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76-01 147 St | Flushing, NY



(718) 544-5213
JEPQueens@gmail.com

by Rabbi Yaakov Finestone

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PARSHAS VAYETZE

Rivka received a prophecy that Esav wanted to kill Yaakov for receiving the brachos from Yitzchak that Esav wanted. Rivka told Yaakov to run away to Charan to her brother, Lavan's, house. Rivka wanted Yitzchak to agree with her. Therefore, she told Yitzchak that she would be unhappy if Yaakov married a local girl. Yitzchak agreed and told Yaakov to go to Lavan's house to find a spouse from one of Lavan's daughters. Thus, Yaakov was given a directive from both of his parents to go to Lavan's house (Bereishis 27:42- 28:5)

However, Yaakov did not go directly to Lavan's house. **Rashi** (28:11) says that Yaakov stopped at the yeshiva of Shem and Ever (Noah's son and grandson). Yaakov stayed there, learning Torah for 14 years! Only afterwards did Yaakov continue his journey to Lavan's house.

*"And he reached
the place..."
(Genesis 22:4).*

Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky zt"l (sefer *Emes L'Yaakov*) asks two penetrating questions. Yaakov had a mitzvah of kibud av v'am to go to Lavan's house. What right did he have to delay that mitzvah? **Rav Yaakov** compares Yaakov's actions to a father who asks his son to buy him something from the store. On the way, the son decides that he wants to go to the beis medrash to learn Torah. He finally returns from his errand many hours later. Wouldn't his father be very upset? How could the son do that? Was this the time to learn Torah or to follow his father's request?

Furthermore, why did Yaakov need to learn in the beis medrash of Shem and Ever? Yaakov had already spent his entire life learning Torah. He had learned Torah with his grandfather Avraham for 15 years (see Rav Yaakov's explanation in Parshas Toldos 25:27). Then Yaakov learned with his father Yitzchok for another 45 years (Rabbi Yissocher Frand on Torah.org).

So how could Yaakov justify postponing the fulfillment of his parent's directive for fourteen years, before traveling to Charan? And why did Yaakov feel the need to first go to the yeshiva of Shem and Ever? What could possibly have been missing in his education until now that necessitated his spending fourteen years in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever?

The **Chofetz Chaim** zt"l asks a different question. Yaakov was already 63 years old when he left his parents' house. He was not yet married. Yaakov knew prophetically that he was supposed to father 12 sons, the Jewish Nation. Certainly, his mitzvah at that time should have been to listen to his

parents and find a wife immediately! Why did he first stop to learn Torah for 14 years?!

Rav Yaakov answers that Yaakov **did** need something at the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever that he did not get at home from his father or grandfather. There was something in that yeshiva that Yaakov had to first learn before going to Charon to get married and have a family.

The **Talmud** (Yoma 28B) says that Avraham and Yitzchak learned Torah and taught Torah to whomever came to them to learn about Hashem. They were totally insulated from the distractions and influences of the alien world around them. Thus, Yaakov had always learned in the atmosphere of tzadikim. He had learned how to serve Hashem and how to have faith in Hashem. **Rabbi Frand** says that Charan was a totally different environment. **Rashi** explains that the name Charan comes from the term "*Charone*" (anger). "Until Avraham came along, there was *Charone Af* (Divine Anger) in the world." Apparently, Charan was not as evil as Sodom and Amorah, but it still incurred the wrath of Hashem.

Shem and Ever's Torah was unique. Shem was saved from the great Flood. He was saved physically and spiritually because he was not influenced by the totally corrupt society. Similarly, Ever lived in the generation of the Dispersion (Dor Haflagah). That society wanted to build a tower up to the heavens to wage war against Hashem. Ever was not influenced by that society. The society and surroundings in which Shem and Ever lived were the antithesis of the Divine Will and the antithesis of holiness. Yet, they were able to overcome their surroundings and remain steadfast in their service to Hashem. Their teachings of Torah taught how one can protect themselves and insulate themselves from an immoral and corrupt society around them. This was the aspect of the Torah that Yaakov sorely needed, to protect himself before he would enter the orbit of Lavan. Lavan was an evil person. He was immoral and was a deceiver and conniver. Not only Lavan, but the entire town, was corrupt.

This is why Yaakov went to study in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever.

Therefore, Yaakov did not to immediately follow his parents' directive until he could properly protect himself from the influences of Lavan. Many years later, when Yaakov left Lavan's house, Yaakov was able to say that although he lived with Lavan, he kept all the 613 mitzvos and did not learn from Lavan's evil and

corrupt ways. Yaakov's parents would not have wanted Yaakov to go to Lavan immediately, without the protection of this unique Torah learning. Thus, in this manner, Yaakov **was** fulfilling kibud av va'am by not going to Lavan right away. **Bartanura** (Bereishis 37:34) says that Yaakov was not punished for this 14-year delay of listening to his parents. That shows that Hashem showed that He agreed with Yaakov's decision.

In fact, these are the same Torah lessons that Yaakov taught Yosef! In Parshas VaYeshev, the *pasuk* (Bereishis 37:3) says, "*And Yisrael loved Yosef more than all his sons because he was a Ben Zekunim* (literally, a child of his old age) *to him.*" **Rashi** explains the term *Ben Zekunim* as *Bar Chakim*—a wise son. Yaakov taught Yosef all the Torah that he had learned in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever, to make him a wise son.

Why specifically those Torah lessons? Why doesn't it simply say that Yaakov taught him the Torah of Avraham and Yitzchak? And why didn't Yaakov teach this part of Torah to his other sons? The answer is that Yaakov Avinu prophetically knew that Yosef would wind up alone, in an environment that was going to be hostile to his kedusha. Yaakov told Yosef that there is only one way he can learn how to survive when the environment is hostile to your Divine Service. That is by studying the curriculum they taught in the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever, the Torah of galus.

We live in galus, in a society that is hostile to our inherent holiness. It is an immoral and corrupt society becoming more and more similar to the generation before the flood. We need to intensify our Torah learning (and Tefillah, of course) to protect our kedusha.

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Rabbi Yaakov Finestone is the director of JEP Queens. For almost 50 years JEP Queens has been in the forefront of kiruv. JEP has changed the lives of thousands of Jewish children enrolled in public schools and kiruv schools. Many are shomrei Torah and mitzvos today because of JEP.

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