



From the desk of
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Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

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TORAT

Parashat Vayetzei

HAMELECH

Business With Integrity

Our *parasha* states (31:38) that Yaakov said to Lavan, “These twenty years I have been with you; your sheep and she-goats never miscarried, nor did I eat rams of your flock. That which was damaged I never brought you – I myself would bear the loss. For me you would deduct it, whether it was stolen by day or stolen by night. This is how it was: By day scorching heat consumed me and frost by night; my sleep drifted from my eyes. This is my twenty years in your household: I served you fourteen years for your two daughters and six years for your flocks, and you changed my wage a hundred times. Had not the G-d of my father ... been with me, you would surely have now sent me away empty handed.”

Questions

1. The Alshich asks: If Yaakov was so scrupulous in avoiding any hint of theft, how could he take spotted sticks and place them in front of the sheep to encourage spotted offspring?
2. Rashi (31:10) writes that the *malachim* would take spotted sheep from Lavan's flock and bring them to Yaakov's flock so that Yaakov's sheep should have spotted offspring. How could they do this? Isn't this dishonest? Didn't Lavan and Yaakov agree that there would be a clear split between their flocks?

That's Business

When we examine how people run their businesses today, we see to our great sorrow that many have fallen into the net of the *yetzer hara*. They trick and deceive their customers, take advantage of people's innocence, and utilize the consumer's lack of knowledge to turn a bigger profit. They justify their actions by telling themselves that they did nothing wrong – after all, the customer agreed to the terms, and he even thanked him afterward. Whenever a naïve person walks into their store, it is a cause for rejoicing; he is easily deceived and a hefty sum of money is close at hand.

For example, a person may take his car to the mechanic and the car owner knows next to nothing about car repair. The mechanic sees this and takes advantage of him; he tells him that there's a serious problem that will require many hours of work and that he should return in a few days. Really, all that's required is a small repair and everything will be in order, but the mechanic fools the customer and charges him a fortune for practically nothing.

A person can walk into a jewelry store, lacking knowledge about diamonds and precious stones, allowing the jeweler to tell him all sorts of stories and overcharge him. There are lawyers who scare people and paint their legal situation in the darkest possible manner to get paid well for their time. They also do this so that the client will be



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thrilled with a mediocre result, believing that he has been saved from horrible fate.

There are some professional legal advisors who conduct *din Torah*, who will fan the flames of discord between a couple so that they will have an opportunity to make some more money. Such practices are common in all different modes of business, whether the person is an electrician, works in computer repair, or does air-conditioning installation.

R' Yosef Shaul Natenson, the chief rabbi of Levov, explained that this is the intent of the pasuk, "The voice is the voice of Yaakov, [but] the hands are the hands of Esav." He said that there are people who have the voice of Yaakov and act with great piety, offering many prayers and supplications to Hashem, but their hands are the hands of Esav, full of plunder and theft. How mistaken are people who behave this way! Our Sages (*Shabbat* 31a) tell us that when we stand in front of the Heavenly court, the first question we will be asked is, "Were you honest in your business dealings?" We will have no choice but to give an accounting of every dollar in our possession and be punished for any money that dishonestly came into our hands. Such money carries no blessing with it and, contrary to what people think, will not help them get rich.

The Alshich's answer

The Alshich explains that Yaakov in no way violated his agreement with Lavan; in fact it was Lavan who went back on his word: The Torah

writes (30:32) that Yaakov stipulated that Lavan could "go amidst the *Seh* and remove any and every *Seh* that was spotted ... Any *Seh* that will be spotted will be my wages." However, Lavan did not act in accordance with Yaakov's words; rather, "On that day he [Lavan] removed all the spotted *Tayashim* and all the spotted *Izim* ..."

The Alshich explains that *Seh* is a term for sheep that are young as opposed to the term *Izim*, which includes sheep of all ages. Yaakov told Lavan to remove all the young sheep to prevent confusing the sheep belonging to Lavan and the new sheep born to Yaakov; Lavan went much farther and removed all the spotted sheep. Lavan wanted no spotted sheep to remain to reduce the chance of any spotted sheep being born to Yaakov.

Yaakov did not take Lavan to task for his dishonesty and did not quarrel with him; but to compensate for Lavan's trickery and maintain the terms of their agreement, Yaakov needed to have some spotted images amidst his flock to replace the spotted sheep that were improperly removed. Therefore, he peeled sticks and the *malachim* brought spotted sheep from Lavan's flock; this was not a violation of their agreement, but on the contrary, it was a just and honest way of still maintaining their arrangement and completely in accordance with Yaakov's later statement, that he served Lavan with great self-sacrifice.



