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Timely Torah Insights
by Rabbi Baruch Bodenheim
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Vayeitzei

The Power of Positive Thinking

This issue is dedicated by **Dr. & Mrs. Marv & Zehava Sher**
L'Iluv Nishmas her father, **Sy Bogarsky, Shmuel ben Natan Yitzchak z"l** (11th of Kislev)

When Dovid was a young child living in a town in Poland, a boiling pot of water spilled on his hand. Dovid was severely burned and needed skin graft surgery. His hand healed but unfortunately, hair started to grow from the palm of his hand because skin from his scalp was used for the graft! Dovid was constantly teased as a young boy, but Hashem had a plan. During World War II the Nazis rounded up all the Jews in Dovid's town into the town square, where a guard announced with a sneer, "Everyone must board this train (to the concentration camp) -- unless you have hair growing out of the palm of your hand." Dovid thrust out his palm, showing the hair growing from it. The startled guard let him go. Dovid was able to escape and his life was spared. Now he understood the Divine Plan concerning his hand.

That story sheds light on an anomaly in Parshas Vayeitzei. If you look inside a Sefer Torah, you'll notice there are spaces in and between various *pesukim*. The spaces in the middle of the line are called *stumah* and those at the start of a new line are called *p'sucha*. In Parshas Vayeitzei, however, there are no spaces at all! It's like one long paragraph. Why?

First, let's see *why* there are breaks and spaces altogether in a Sefer Torah. The Torah is not written like a regular book with punctuation, so why the placement of spaces? The *Toras Kohanim*¹ explains that Hashem taught Moshe the entire Torah when he was on top of Har Sinai. The spaces indicate the places where Hashem stopped to give Moshe time to think about what he had just learned. So... didn't Moshe need time to reflect on any portion of Vayeitzei??

Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz² explains that Yaakov's life was filled with many difficulties, most of them occurring in Parshas Vayeitzei. The Parsha opens with Yaakov going into exile, fleeing from his brother Eisav, who sent his son Elifaz to kill Yaakov. Elifaz accomplished his mission by stripping Yaakov of all his money and valuables, leaving him penniless (akin to death). Yaakov arrived at the home of his Uncle Lavan and began working seven arduous years to marry Rochel. After the evil Lavan switched Leah for Rochel on Yaakov's wedding night, Yaakov had to work for an *additional* seven years to marry Rochel, his intended wife. For 20 years, Yaakov worked for Lavan, the greatest con artist in history, who always tried to swindle and cheat Yaakov out of any profits. Yaakov's commitment to *emes* (being honest) was challenged daily, as he labored to raise a family and to live a life of truth in the home of a cheat and liar.

If we analyze those years of Yaakov on their own merit, it's hard to understand why Yaakov had to endure such suffering. Only at the end of the Parsha does the silver lining appear. Yaakov left Eretz Yisrael alone and penniless, but he returned to Israel with four wives and their twelve children, along with great wealth. Looking back, one can see clearly that Yaakov was destined to marry the Matriarchs Rochel and Leah, as well as Bilha and Zilpah, who altogether bore twelve sons who became the Tribes of Israel. So why were there no breaks or spaces left for reflection in the middle of the Parsha? Because the Parsha must be read in its entirety in order to learn its teaching - that whatever happens is by Hashem's design, for the ultimate good. The same applies in our lives when we are going through a challenging period. Hashem is teaching us that these situations must be viewed by looking at the *whole* picture.

But what happens when the bigger picture is unclear? What do we do when we can't see the benefit of our difficult experiences? Rav Chaim Shmulevitz gives us an easy approach to adjust our attitudes. There was a great Talmid Chacham in the time of the Gemara referred to as Nachum Ish Gam Zu - Nachum, the man who said the phrase "*Gam Zu l'tovah*" - this too is for the good". The Gemara recounts many painful episodes in Nachum Ish Gam Zu's life and his response was always, "*Gam Zu l'tovah* - This is also for the good." And sometimes it was easy to recognize the good end results in his lifetime³.

Everyone encounters various hardships in life; be it with finding a spouse, *shalom bayis*, children, health, career - the list goes on. The story of Yaakov's difficulties, the hair on Dovid's palm and the challenging life of Nachum Ish Gam Zu, illustrate that all situations are for our ultimate good.

¹ 1:3, quoted in Rashi Vayikra 1:1

² Sichos Mussar Maamar 13

³ Gemara Taanis 21a

If we have faith and train ourselves to say, "This too is for the good," it will have a positive effect on our attitude and help us view all of our experiences as ultimately being for our good.

