

Parsha Pearls

FROM THE WORDS OF THE GEDOLIM

לע"נ הרה"ח ר' יעקב נחמיה בן ר' חיים צבי ע"ה, ע"י נכדו הרה"ח ר' אברהם שלמה יאקאבאוויטש הי"ו

Chayei Sarah 5770

And Rivka had a brother, and his name was Lavan; and Lavan ran to the man, outside, to the well. (24:29)

Rashi says: Why did he run and for what did he run? The Torah continues: “And it came to pass, when he saw the nose ring and the bracelets on his sister’s hands...” He said, “This man is rich,” and gave his eyes on the money.

What is forcing Rashi to say that Lavan ran to get the money? Maybe he simply ran to see who was the guest who had given his sister expensive presents.

Lavan said to Eliezer: “Come, blessed of Hashem! Why do you stand outside? I have cleared out the house, and there is place for the camels.” Rashi says that Lavan meant that he had removed the idols from the house. How did Lavan know that Eliezer would object to the idols? After all, everyone in the world at that time worshipped idols except for Avraham Avinu, and Lavan did not yet know (until v. 34) that this man was Avraham Avinu’s trusted servant and disciple.

The Torah describes Rivka as “a virgin, and no man had known her” (v. 16). The Midrash Rabbah (60:5) notes that this seems to be redundant. Rabbi Yochanan answers that “no man had known her” means that no man had ever even approached her and asked her to know him, as Scripture states, “For the staff of the wicked will not rest on the lot of the righteous” (Tehillim 125:3). The commentary Nezer Hakodesh on the Midrash explains that indeed Rivka was very beautiful and the people of her country were immoral, and thus one would have expected that some of them would have approached her. However, Rivka was righteous and they were wicked, and it is the nature of wicked people to hate righteous people and stay far away from them. Wicked people have no pleasure from being close to righteous people. That is the meaning of the verse, “For the staff of the wicked will not rest on the lot of the righteous.”

According to this, we can answer our questions. Lavan knew that the people of his country hated Rivka for her righteousness, and therefore when he saw a stranger come and befriend her, he knew that the stranger had to be righteous, not an idol worshipper. Therefore he cleared out all the idols from the house.

Now we can also understand Rashi’s question about why Lavan ran. Since Lavan was wicked and he knew that this visitor was righteous, why did he run to greet him and go to such great lengths to clear out the idols so that he would feel comfortable? The answer, Rashi says, is that the desire for money can drive people to do things that are against their nature. The Torah says that a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of the righteous (Devarim 16:19). The Gemara comments (Kesubos 105a) that if it does so to the wise, all the more so to the foolish; if it does so to the righteous, all the more so to the wicked. Lavan “gave up his eyes on the money” – he allowed himself to be blinded by his desire for Eliezer’s money. (Divrei Yoel pp. 523-524)

The lesson we must learn from this is that whenever we see the wicked befriending the righteous, there has to be an ulterior motive. Anti-religious Jews do not make concessions to Torah Jews unless they have something to gain.

A year before the Zionists established their state, three of their leaders made a promise to the Agudath Israel activists that certain aspects of their state would be run in accordance with the Torah – notably marriage and divorce. Later, during all the history of the state, although battles were fought over many religious matters, these principles remained constant.

Many tout this as an example of how working together with the Zionists and participating in their government yielded a positive result. To this day, the Zionist state has no civil marriage; two Jews can only get married or divorced in a halachic ceremony.

But let us examine the historical context. The following lines are taken from the work of a prominent historian. “The discussions between Agudah and the Zionist Agency began in the spring of 1946, as the Anglo-American Committee was due to arrive in Palestine. Considering the anti-Zionist traditions and statements of certain Agudah leaders who appeared before the Committee, the Zionist Agency feared that Agudat Israel would not support Zionist claims that Palestine was the only haven for Jewish refugees. Hence the Zionist Agency felt the need to approach Agudah...

“When the UN Committee was due to arrive in Palestine (summer 1947), Agudath Israel notified the Zionist Agency that it would appear before the Committee separately and not as part of the Zionist Agency joint delegation. It was then that Ben-Gurion entered the picture, urging Levin to reconsider this decision. “For the sake of Jewish interests,” he said, “the Zionist Agency should be recognized as representing the entire nation.” But Levin did not agree... On June 9, 1947, Agudath Israel leaders again met with Ben-Gurion, informing him that they were prepared to support the cause of a Jewish state if their religious demands were guaranteed in the state constitution...these words obviously express an implied threat: if the Zionist Agency does not promise to fulfill Agudath Israel’s demands, the latter will oppose the establishment of a Jewish state... Ben-Gurion would not deviate from the lines drawn by Shertok and Kaplan a half-year earlier. Regarding marital affairs, he said that there would be no problem arranging matters according to the Torah... Ten days later, the letter from the Zionist Agency Executive was received at the offices of World Agudath Israel... Levin, disheartened, declared that Agudath Israel’s policies were not to be changed despite the letter, which essentially says nothing and contains no genuine commitment. Agudath Israel thus decided to appear separately before the UN Committee, still debating how to present its view that extension of the British Mandate would be the least of all evils...

“The UN Committee...recommended the partitioning of Palestine and the establishment of two sovereign states therein – a Jewish state and an Arab state... After considerable efforts the Agudath Israel Executive Committee succeeded in obtaining a rabbinic decision from five members of its Moetzes Gedolei Hatorah. The Moetzes met on November 5, 1947...a decision was taken not to do anything to oppose the Jewish state or to block achievement of a two-thirds majority in the United Nations to establish the state. This was a decision of considerable significance under the circumstances then prevailing. Agudath Israel’s leaders throughout the world could have initiated contacts with leaders of UN member countries to thwart approval of the partition plan by the General Assembly. At that time (about three weeks before the scheduled General Assembly session), the Zionist Agency was exerting great efforts to convince various world leaders to support the plan. They had to make sure Agudath Israel leaders and supporters were not working in the opposite direction. The decision by these members of the Moetzes was thus the first step in Agudath Israel’s involvement in Zionist efforts to establish a Jewish state.”

Throughout the 61 years of the state’s existence, secular Jews have made up a clear majority of its population and government, and they could have easily voted to establish civil marriage, had it been a priority to them. Yet we do not find that it was even a struggle, as were other issues such as drafting girls and autopsies. Why have the anti-religious gone along so willingly with this religious coercion? The answer is that just as in 1947, when the world was deliberating over the idea of a Zionist state, the Zionists desperately needed all of the Jewish people to appear to be united behind them, so too today the Zionists need their state to be officially a Jewish state, so that they can tell the world about their “right” to Eretz Yisroel based on the Torah. They need the approval of Orthodox rabbis to maintain the appearance of a Jewish state. Let those Orthodox rabbis who think they are gaining concessions from the Zionists realize that it is they who are really making the biggest concession – it is they who give the state its legitimacy!



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