOTES

1. The Gemorah is reacting to the fact that Yaakov went back over the river to retrieve small jugs. It seems to be difficult to understand that Yaakov would care for small jugs at all, and certainly not to the extent that he would risk the danger of being alone. The Gemarah answers by telling us that Yaakov's attachment to these minor possessions was because he was very careful, as is the case with all Tzaddikim, to never steal from others. Everything he owned came to him as a result of honest work, and therefore was very dear to him.

Perhaps we can understand the Gemarah to be telling us a deeper lesson. A Tzaddik understands that all he has is a gift from Hashem. His hard work is only the means by which Hashem will send the blessing to him. Therefore, a Tzaddik will never steal. Since he realizes that Hashem will always give him what he needs and deserves, why would he try to steal?

We can now understand why the small jugs were dear to him. For example: Imagine if a king were to give his subjects a gift. Wouldn't they cherish it even though it was a small and seemingly insignificant? What it cost would mean nothing compared to the fact that it came from the king. So too, Yaakov treated all his possessions as a gift from Hashem and held them dear. In fact since he earned the gift, he held it even dearer than his body, which was a gift he had not earned.

2. What does the Gemarah see in the words of the Pasuk that would lead them to say Yaakov returned for small jugs?

There are two possible answers. One is that the previous Pasuk had told us that Yaakov had taken all his possessions and crossed the river: וַיַּעֲבֹר אֶת-אֶשְׁרֵי-לוֹ. Why would he go back? Therefore, reasons the Gemarah, he must have returned for something he missed the first time, i.e. small jugs. Another possibility is that word in this Pasuk that is used to mean he remained behind is וְיֹתֵר the שׁוֹרֵשׁ being י.ת.ר. It is rarely used in Chumash or Tanach (one other time in Chumash, three more in all of Nach) and really means to be left over (similar to the word יֹתֵר – something extra, such as נֹתֵר, left over meat from a קֶרֶבֶן). If all the Pasuk was trying to tell me was that Yaakov remained behind it should have used the word נִשְׁאַר. Hence, the Gemarah tells us he remained behind for something that was not really necessary, something extra, such as small jugs.

3. Questions for further thought:

1. Can you think of other examples you had in Chumash of Tzaddikim who were careful not to steal from others?
2. Can you think of a connection between the first half of the pasuk which tells us he returned for these jugs and the second part which tells us about Eisav's angel attacking? (It is hard to believe that this was the only time he could catch Yaakov alone).