

Parshat Vayetze 5779

It is instructive to contrast the רמאות (deceit) of Lovon and the אמת (truth) of Yaakov.

When Yaakov meets Rochel he says כי אחי אביה הוא *"that he is her father's brother"*. He wasn't literally. Rashi says it means he was a relative of her father. But he also quotes the Midrashic interpretation: אם לרמאות הוא בא *"If he comes for deceit"* גם אני *"and if he is a decent person"* גם אני בן רבקה אחותו הכשרה *"I am also the son of Rivka his decent sister"*. In both ב שמואל 22:27 and תהלים 18:27 it says: עם נבר תתבר ועם עקש תתפל: *"With the pure you act purely and with the corrupt you act perversely"*.

When Lovon met Yaakov for the first time it says לו ויחבק לו וינשק לו *"He embraced and kissed him"* i.e pretended to be his friend but was really looking for his money. Yaakov specifies he wants to marry Rochel *"I will work seven years"* אעבדך שבע שנים *"for Rochel; your daughter"* [not someone else's]; [only] your younger daughter [not older]. Why did Lovon reply long-windedly: טוב תתי אתה לך *"It is better that I give her to you than I give her to another"*. This exemplifies how Lovon said one thing אחד בפה but meant another אחד בלב. Lovon could have just said yes. There is a kind of G'matria called מספר קטן (cue groans from some!) where (by dividing by 10 or 100 as necessary) all 22 letters in the Hebrew Alphabet are given a value of between 1 and 9.

אתה) (4+4+1) = 9 in מספר קטן and לאה) (3+1+5) also = 9 so *"I will give"* her (אתה) [denoting Leah] לך *"to you"*. מתתי (4+4+4+1) = 13 and רחל) (2+8+3) also = 13 [here אתה denotes Rochel]. I will give her to איש (1+1+3 = 5) אחר (1+8+2 = 11) i.e 5+11 = 16. עשו (7+3+6) = 16. So Lovon was saying I am giving Leah to you and Rochel to Eisov (which was always his plan).

Rav Sholom Schwadron notes that Lovon's רמאות was so great that he was actually deceiving himself. He convinced himself that he had made it possible for Yaakov to realise he was being deceived with Leah – Yaakov could have worked it out. We must all guard against self-deception and not justify our wrong actions to ourselves.

Having worked for these 7 years Yaakov asked Lovon to give him Rochel. The Medrash asks why was Lovon called לבן הארמי? Because he deceived אנשי מקומו *"his townspeople"* - the Arameans). He gathered them to make a feast saying: *"Before we had no water, now we have water and food"*. We have to come up with a plan to keep Yaakov for another 7 years so we will switch round Rochel and Lovon. The

Medrash says Lovon got pledges from the townspeople (which he never repaid) and used these to pay for the wedding (the first recorded instance of *"crowdfunding"*?) After Yaakov complained at the switch Lovon had to say: *"we [all of us] will give her (Rochel) to you"* because, explains Rabbi Y'hudah HaChosid, Yaakov no longer trusted him on his own.

After 14 years Yaakov asks permission from Lovon to go home. Lovon thought he was blessed because of the Z'chus of Yaakov – only through him he had sons (previously Rochel had to take the sheep to the well). *"I have seen by Divination"* with my תרפים (idols), so he persuades him to stay longer.

6 years later Yaakov, now enriched with large flocks, flees from Lovon who chases after him and lists a whole lot of accusations against him. After all the רמאות of Lovon throughout the story now for the first time we see Yaakov reacting angrily: ויחר ליעקב וירב בלבן. Ironically this is the first time that Lovon is justified because Rochel had indeed stolen Lovon's תרפים, unknown to Yaakov, who finally brings out all his sufferings at the hands of Lovon over 20 years – I have acted honestly and you have treated me badly. In Parashas Toldos Yaakov is called איש תם which Rashi says means someone הרוף לרמות *"who is not sharp in his dealings"*. How could this איש תם now have become רמאות?

According to Rabbi Simcha Wasserman there are two paths in duplicity: doing it habitually or only doing it in defence. Yaakov, an איש תם came into the second category i.e. if someone came to him pretending to be אחיו then he too could act as a רמאי. In the Haggada תם being the third one down the list in intelligence is not a compliment, but Yaakov was not just a תם but an איש תם and knew when to use the quality of אמת and when to use רמאות.

Lovon accuses him of stealing his תרפים? Why suddenly does Yaakov reveal his anger? Baer Yosef (Rav Yosef Salant) explains that until now the only victim of Lovon's רמאות was Yaakov himself. But now that Lovon is accusing Yaakov the son of Yitzchok, grandson of Avraham of being a thief of idols this would be a Chillul Hash-m so Yaakov had to show that he was not M'challel Shem Shomayim, and so must we, in all our dealings.

(Based on a shiur given by Rabbi Yitzchok Weitz, nephew of Rav Sholom Schwadron)

of my grandfather הלוי בן שאול whose Yahrzeit is on 11 Kislev