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Let's Follow In Their Footsteps

The deeds of the Avot are a forbearer for their children and Yaakov's great integrity should be the Jewish Nation's model. Today, it is self-understood that if a boss is dishonest and changes the worker's wages a hundred times, as Lavan did with Yaakov, the worker can pay back the boss by tricking and stealing from him. Who can blame the worker? He has no other option - he has to eat and earn a living somehow. Yaakov behaved differently and teaches us that we should not be corrupted by the boss's dishonest ways, but to continue to exert our best efforts in our job and work with great self-sacrifice; Hashem can be trusted to give us our just wages.

We mentioned that our Sages say that we will be asked if we conducted our business dealings with integrity. We cannot excuse ourselves by saying that the boss had it coming to him; this is not the way of the Torah. Somebody who slacks off, works half-heartedly, and allows himself to take what is not his because of his boss's misconduct, will even lose what is rightfully his. Our Sages tell us (*Derech Eretz Zuta*), "If one takes what doesn't belong to him, [even] what rightfully belongs to him will be taken away." On the other hand, if he acts like Yaakov Avinu he will merit tremendous success and blessing in his work. This is what happened with Yaakov – ignoring Lavan's deception and crooked practices, Yaakov continued to work faithfully and with great dedication. He thereby merited great wealth despite Lavan's efforts to rob him at every turn; a

person's yearly earnings are pre-determined and no one can deprive him of what is coming to him.

The Rambam (*Hilchot Sechirut* 13:7) learns from Yaakov how a hired worker is to conduct himself: "A [paid worker] is obligated to work with all his strength since Yaakov, the *tzaddik*, said, 'With all my strength I worked for your father.' Therefore, he received a reward even in this world, as it states, 'And the man became abundantly [wealthy].'" This idea is also mentioned in the *Otzar Medrashim* (pg. 167), "Three things bring a person to wealth - serious prayer, honest business dealings, and acting humbly with the members of one's house."

Rotten Fabric

R' Klipah HaKohen was pious, holy, humble, and a man of great integrity. He lived in Gerbas and was involved in the fabric business. He had an arrangement with a merchant from Bejorva - the merchant would send him wool from Bejorva; R' Klipah would sell the wool and keep 20 percent for himself and send the other 80 percent back to Bejorva. R' Klipah instructed the merchant to make sure to mark the precise amount that he paid for the merchandise and not to mark up the price.

The merchant from Bejorva saw that R' Klipah conducted his business with great honesty and followed his instructions. However, one time he managed to purchase high quality merchandise for very little money and couldn't resist marking



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up the price when he sent the fabric to R' Klipah. The merchant expected the fabric to be sold quickly and waited for R' Klipah to send him a handsome profit. He waited and waited but months went by and still no money was forthcoming. He wrote R' Klipah a letter but received no response.

Eventually, the merchant's travels took him to Gerbas, and he personally went to talk to R' Klipah. He asked R' Klipah why, despite having sold much fabric in the interim, he had yet to sell the high quality merchandise that the merchant had sent him from Berjova. R' Klipah told him that as unbelievable as it was, no customer ever asked him about that particular fabric; it was just lying there, still in its package, ignored and unwanted. R' Klipah said that he suspected that there was something dishonest mixed in with the merchandise and therefore he had no *siyata diShmaya* (Divine aid) in selling it.

Hearing this, the merchant from Berjova confessed that he had marked up the price. They went to examine the merchandise and discovered that it had rotted and grown wormy. The merchant was taken aback and saw that he had suffered a significant monetary loss. R' Klipah asked him for the true price that he paid for the merchandise; they would sell it for that price and salvation would come from Hashem. And so it was: Only a short time later, a merchant came who was interested in this specific type of fabric. He was unable to find it anywhere else and paid full price despite it being heavily damaged. The

merchant from Berjova made a sizeable profit and learned a lesson in faith and integrity.

The Blacksmith Of Berditchiv

When R' Yechezkel the blacksmith passed away, his funeral was announced throughout the town. When R' Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev heard the news, he turned to his students and said, "One of the pillars of the world has left us. Come, let us join in the funeral procession of this great *tzaddik*." The townspeople had thought of the blacksmith as a simple man, and soon the words of R' Levi Yitzchak spread throughout the town. The people were amazed - how could this simple man be a *tzaddik*?

When the funeral procession commenced and the townspeople saw R' Levi Yitzchak walking after the deceased, they all closed up their shops and joined the procession. When the procession reached the open area in front of the cemetery, the Rav stopped the procession and said that he would like to say a eulogy. The Rav got up and said, "The deceased, the *tzaddik*, was before me three times for a *din Torah*. It's worthwhile for you to listen to my words and gain greatly in character improvement from them.

