

The
CHASSIDUS
PERSPECTIVE
with Reb Yoel Kahn

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TWO SISTERS AND A LESSON IN PIETY

Parshas Vayeitzei relates the story of Yaakov's journey to Charan, where he married Rochel and Leah, the two daughters of his uncle Lavan.

Many commentators ask: How could Yaakov marry two sisters, which is forbidden according to Torah law?

Although the Torah had not yet been given, we know that our forefathers kept all the *mitzvos* regardless. Indeed, on his way back to Eretz Yisrael, Yaakov sent a message to his brother Esav: "Although I lived together with Lavan, I succeeded in keeping all 613 *mitzvos*." If so, how can it be that he married both Rochel and Leah?!

Although the commentators give various complex, scholarly answers, there must surely be a simple answer as well. Proof to this is the fact that Rashi does not offer an explanation.

Rashi makes it his mission to address any straightforward question that may arise when learning Chumash. If he has no answer, he clearly states, "I do not know." Why doesn't he address this question, which is certain to puzzle anyone learning Chumash? It must be that there is such a simple answer that Rashi finds it unnecessary to mention.

What is it?

UNWARRANTED CHUMROS

Before Mattan Torah, there was no obligation to fulfill the *mitzvos*. The conduct of the *avos* was an added stringency, beyond their call of duty. Indeed, this is why keeping the *mitzvos* was considered a special *zechus* for them, because they were not required to do so.

Now, it goes without saying that you cannot adhere to a stringency if that will stop you from fulfilling a clear *halachah*. For example, let's say you are particular to

only eat *matzah* that was baked during the first eighteen minutes since the oven was heated (the "*ershte oyven*"), or to use a new rolling pin for each *matzah* being kneaded. Let's say Pesach comes around, and you do not have any of your special *matzos*. All you have is "regular," 100% kosher *matzah*. It would be outrageous to be "*machmir*" and not eat this *matzah*, resulting in not fulfilling the *mitzvah* of eating *matzah* on Pesach!

It follows that the *avos* could not follow the stringency of keeping all the *mitzvos* if that would get in the way of something they were obligated to do.

This is the simple reason why Avraham did not circumcise himself until he was commanded. Since he did all the *mitzvos* on his own accord, why didn't he give himself a *bris*?

The answer is that Hashem prohibited Noach and all of his descendants from spilling blood. Avraham therefore could not circumcise himself, which

would cause bleeding and was potentially dangerous. Once Hashem gave Avraham the *mitzvah* of *milah*, all of these concerns were overruled; however, before that point, when *milah* was merely an act of piety, Avraham could not be "strict" and inflict harm upon himself.

KEEP YOUR PROMISE!

In addition to the *sheva mitzvos bnei noach*, there were certain guidelines that humanity as a whole agreed to follow, even in those days. (For example, after the *ma'bul*, everyone resolved to abstain from molesting unmarried girls, even though this was not included in the *issur* of *arayos*.)

Although these behaviors were not commanded by Hashem, since humanity *as a whole* decided to follow them, they took precedence over keeping the *mitzvos*, which was

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a *private* resolve accepted only by the *avos*.

One of the practices prevalent throughout civilization was not to cheat others. In fact, when Yaakov confronted Lavan, demanding, "Why did you trick me?" Lavan found it necessary to excuse his conduct: "In this region, no one marries off a younger daughter before her older sister." Why give an excuse? Hashem had never yet given a command not to lie! Apparently, all of mankind had resolved to stay away from cheating and lying, and Lavan the trickster had to save face by giving an excuse.

It follows that the *avos* could not follow a personal *chumra* if that would entail misleading another person.

This being the case, Yaakov could surely not refrain from marrying Rochel because of his *hiddur* not to marry two sisters. He had promised to marry her, and he had even given her special signs so he would know it was her. Failing to keep his promise would entail deceit and would cause her great sorrow. Moreover, since everyone was saying that Rivkah's two sons would marry Lavan's two daughters, there was a real concern that Esav would end up marrying Rochel if Yaakov would not. How could Yaakov go against his word, causing Rochel such terrible anguish, all because of his personal stringency not to marry two sisters?!

BEFORE YOU ARE MACHMIR, READ THIS

The lesson to us is simple. It's a beautiful thing to accept *hiddurim* and *chumros*, but there is something we must consider first: How will they affect others?

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Indeed, the way we relate to others is more important than our personal *chumros*.

In Parshas Vayeira, the Torah tells us why Hashem held Avraham precious: "...because he commands his children... to do *tzedakah* and judgment." Shouldn't Avraham be praised

for fulfilling all of the *mitzvos*? But no; he had another accomplishment that is deemed even more praiseworthy: He encouraged his children "to do *tzedakah* and judgment."

Why does the Torah write the word "judgment" after "*tzedakah*" in this verse? Chassidus explains that we must judge ourselves when giving *tzedakah*. We should analyze exactly

how much we really need for ourselves, and give the rest to *tzedakah*.

The same applies to spiritual *tzedakah*, teaching others about Hashem and bringing them closer to Yiddishkeit. We might claim that we are too involved in our personal *chumros* to spend time reaching out to other Jews. The Torah tells us that we must judge ourselves and consider whether our spiritual pursuits are truly more important than the basics the other is lacking. Our personal *hiddurim* cannot get in the way of fulfilling the *shlichus* we are *obligated* to do, to teach others about Yiddishkeit.

For further study, see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 5, pp. 141ff.



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