

# Parsha Pearls

FROM THE WORDS OF THE GEDOLIM

Vayishlach 5770

**And he commanded them saying, so shall you say to my master, to Esav... (Bereishis 32:5)**

Rabbi Tovia ben Eliezer, in his Midrash Lekach Tov, says that the word “saying” means that the command to show respect to Esav also applies to future generations. They must not stand up against the wave, for whoever stands up against a wave, the wave sweeps him away; but when one bows to the wave, the wave passes over.

He is echoing the story in Yevamos 121a, in which Rabbi Akiva’s ship sank and he survived by holding onto a piece of wreckage. To each wave that came his way, he bowed his head. Chazal learned from this that if a man sees wicked people coming his way, he should bow his head to them.

Rabbi Yonasan Eybeshutz in Yaaros Devash (v. 1, Drush 3) also quotes this Gemara in Yevamos and derives from it that the Jewish people can get the ultimate benefit from exile only if they accept it humbly and meekly.

The Midrash Lekach Tov brings another statement of Chazal regarding the story of Yaakov’s encounter with Esav. Rabbi Yehonasan said: Whoever wants to appease a king or a government, but does not know the right way, should place this portion of the Torah before him and learn from it the way to appease.

The Sefer Chareidim on the Torah says that in emulating Yaakov Avinu, the Jewish people is keeping the oath that prohibits rebellion against the nations of the world. Instead of rebelling, they must tolerate the exile and give the nations honor, like a servant gives his master. They must not react angrily to the nations, for they are only like a strap in the hand of Hashem. When the nations demand taxes, they must not kick back or speak sharp words, but give them in accordance with the law, respectfully.

The Chareidim also comments that the use of the word “and he commanded” (Bereishis 32:5) implies, according to the Gemara in Kiddushin 29a, that this is a matter that needs encouragement, now and for all generations. Yaakov Avinu wanted to teach his descendents in future generations in exile to be careful with Esav’s honor. This is why whenever our Sages went to visit Roman kings to make requests on behalf of the Jews, they would always consult this passage and learn from it how to conduct themselves.

Later Esav proposed to Yaakov, “Let us travel and go, and I will go by your side” (Bereishis 33:12), and Yaakov declined. Rabbeinu Bachya explains that Esav wanted to split this world with Yaakov. Yaakov, however, said, “My master knows that the children are weak” - the Jewish people will be weak in mitzvos – “and if they pressure them in one day all the sheep will die” - without the atonement of exile they will be sent to Gehinom on the day of judgment and they will not be able to bear the suffering. Therefore, said Yaakov, “Let my master pass before his servant” – you take this world first – “and I will travel in my lowliness” - I will stay in my exile and lowliness. I will not wage any war and I will not rise up in exile at all, but rather “according to the work that is before me” - I will bear the yoke of subjugation. And until when will the subjugation last? “Until I come to master, to Seir.”

The Midrash, cited by Rashi, points out that Yaakov never fulfilled his promise to come to Seir in his lifetime, and that it will be fulfilled only in the messianic era, regarding which the prophet Ovadiah writes: "And the saviors will go up Mount Zion to judge the Mount of Esav" (Ovadiah 1:21).

Similarly, the Akeidas Yitzchak (Rabbi Yitzchak Arama, 1420-1494) interprets the words “according to the work that is before me” as a metaphoric description of Jewish history. Yaakov said, "I have much work to do! My children cannot reach their full potential unless they go through the refinery of trials, suffering and exile three times (i.e. Egypt, Babylonia and Rome). Only then will their souls be purified and ready to absorb spiritual good, to be the chosen people and to live peacefully forever. This refining process will take a long time, and will end with the coming of moshiach, when I will come to you at Seir." (Akeidas Yitzchak Shaar 26)



True Torah Jews  
183 Wilson St. PMB 162  
Brooklyn, NY 11211

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