"The first *din Torah* he had involved a merchant from our town. The merchant's fortune took a turn for the worse; he was in dire straits and needed to get hold of 500 rubles. He found out that it was possible to receive a loan from the blacksmith. He came to the blacksmith and put



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forth his request. The blacksmith said that he was ready to loan him the money but he needed a co-signer. The merchant answered that he wanted to keep his situation a secret and was embarrassed to tell anyone, but Hashem would guarantee his loan. R' Yechezkel accepted this arrangement, wrote a contract which said that Hashem guaranteed the loan to be paid in two months, and gave the man the money.

"A few months went by and the time to repay the loan arrived. The merchant didn't have the money, and R' Yechezkel didn't take him to court. After a year, the merchant was successful and went to the blacksmith to finally repay his loan. However, the blacksmith refused to accept payment and claimed that Hashem had guaranteed the loan and had already paid him in full. The merchant was afraid of having transgressed the prohibition of theft and demanded that the blacksmith take the money. They came to me for a *din Torah* and I told R' Yechezkel that he was required to accept the money. He refused and insisted that Hashem had already paid back the loan. I saw that neither side wanted the money and told them that if they didn't want the money, they could give it to me to use for the *yeshiva*, to which they happily agreed.

"The second *din Torah* started when a person walked into a store and two hundred rubles fell from his pocket. He didn't notice his loss until he left the store. The store owner saw the money and took it. Soon, the man returned and inquired

whether perhaps a large sum of money had been found in the store. The store owner denied having seen the money. The blacksmith had witnessed the whole scene and told the man who had lost the money not to worry. He had found the money and just needed to hear from the man exactly how much he had lost to make sure. The man said that he had lost 200 rubles, and the blacksmith took him to his shop and gave him the money from his own pocket.

"When the storekeeper saw what the blacksmith did he was greatly embarrassed and went to R' Yechezkel and confessed. Full of regret he asked R' Yechezkel for forgiveness, and gave him the money. The blacksmith replied that he didn't know what he was talking about and refused to take the money. They argued and finally agreed to present the case to me. I told R' Yechezkel that he should take the money, but he wouldn't take it under any circumstances. I told them that if they wanted, they could give me the money for the *yeshiva*; they were very happy with the arrangement.

"The third *din Torah* involved a man of distinguished lineage. After his marriage, he lived in grinding poverty but couldn't bring himself to ask for charity. After many nights of going to sleep without food, he decided that he was going to try his luck in another town, where, with Hashem's help, his fortune would turn around. The next morning, he told his wife that he was leaving but she shouldn't worry; the blacksmith, who lives in their neighborhood, owed him money. Until he



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would return the blacksmith should give her a half ruble every day. The man left town, and his wife, in all innocence, went to ask the blacksmith for the money. He saw that she came in all seriousness, but he did not know her husband. He thought a bit and told her that she should come every day for her half ruble. The woman came for years to get her half ruble; on Friday, the blacksmith would give her a full ruble.

"Eventually her husband was successful, amassed a sizable amount of money, and returned to the town. The man was shocked when his wife told him how every day the blacksmith gave her half a ruble. He made a calculation of all the days that he was gone and determined how much money the blacksmith had given his wife. He took that sum of money and went to pay back his debt. But the blacksmith said that he didn't know him or his wife. The husband was adamant - he had told his wife a fairy tale so he could run away, but now that he had the money, why should he be guilty of theft? Neither of the two men would budge and they came to me for a *din Torah*. Again, the same story repeated itself and they gave the money to the yeshiva.

"*Rabbotai*, woe to us from the Day of Judgement and woe to us from the Day of Rebuke; the first question that we will be asked in the Heavenly Court is whether we conducted our affairs with integrity. The deceased wasn't such a wealthy man and was able to withstand such difficult trials; a great *tzaddik* has been taken from us!" These words made a great impression on all those

assembled, and they took upon themselves to return any questionable money and to repent.

It Pays To Be Honest

We have learned how careful a person must be to stay clear of any theft and deception and work honestly and diligently regardless of his boss's conduct. The same is true for all his financial dealings; they should be conducted with integrity and honesty and he should always have the customer's welfare in mind. This is in accordance with what I heard from a certain lawyer; he went to R' Elazar Abuchatzera who told him that if he will always be concerned with the welfare of the client, he will have an abundance of *parnasah* and clients as numerous as sand. The lawyer told me that he did as he was advised, and it was just as R' Abuchatzera said.

This is the proper path and the polar opposite of those who take advantage of the naïve customers by telling them a pack of lies and then rejoice in their good fortune. However, what he thinks is bringing him success will lead to a great financial loss and cause him to lose his business, for ill-gotten wealth abandons its owner in the middle of his days. A wise person should learn from Yaakov Avinu, who paved the way for us, a straight way which leads to blessing and success in everything we do.

Shabbat Shalom
Rav Mordechai Malka