

Good Shabbos, everyone.

Mazel tov to Adam and Dena Lerner on the *Bar Mitzvah* of their son, Moshe. Mazel tov also to his grandparents, Estelle Lerner and Bernie and Sonia Kozlovsky. May you have much continued *nachas* from all your children and grandchildren.

Thank you to the *drasha* sponsors:

- Mordechai and Miriam Gordon, in memory of Miriam's mother, Betty Frost Eisner, Batya bas Menachem Mendel, whose *yahrzeit* is the 21st of Kislev. May her *neshama* have an *aliya*.
- Simy Lewis, In honor of Tommy Weiss's special birthday. Wishing him many more happy and healthy years!

May the sponsors be rewarded for their support of the shul with *bracha*, *hatzlacha*, and good health.

Towards the end of the Parsha, Yaakov fulfills the commitment he made 22 years before as he made his way to Lavan's house. He built a Mizbeach and thanked Hashem for keeping him safe through all of his difficulties. In response, Hashem gives Yaakov a *bracha* and formally changes his name to Yisrael. Then the Torah records,

בראשית פרק לה פסוק יג: וַיַּעַל מֵעֵלְיוֹ אֱלֹקִים בְּמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר אֲתָוּ:

"Hashem went up from [meeting with] him, from the place where He spoke with him."

On this pasuk, **Rashi** comments,

רש"י בראשית פרק לה פסוק יג: במקום אשר דבר אתו - איני יודע מה מלמדנו:

"I do not know what this comes to teach us."

This comment seems peculiar. Rashi does not comment on every single pasuk. He could have simply not commented on the pasuk at all. What does he add by writing that he does not know what this comes to teach us? The **Sifsei Chachamim** writes that Rashi is informing us that there is something peculiar about this pasuk, something that the verse is trying to tell us, but that he does not know what it is. Essentially, Rashi is alerting us that there is a question, and he knows there are different approaches but is not convinced one is correct.

שפתי חכמים: יש מקשים מה בא להודיענו שאינו יודע, אם לא יודע ישתוק, וי"ל דרש"י ידע שיש לישב בכמה אנפי כפירוש המפרשים וע"ש, אבל לא ידע איזה הוא אמיתי לישב הפשיטות של מקרא, ועיין בצד"ל:

This is not the only time that Rashi informs us that he does not know something. **Rabbi Akiva Eiger** in his *Gilyon Hashas* on **Gemara Brachos 25b** lists over three dozen examples throughout shas where Rashi admits that he does not know something.

Rashi is following the **Gemara in Brachos 4a**, which states: *Teach your tongue to say 'I don't know'*. It takes tremendous humility and intellectual honesty to say that there is something to learn, but I do not know the answer.

But it is interesting to note that, although he writes this dozens of times on shas, in his commentary on the Chumash, Rashi writes that he does not know only twice. The other example is at the end of Parshas Toldos, where the Torah identifies Rivka as the mother of Yaakov and Esav.

בראשית פרק כח פסוק ה: וַיִּשְׁלַח ה' וַיִּשְׁלַח יִצְחָק אֶת-יַעֲקֹב וַיֵּלֶךְ פְּדָנָה אֲרָם אֶל-לְבָן בֶּן-בְּתוּאֵל הָאֲרָמִי אֲחֵי רִבְקָה אִם יַעֲקֹב וְעֵשָׂו:

Yitzchak sent Yaakov away, and he travelled to Padan Aram, to the house of Lavan, son of Besuel, the Aramean, brother of Rivkah, mother of Yaakov and Esav.

There, too, Rashi writes: *I do not know what this comes to teach us.* It is interesting that these two places Rashi are both in the context of Yaakov and his journey. Is this significant?

I would like to suggest that Rashi may be teaching us more than the fact that there is an unanswered question here. He is also modeling for us the *midda* of humility. And he is modeling this *midda* specifically in the context of Yaakov Avinu, to teach us that humility and honesty and willingness to accept and appreciate the help of others was what would keep Yaakov growing, learning, and thriving in challenging times, and is our mandate as well.

We see this in many instances in Yaakov Avinu's life. Immediately after that Pasuk at the end of Toldos, according to the Medrash, Yaakov demonstrated humility by attending the Yeshiva of Shem v'Ever. Even though he had studied with his holy father for 48 years, he went to learn more and learn in a different style. That takes humility. How many people at the age of 63, having studied with the best, would go study more, with different teachers, admitting there is more to learn...for 14 years.

Indeed, immediately after Yaakov leaves that Yeshiva, the Torah records the following statement:

בראשית פרק כה פסוק טז: (זט) וַיִּקְרַע יַעֲקֹב מְשַׁנְתּוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר אָכֵן יֵשׁ ה' בַּמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה וְאֲנִי לֹא יָדַעְתִּי:

Yaakov awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely Hashem is present in this place, and I did not know it!"

