

Parsha Pearls

FROM THE WORDS OF THE GEDOLIM

And they called to Rivkah and said to her, “Will you go with this man?” And she said, “I will go.” (24:58)

The Midrash (Yalkut Tehillim 795) says that Hashem took Israel out of Egypt as a reward for the deeds of the Imahos: Sarah, Rivka, Rachel and Leah. For each of the Imahos, it mentions a great deed that she did, and when it comes to Rivka, it says because she said, ‘I will go.’ What is the connection between Rivka’s willingness to go to marry Yitzchak and the Exodus from Egypt?

On the words “I will go,” Rashi comments, “On my own, even if you do not want.” Lavan was willing to let Rivka go; he had already told Eliezer, “We cannot speak to you evil or good. Behold, Rivka is before you, take her and go, and let her be a wife to your master’s son, as Hashem spoke.” But Rivka realized that when a wicked man gives something or accomplishes something, he has a certain power over it. When one receives a gift from another, he becomes obliged to the giver. Rivka’s marriage to Yitzchak was destined to give rise to the entire Jewish people. She did not want Lavan to play any role in this great accomplishment. Therefore, she said, “I want to go on my own, even if you don’t want.”

In this vein, we can explain the words at the beginning of the Haggadah, “If the Holy One, blessed is He, had not taken our fathers out of Egypt, we and our children and our children’s children would be enslaved (meshubadim) to Pharaoh in Egypt.” Seemingly, this is obvious – who would have taken us out if not Hashem? But the answer is that after suffering through the first five plagues, Pharaoh would have let the Jewish people go, if Hashem had not hardened his heart during the sixth plague. The reason Hashem hardened his heart is that He did not want the wicked Pharaoh to have any hand in the great beginning of our holy people. Hashem made sure that we left not through Pharaoh’s graciousness, but “with a strong hand,” against Pharaoh’s will. “If the Holy One, blessed is He, had not taken our fathers out” – i.e. had He allowed Pharaoh to be the one to let us out – then we would be “meshubadim” – obliged, grateful, under the influence of – Pharaoh, even today.

Thus, the Midrash tells us that in reward for Rivka’s concern that Lavan not have a hand in creating the Jewish people, Hashem made sure that Pharaoh did not have a hand in the Exodus from Egypt; rather, Hashem Himself took us out with a strong hand. (Divrei Yoel, p. 492)

Just as a gift from the wicked influences a person to be wicked, a gift from a good person influences a person to be good. Based on this, Rabbi Avigdor Miller once explained the meaning of the verse in Mishlei (15:27), “He who hates gifts will live.” The only way to succeed in this world is by exercising one’s free will, doing mitzvos and avoiding sins, and thus earning reward in the World to Come. So the essence of life is really free will; without free will, life would have no meaning. When one accepts gifts, even from good people, the gift takes away part of his free will, because he is now under the influence of the giver. So, only someone who hates gifts will have true life. (Tape 59)

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Reb Moshe Shmuel Shapiro relates that when he was young, at one point he was not sure if he should open a yeshiva or become a dayan within the Zionist system. He went to speak to the Brisker Rav, and he found him sitting together with his son Reb Berel. The Brisker Rav told him, “To be a dayan in their

system is much worse than taking their money for yeshivos!" "Is there any prohibition to take money from them?" asked Reb Moshe Shmuel. "I'm not saying that it's a prohibition," said the Brisker Rav, "but would you be able to take money for a yeshiva from someone who owns a pork store?" Then he looked at his son and Reb Moshe Shmuel and said, "I promise you that as long as you take money only from clean sources, you will never lack money." (Uvdos Vehanagot Leveis Brisk, v. 2 p. 181)

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Reb Dovid Soloveitchik later expressed his father's position in another way: How can one take money for the support of Torah from those who are trying to destroy Torah? Chazal say, "One who causes another to sin is worse than one who kills him." (Sifri quoted by Rashi, Devarim 23:9) If Hitler, yimach shmo, had proposed to support the yeshivos at the same time that he was murdering the Jews of Europe, would they have accepted it? ("Today, maybe they would..." he added.) So why is this any different? The Zionists are working as hard as they can to destroy whatever remains of Torah-observant Jewry. (ibid. p. 179)

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The Poneveczer Rav built many yeshivos using money from the Zionist government. Every time he made a gathering to celebrate the laying of the cornerstone of one of his buildings, a small group of Neturei Karta members would attend, holding signs saying that they protested against the acceptance of the money. Their protests often disturbed the festivities. Someone asked the Poneveczer Rav, "Why don't you do something about it? Make sure they don't come!" "If they wouldn't come on their own," answered the Poneveczer Rav, "I would pay them to come! I want everyone to know that what I'm doing is only bedieved - not the right way to do things, but necessary because of the difficulty of the times."

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The Midrash (introduction to Esther, based on a rule mentioned in the Gemora, Megillah 10b) says that the words, "And it came to pass in the time of Achaz..." (Yishaya 7:1) indicate that a tragedy is about to be described. What was it? Aram was in front and the Phillistines behind (ibid. 9:11). The wicked king Achaz hated the Torah and its scholars, continues the Midrash, but he was afraid to kill them directly, so he reasoned, "If there are no kids, there will be no goats. If there are no goats, there will be no flock. If there is no flock, there will be no shepherd. So too, if there are no students, there will be no Torah scholars. If there are no scholars, there will be no elders. If there are no elders, there will be no Torah, no shuls and houses of study, and Hashem will not cause His presence to rest in the world." He went and closed all the shuls and houses of study, so that no one should study Torah. Rav Huna in the name of Rabbi Elazar said, Why was he named "Achaz?" Because he held onto the shuls and houses of study.

Rabbi Yosef Chaim Zonenfeld asked, doesn't the word achaz (held onto) sound like a positive word, that he supported the houses of study? He answered that yes, Achaz supported the houses of study, because he wanted them to become dependent on him so that he could control them and force them to follow his ideas. His cold calculation told him that power over all of the Jewish people begins with control of the yeshivos. This is what Chazal say in the continuation of that Midrash, "Once he supported the shuls and houses of study, everyone began to cry out, Woe!" The Jewish people knew that such crafty support, designed to exert control, is reason not to rejoice but to cry out. Furthermore, said Reb Yosef Chaim, look how the Midrash begins. Before it starts telling about Achaz's plot to uproot Torah, it says, "Aram was in front and the Phillistines behind." What is the connection between this and Achaz's plans? The answer is, he said, that Achaz convinced the yeshivos to accept his support by telling them of the dangers the kingdom faced from Aram and the Phillistines. Now is not the time for lofty ideological refusals to take money from an anti-religious government. We are in danger! Accept my leadership for now so that we can face the common enemy. Reb Yosef Chaim concluded: Let us not repeat the mistake of the yeshivos in the time of Achaz. (Chochmas Chaim, p. 29)

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