

Rabbeinu Yonah Gerondi z"l (1210-1263; Spain) introduces his commentary to this week's *Parashah*, which describes Yaakov's years with Lavan, by quoting a verse from *Mishlei* (12:2). He proceeds to explain the verse in several different ways:

(1) "It is good to bring out favor from *Hashem*, but a scheming man goes astray." There are multiple verses in *Mishlei* that, like this verse, begin with the word "*Tov*" / "Good," and in each case the verse is setting up a comparison. Understood that way, our verse is teaching: Finding favor in *Hashem's* eyes by doing His will is better than scheming--i.e., trying to succeed using one's own wisdom and understanding.

(2) "A good man brings out favor from *Hashem*, but a scheming man causes wickedness." *Middah-k'negged-middah*/measure-for-measure, when one is a good man and subdues his own will before *Hashem's* Will, *Hashem* will cause him to find favor in the eyes of other people, as Hillel says in *Pirkei Avot* (2:4), "Nullify your will before His Will, so that He will nullify the will of others before your will."

(3) "A good man" refers to Yaakov, as it is written (*Yeshayah* 3:10), "Say of a *Tzaddik*, 'He is good!'" "He brings out favor from *Hashem*"--our *Parashah* includes seemingly redundant verses describing Yaakov's departure from Be'er Sheva, after that departure was described at the end of last week's *Parashah*, all for the purpose of describing how *Hashem's* Presence accompanied Yaakov on his journey. (*Drashot U'perushei Rabbeinu Yonah Al Ha'Torah*)

Shabbat

"Whoever sanctifies the *Shabbat* as befits it, whoever safeguards the *Shabbat* properly from desecration, his reward is exceedingly great . . ." (From the Friday night *Zemer* "*Kol Mekadesh*")

The author of this *Zemer* is unknown, but his name--"Moshe"--is suggested by the initials of the second word in each of the first three lines ("*Mekadesh*," "*Shomer*," "*Harbeh*"). Some attribute the *Zemer* to R' Moshe ben R' Kalonimus the Elder z"l (Italy and Germany; 10th century). In any event, the *Zemer* is known to be very old, as it is mentioned in the 11th century work *Machzor Vitry*.

Beginning with the second stanza, the lines are alphabetical. However, the *Aleph-Bet* only goes through the letter *Tzadi*, suggesting that the final stanza is missing. R' Yaakov Emden z"l (1697-1776; Central Europe) writes that it was removed "because of peace."

The *Zemer* begins: "Whoever sanctifies the *Shabbat* as befits it." According to R' Emden, this refers to sanctifying *Shabbat* with "*Oneg Shabbat*," i.e., fish, meat, and other delicacies, as befits the day. R' Boruch of Medzhybizh z"l (1753-1811; grandson of the *Ba'al Shem Tov* and an early *Chassidic Rebbe*) explains the line differently: "The *Shabbat* day sanctifies each person as befits him," i.e., each person on his own level.

The *Zemer* continues: "Whoever safeguards the *Shabbat*." What is the difference between "safeguarding" the *Shabbat* and "sanctifying" it? R' Yisrael Meir Kagan z"l (the *Chafetz Chaim*; died 1933) explains: There are multiple levels of *Shabbat* observance. Some people keep all the laws of *Shabbat* meticulously, and they further sanctify *Shabbat* in word and thought. Other people merely "guard the *Shabbat* against desecration" (*Yeshayah* 56:2); they do not do any forbidden labor on *Shabbat*, but they do not add sanctity to their day. The first "sanctify" *Shabbat*; the second merely "safeguard" it. (*Mesivta Zemirots Shabbat*, p.71 & 351)

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"See--his daughter Rachel is coming with the flock!" (29:6)

Why was Lavan's younger daughter tending the sheep? R' Yehonatan Eybeschütz z"l (Central Europe; 1690-1764) explains: Everyone expected that Lavan's older daughter, Leah, would marry the older of her two cousins, Esav, while Rachel would marry Yaakov. Esav was "a man of the field" (*Bereishit* 25:27), so Lavan trained Leah to manage the house. Yaakov was "a man dwelling in tents," so Lavan trained Rachel to go out to work.

(*Tiferet Yehonatan*)

"Then Yaakov became angry, and he fought with Lavan. Yaakov spoke up and said to Lavan, 'What is my transgression? What is my sin that you have pursued me hotly?'" (31:36)

Midrash Rabbah comments: Better the anger of the Patriarchs than the humility of the descendants! From where do we learn what the Patriarchs' anger was like? From Yaakov. Our verse says that Yaakov "fought" with Lavan. Do you imagine, perhaps, that blows were exchanged or wounds were inflicted? No! Yaakov spoke words of appeasement. Yaakov placated his father-in-law (31:36-37): "What is my transgression? What is my sin that you have pursued me hotly? When you rummaged through all my things, what did you find of all your household objects?"