He admitted that he did not know that he was on holy ground. He was able to say, like Rashi, "there is something I did not know."

In *Pirkei Avos*,(4:1), **Ben Zoma** teaches that a wise person is open to learning from everyone. A truly wise person never believes he has all the answers.

משנה מסכת אבות פרק ד משנה א: בן זומא אומר איזהו חכם הלומד מכל אדם שנאמר (תהלים קי"ט) מכל מלמדי השכלתי

Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, in his commentary on Pirkei Avos, comments on people who have a problem learning from others, who see that as a sign of weakness. He writes that "*people with a healthy ego are the ones who can learn from everyone...*" Rashi's seemingly innocuous comment of "I do not know," beyond urging us to look for answers, is modeling humility and a healthy ego. It is also teaching us that Yaakov Avinu's life is a study of humility. Real humility is about honesty. Understanding what we know, what we do not know, and having the courage and intellectual curiosity and honesty to go out and search for answers...

If we do not have all the answers, humility allows to recognize that we need others—Hashem and other people--to provide us with what we are missing. A humble person is confident enough to recognize and thank others—and appreciate them.

We see this in other incidents in Yaakov's life. When he meets with Esav, along with his abundant and wealthy estate, large family, and riches, he states:

בראשית פרק לג פסוק יא: קַח־נָא אֶת־בְּרִכְתִּי אֲשֶׁר הֵבֵאתָ לִּי כִּי־חַנּוּנִי אֱלֹהִים וְכִי יֵשׁ־לִי־כֹל וַיִּפְצַר־בּוֹ וַיִּקַּח:

Please accept my present which has been brought to you, for God has favored me and I have plenty. And when he urged him, he accepted.

רש"י בראשית פרק לג פסוק יא: יש לי כל - כל ספוקי, ועשו דבר בלשון גאווה (פסוק ט) יש לי רב, יותר ויותר מכדי צרכי:

Rashi notes that this is a humble way of speaking. It contrasts sharply with Esav, who says "I have an enormous amount." Whereas wealth inflated Esav's ego¹, it deflated Yaakov's ego. How does this work?

Earlier in the Parsha, when Yaakov Avinu is worried about meeting with Esav, he states explicitly that the enormous wealth and *bracha* Hashem had bestowed upon him made him feel small.

¹ See also Hoshea 12 (Haftara of Vayetze), where Esav is chastised for his arrogance

בראשית לב:יא: קִטְנִיתִי מִכָּל הַחַסְדִּים וּמִכָּל הַחַמְדָּה אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֵת-עַבְדְּךָ כִּי בְמִקְלִי עָבַרְתִּי אֶת-הַיַּרְדֵּן וְעַתָּה הִנֵּיתִי לְשָׁגִי מִחַנּוֹת:

I have become small from all the kindness that You have so steadfastly shown Your servant: with my staff alone I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps.

What does it mean “I have become small”?

Humility is about perspective and context—focusing on the source of our gifts—recognizing those who helped us obtain them. It’s about recognizing and living life with that appreciation. In this way, someone with true humility must be fully aware of their gifts, proud of their accomplishments—and that does not lead to haughtiness.

Rav Eliyahu Lopian, in *Lev Eliyahu (Vol II)*, writes :

ענין ענוה אינו שלא ידע האדם ערך עצמו אל אדרבה צריך אדם לידע כחות נפשו ואעפ"כ לא יבא עי"ז לידי גאוה בהתבוננו האיך השתמש בכחותיו ובידעו כי אין אלו שייכים לו רק של שמים. . .

Humility is not the product of self delusion—one not realizing the gifts and talents one has—rather it is the product of correct self awareness—one’s recognition that these are gifts from G-d.

This idea is further highlighted in a famous **Mishna in Avos 2:8** .

רבן יוחנן בן זכאי קבל מהלל ומשמאי הוא היה אומר אם למדת תורה הרבה אל תחזיק טובה לעצמך כי לכך נוצרת
*Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai would say: If you learn a lot of Torah, do not attribute success **only** to yourself; for that is what you were created for. God gave you those abilities for a purpose.*

In considering our accomplishments, we must not applaud only ourselves. We must also recognize that the Divine source of the strength, vision, and vigor to that enables us to translate our potential into real accomplishments. This is what it means when Yaakov describes himself as small. Usually, abundance inflates our egos and makes us feel bigger and independent. Yaakov attributed his success to Hashem, and as he allowed Hashem to have a bigger role in his life, he describes this as *katonti*, becoming smaller, less self important.

Haughtiness is the result of separating our accomplishments from their true source. In contrast, humility is the result of *hakaros hatov*—recognizing where the accomplishments come from, and showing proper gratitude. Being aware of where things actually come from, highlights our responsibility to use them for their intended purpose.

This was Yaakov’s message to Esav when he sent messengers ahead.