Halacha in the Parsha – Parshas Vayeitzei

by Rabbi Moshe Silverstein
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Last week we discussed the *minhag* for a *Chosson and Kallah* to fast on the day of their wedding and explained that it is a day of atonement and forgiveness. We mentioned that there are different opinions as to whether *teshuvah* is an essential component of the fast but pointed out that realistically it is difficult to be in the proper "Yom Kippur" frame of mind considering the common schedule of events leading up to the *Chupah*, which typically includes getting dressed and made up, taking pictures, and greeting family and guests. In addition, it may be a particularly hard day to fast especially for those that do not fast well on a regular day.

Can the fast take place on an earlier day prior to the day of the wedding? Are there other instances when the fast may take place on an earlier day?

The *S'dei Chemed*¹, Rav Chaim Chizkiyahu Medini, privately instructed his *talmidim* to fast on an earlier day out of concern that the pre wedding celebrations, which he described were elaborate in his time, may delay the *Chupah* and cause the *Chosson* to have to fast much longer than necessary. However, he was not willing to publicize this because of the opposite concern, namely, that the *Chosson* may overindulge in the party which would be inappropriate prior to the *Chupah*. In fact, another reason for the *minhag* to fast altogether is to prevent insobriety which could bring to question the validity of the marriage².

Based on this *S'dei Chemed*, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach³ advised *Chassanim* and *Kallos* who may not fast easily to fast on an earlier day. He also said that if one gets married on the day following (or perhaps even within a short time after) a public fast day, the fast of the previous "fast day" could count for the pre wedding fast as well.

However, Rav Moshe Feinstein⁴ disagreed. He was asked if it is necessary to fast on the day of the *Chupah* if the previous day was a public fast day. He brought a proof that the fast has to be on the wedding day itself: *Mogen Avraham*⁵ writes that although a *Chosson* doesn't fast on certain days on which one would otherwise be precluded from fasting such as *Rosh Chodesh*, a *Chosson*

does fast on the days between *Yom Kippur* and *Sukkos*. Rav Moshe says that we see from here that although the *Chosson* just fasted on *Yom Kippur*, it cannot serve as the pre wedding fast. He adds that one should fast even on the day immediately following *Yom Kippur*.

Rav Mordechai Eliyahu Rabinowitz in *Shut Toras Mordechai*⁶ writes that if one gets married the day after *Yom Kippur* he does not have to fast; not because *Yom Kippur* serves as the fast but because there is no need to fast. The purpose of the fast is to attain forgiveness and that was just achieved the day before. He bases this on an opinion in the *mishna*⁷ that says that the day following *Yom Kippur* is the one day during the year that everyone can be assumed to be "sin-free". (Furthermore, he writes, since fasting two days in a row could be difficult there is additional justification to be lenient.)

Rav Meshulam Finkelstein in his commentary on *Mateh Ephraim*⁸ extends the application of this idea until *Sukkos* based on the *Medrash*⁹ that says that after achieving atonement on *Yom Kippur*, we remain "sin free" until *Sukkos* because when we are involved with *Yom Tom* preparations there is no time to sin. Accordingly, a *Chosson* who gets married any day between *Yom Kippur* and *Sukkos* would not need to fast. He says that one can rely on this in cases of necessity.

*Aruch Hashulchan*¹⁰ writes that the fast can be skipped completely by those who do not fast well. However, he cautions, the *Chosson* should not drink any intoxicating beverages and should not overindulge. Similarly, in the above mentioned cases as well as any other time the wedding is not immediately preceded by a fast, *poskim* advise the same.

¹ שדי חמד מערכת חתן וכלה וחופה אות ד

² שו"ת מהרם מינץ ס' ק"ט, רמ"א אה"ע ס' ס"א סע' ג

³ הליכות שלמה תעניות פרק י"ג סע' י"ג הע' 43

⁴ שו"ת אגרות משה או"ח ח"א ס' קס"ד

⁵ מגן אברהם או"ח תרע"ג ס' ק"א

⁶ שו"ת תורת מרדכי או"ח ס' ק"ד מובא בזהנשוואין כהלכתם ח"א פרק ו' הע' 106

⁷ כריתות כ"ה ע"א

⁸ אלף המגן על מטא אפרים ס' תרכ"ה ב' אות ב

⁹ מובא בטור או"ח תקפ"א

¹⁰ ערוך השלחן אה"ע ס' ס"א סע' כ"א

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