The *Midrash* continues: Not the humility of the descendants, as illustrated by King David. We read (*Shmuel I* 20:1): "David fled from Nayot in Ramah, and he came and said before Yehonatan, 'What have I done? What is my crime and what is my sin against your father, that he seeks my life?'" Even when he was humbling himself and speaking words of appeasement, he referred to violence. [Until here from the *Midrash*]

R' Don Segal *shlita* (Yerushalayim and Brooklyn, N.Y.; a leading contemporary teacher of *Mussar*) writes: Not only was Yaakov's anger not what we picture when we think of "anger," look what it took to get Yaakov angry! Yaakov lived in Lavan's home and served him faithfully, despite Lavan's treachery, as Yaakov says (31:41), "It is now twenty years that I am in your household--I served you for fourteen years for your two daughters, and for six years for your flocks, and you changed my wage a hundred times." Moreover, Yaakov said (31:42), "Had not the *Elokim* of my father . . . been with me, you surely would have sent me away empty handed."

R' Segal continues listing the wrongs done to Yaakov: He worked for Lavan for seven years, expecting to marry "Rachel your younger daughter" (29:18) as he and Lavan had agreed. Only after those seven years did Lavan tell him (29:26), "Such is not done in our place, to give the younger before the elder"--not only breaching their contract, but also acting as if he (Lavan) was a righteous man rebuking Yaakov for his attempted breach of etiquette. Through all of this, Yaakov never became angry! And, as noted, all he said when he did become angry was: "What is my transgression? What is my sin that you have pursued me hotly?" (*Chovat Ha'adam Al Iggeret Ha'Ramban* p.17)

"Go and learn what Lavan the Aramean sought to do to our father Yaakov! For Pharaoh decreed only against the males, while Lavan sought to uproot *Ha'kol* / everything, as it is said (*Devarim* 26:5), 'An Aramean tried to destroy my forefather. He descended to Egypt . . .'"

(From the *Pesach Haggadah*)

Commentaries struggle to understand this passage. Firstly, in what way did Lavan seek to uproot everything? The Torah does not seem to mention such an attempt! Secondly, why does the subject of the quoted *Pasuk* seem to change mid-verse? The subject of the first phrase is the Aramean who tried to destroy our forefather, while the subject of the second phrase seems to be our forefather who descended to Egypt! Indeed, how are these two events related, such that they are mentioned in one verse?

R' Eliezer Yehuda Waldenberg z"l (1915-2006; Yerushalayim; member of Israel's Supreme Rabbinical Court and a leading *Posek* / *Halachic* authority) explains: Our Sages had a tradition that Lavan was the same person as Bil'am, the gentile prophet who attempted to curse *Bnei Yisrael* (see *Targum Yonatan ben Uziel* to *Bemidbar* 31:8). Indeed, *Midrash Tanchuma* relates that the place where "Bil'am's leg was pressed against the wall" (*Bemidbar* 22:25), preventing him from traveling on, was the exact spot where Lavan had sworn (in our *Parashah*--31:52), "This mound shall be witness . . . that I may not cross over to you past this mound." Despite Lavan's oath not to harm Yaakov or his family, the *Gemara* (*Sotah* 11a) records that Bil'am was the advisor who suggested that Pharaoh enslave and oppress *Bnei Yisrael*.

As such, R' Waldenberg concludes, our questions are answered: How did Lavan seek to uproot everything? Egypt's enslavement and oppression of *Bnei Yisrael* were Lavan/Bil'am's idea; in fact, he proposed even worse persecution designed to uproot *Bnei Yisrael* from existence. However, Pharaoh did not fully adopt Lavan/Bil'am's proposal; Pharaoh enslaved *Bnei Yisrael*, but he decreed only to kill the newborn males. And why does the subject of the verse change? It doesn't! Rather, the verse should be read as follows: "An Aramean (Lavan) tried to destroy my forefather (Yaakov). He (referring to Lavan, by then known as Bil'am) descended to Egypt." (*She'eilot U'teshuvot Tzitz Eliezer* XVII 24)

R' Eliezer Ashkenazi z"l (1513-1585; rabbi in Egypt, Italy and Poland) offers another answer: The *Gemara* (*Bava Batra* 16b) teaches that the Patriarchs tasted *Olam Ha'ba* / the World-to-Come while they were still in this world. The *Gemara* cites three verses as proof, one for each Patriarch, each of which contains the word "*Kol*" / "everything." (We allude to these verses in *Birkat Ha'mazon*: "*Ba'kol, mi'kol, kol.*") Lavan sought to uproot *Ha'kol* / "everything," referring to the common bond between Yaakov, Yitzchak, and Avraham, the bond on which the Jewish family is built. Lavan did this by claiming Yaakov's family as his own (31:43): "The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children." (*Haggadah Shel Pesach Ma'aseh Hashem*)