בראשית פרק לב פסוק ה וַיֹּצֵר אֹתָם לְאֵמָר כֹּה תֹאמְרוּן לְעֵשָׂו כֹּה אָמַר עַבְדְּךָ יַעֲקֹב עִם-לָבָן וְאֶתְרִי וְעַתָּה:
“*Thus you shall say to my lord Esau, ‘Thus says your servant Jacob:…’*” “*Thus shall you say, ‘To my lord Esau, thus says your servant Jacob. I stayed with Laban and remained until now;*

Rashi famously comments:

רש"י בראשית (פרשת וישלח) פרק לב פסוק ה: דבר אחר גרתי בגימטריא תרי"ג, כלומר עם לבן הרשע גרתי ותרי"ג מצות שמרתיג ולא למדתי ממעשיו הרעים:

Another explanation: the word גרתי has the numerical value of 613 - תרי"ג - it is as much as to say, “Though I have sojourned with Laban, the wicked, I have observed the מצות מצות, the 613 Divine Commandments, and I have learned naught of his evil ways.

How did Rashi see this explanation of Taryag Mitzvos in the word *garti* (beyond a play on words)?

When Avraham approached Efron (Breishis 23:4) about purchasing *Me-aras Hamachpela*, he identifies himself as a *ger*. Rashi explains that it means an outsider.

Yaakov was saying that despite all the challenges he faced in Lavan's house, physical and spiritual, he had remained "an outsider," committed to his own values, never allowing the materialism he amassed to change the way he viewed himself. If anything, it gave him more of an appreciation for Hashem's role in his life and diminished his view of his own powers.

I believe this is why we refer to the story of Yaakov Avinu in *mikra bikkurim*. *Arami oved Avi*, the **Ibn Ezra** says, is describing Yaakov Avinu. Yaakov was the model for gratitude and appreciation.

אבן עזרא דברים פרק כו פסוק: והקרובו, שארמי הוא יעקב. כאילו אמר הכתוב: כאשר היה אבי בארם, היה אובד

The word קטנתי is the ultimate statement of humility. Yaakov is acknowledging that God is truly the One Who is great — and the crossing of the Jordan with just a stick, flourishing into two full camps, was the ultimate proof to Yaakov that everything came from God.

The **Ba'al HaTanya** has an insight into this: It is possible for a person to have complete understanding that all gifts are from God, but still not fulfill "קטנתי". He says that, when a person receives *chesed*, there are two normal reactions: The recipient can either be focused on the gift itself or on the giver of the gift. Unfortunately, many times in life, Hashem bestows goodness upon us and we focus only on the gifts. We take the gifts and ignore the giver. Yaakov, however, states קטנתי meaning that he is small *vis-a-vis* Hashem. He recognizes how dependent he is on His *chesed*. And this is, of course, the ultimate way that one should approach *chesed*, whether from Hashem or from others.

Thus, there are two ways to look at things we receive in life from Hashem: That which we receive can make us feel inflated and bigger like Esav. We have something new and now we are bigger and better because of it. We may go through the motions and even thank Hashem, but unfortunately, many times, the bigger we get, the smaller God gets in our minds. In the extreme, if there were no God, but we had all of these things, we would be just as happy. In this model, we thank God merely as a means and *not* as the ultimate end.

Yaakov Avinu was the opposite-- the more Hashem showered him with blessings, the more he recognized Hashem, and the more room Hashem occupied in his life. That is his statement of קטנתי. It is humility that creates space for a relationship with others and creates a thirst for knowledge that would serve Yaakov well in life. Rashi's admission that "I do not know" is the secret to being a lifelong learner, to being committed to real growth. It is the secret of Yaakov who was given a new name, which included the name of Hashem, as he lived his life making room for Hashem within his identity.

There is a story told by **Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer** about **Reb Eizele Charif**, a renowned 19th century Lithuanian Rabbi. Reb Eizele visited Volozhin and posed a halakhic problem to the students of the great Yeshiva there. He declared that whoever solved it would be worthy to become his son-in-law. The most brilliant students came to his door with proposed solutions, but were dismissed one by one. Eventually, it seemed, the students gave up and Reb Eizele packed up and got ready to leave. Just as he was leaving the city, a student came running and called on the carriage to stop. "Ah," said Reb Eisel, "you found the correct answer?" "No," replied the student, "I have no idea, but please, before you leave, I beg you, tell me the solution." At which point Reb Eizele smiled and replied, "You are the one." Rav Yosef Shlofer who became the Av Bais Din of Slonim, became the son-in-law of Rav Eizele Charif and later published his *seforim*. May Hashem give us the courage to be able to say "I don't know," when necessary, as well as the intellectual curiosity and passion to exert ourselves to always seek the answers. May we learn to see and appreciate Hashem in our lives and see the days when the searching for truth will help restore the Beis Hamikdash, bimhera viyamenu, amen.