

WORDS OF WISDOM FROM RABBI YITZI

לרפואה שלימה ליוסף יצחק בן ברכה

PARSHAT VAYISHLACH

Are Physical Possessions Good or Bad?

In this week's parsha, Vayishlach, Yaakov sends angels to his brother Esav. Part of the message they were to tell him was, "I sojourned (garti) with Lavan." Rashi gives two explanations for the word garti. First, that it is like the word ger, which means stranger, because the whole time he lived by Lavan he was like a stranger. Second, Yaakov was hinting to Esav, that during his sojourn with Lavan, he kept the 613 mitzvahs, as the numerical value of the word garti is 613.

What is the connection between the homiletical explanation, that Yaakov kept the 613 mitzvahs, with the simple meaning of the verse, that he sojourned with Lavan? Why was it important for Yaakov to let Esav know that he

kept the 613 mitzvahs? And finally, what lesson are we meant to learn from this?

PHYSICAL POSSESSIONS ARE NOT INHERENTLY GOOD OR BAD; IT'S HOW WE USE THEM THAT MATTERS.

Yaakov's descent to Charan, where he lived with Lavan, is the descent of the neshama into the world, and on a broader perspective, the descent of the Jewish people into exile. Your neshama descends to accomplish a mission, to refine your body and the world around you into a dwelling for Hashem. When you do this, you have completed your part of the mission. When we complete our missions collectively, Hashem will dwell openly in this world, and Moshiach will be here.

Yaakov is teaching us the correct approach to

succeed in our mission.

Rashi's first explanation is that garti comes from ger, a stranger. When you are home, everything has to be just right, but when you are traveling on the way, things don't have to be perfect, you make do with what is available because it is not so important.

Lavan and Esav symbolize physical needs, wants, and pleasures. The question is, are you at home by Lavan, meaning, are your physical needs, wants, and pleasures most important, or are you a stranger traveling through Lavan's place, meaning, that the spiritual is most important and the physical is not so important?

Yaakov was saying that he was like a stranger traveling through Lavan's place. The physical was not so important to him, his focus was on the spiritual. Therefore, he was successful in his mission.

To prove that he was successful, Yaakov says, "I acquired cattle, donkeys, sheep..." This seems to contradict what was said before, that the physical was not important to Yaakov. Was it important or not?

There are different approaches you can have to the world. One approach is that the physical is all that is important, and success is measured by how many things you have. This is Lavan and Esav's approach.

A second approach is that only the spiritual is important. In this approach, all physical gains are shunned.

Then there is Yaakov's approach. When you



make the spiritual most important, but you recognize that everything in the world has a spiritual purpose. In other words, the physical becomes important for the spiritual reason it exists. So the physical isn't bad at all, it just has to be harnessed and used for its G-dly purpose. When it is just physical, it is negative, but when it is viewed through spiritual lenses, it is positive.

This will help us understand a strange thing that the Midrash says. On the verse, "I acquired cattle, donkeys, sheep," the Midrash says that the word "donkey," refers to King Moshiach, as it says about Moshiach, that he will be "A pauper, riding on a donkey." How does this fit in with what Yaakov was saying?

Because Yaakov was saying that he did his part to bring Moshiach.

In order for Moshiach to come we have to make this world into a dwelling place for Hashem, we have to take ownership of it and refine it. This is done through Torah and mitzvahs and by using your possessions to serve Hashem. Conveying that he kept the 613 mitzvahs, Yaakov was saying that he did this work.

From this perspective, the more you acquire doing your mission, meaning, the more of the physical world you refine, the more successful you become. And that is what Yaakov is telling Esav, "See how much I accomplished, I have acquired the spiritual essence of all these things, and now they are realizing their G-dly purpose. I have done my part to bring Moshiach."

By sending these messages, Yaakov was hinting to Esav that "I have completed my mission despite all the difficulties of living in exile, with Lavan. Did you do the same?"

The angels returned to Yaakov with the answer, "We came to your brother to EEsav." You were hoping that he would be like a brother, that he would be the same as you, but he is still Esav he still only sees the physical world as important. He has not done his part.

The lesson here is for everyone, at every time

and in every place, no matter the situation. A Jew must do his best to refine himself and his part of the world, making it into a home for Hashem, and readying it for the redemption. This is true even if the world around him doesn't seem to be going in the same direction, and others don't seem to be doing their part, and maybe they are even acting as a Lavan or an Esav. Don't think that it is a waste, because you are bringing the redemption closer, and being that the world is holding in a balance, perhaps it is your effort that will tip the scale and usher in the redemption. This is how powerful the effort of a single individual can be.

The key to accomplishing your part is making the spiritual most important, and allowing the physical to follow, using it for its G-dly purpose.

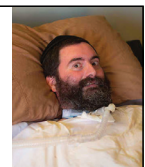
May our efforts to make this world into a home for Hashem succeed, and usher in the coming of Moshiach. May it happen soon. The time has come.

*"Dear Rabbi Yitzi,
It really was beautiful spending the time with you last week.
In the past, when I came by to see you, I was only there for shorter visits when I was in town anyway, but this time I came to LA just to see you and spent many hours a day, sitting around, shmoozing, learning and farbrenging with you and near you. It was a very eye-opening and meaningful experience.
I got to appreciate many of the things you are involved with, and to observe the incredible amount of study partners you have everyday!
It has encouraged me to commit to add more Torah study to my day
Thank you!"*

- Moshe R, Wisconsin

RABBI YITZI WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU! SEND YOUR MESSAGE TO:
(937) 770-4802 | TORAHFROMMYEYES@GMAIL.COM

Despite facing one of life's most difficult challenges, Rabbi Yitzi Hurwitz continues to spread joy and faith to thousands around the globe. Diagnosed in 2012 with ALS, Rabbi Yitzi is now 95% paralyzed and no longer able to speak or breath on his own. Thanks to the miracle of technology, Rabbi Yitzi continues to spread his wisdom through his eyes, focusing on each and every letter of these Torah articles. Rabbi Yitzi, his wife Dina and their seven children are the Rebbe's Shluchim to Temecula, California.



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