



KINDER TORAH®

*For parents to share with children at the Shabbos table
Parshas Vayetze*



Stay Calm

"And Yaakov became angry and he fought with Lavan" (Bereshis 31:36). The Medrash (Bereshis Rabba 74:10) praises Yaakov for his self control at a time of anger. Let us examine the situation that caused Yaakov to be angry. Yaakov's father-in-law was Lavan, one of the most devious tricksters in history. Lavan tricked Yaakov into marrying Leah before Rachel, thereby extorting seven years of work from him. He changed Yaakov's wages 100 times in 20 years. He did not give a dowry to either of his daughters (Rashi 31:15), in fact, he received money for them by selling them to Yaakov in exchange for his labor. Yaakov fled from Lavan with his family. Lavan finally caught up to him. He called Yaakov a thief saying, (31:43) "The daughters are my daughters, the sons are my sons, the sheep are my sheep, and all that you see is mine." How would we react when dealing with a terrible person like this? We would probably feel justified in pouring out our anger and frustrations upon the person who has treated us so unfairly. How did Yaakov react? He said, "What have I neglected and what am I guilty of that has caused you to be angry with me?" (Bereshis 31:36). The Medrash states that one might have thought that Yaakov would have hit or injured Lavan. Rather he spoke words of appeasement, trying to soothe Lavan's anger.

Kinderlach . . .

"Oy am I upset. That is the tenth time that Miri has borrowed my book without permission. How inconsiderate! I am really going to let her know how upset I am." Wait a second. Stop. Think. What would Yaakov Avinu have done in this situation? Take a few deep breaths. Perhaps Miri really meant to ask permission, but just forgot. People make mistakes. Judge her favorably. You can tell her that she should have asked, but speak in a low voice, very calmly and respectfully. As the Ramban writes in his letter about anger, "Accustom yourself to always speak softly to everyone at all times and you will be saved from anger."

Silence

"And Hashem remembered Rachel, He listened to her, and He opened her womb" (Bereshis 30:22). The Sifsei Chachomim explains that whenever the Torah states that Hashem remembers someone, He remembers a good deed or deeds that the person performed in the past and subsequently grants their request. The Medrash Tanchuma notes that Hashem remembered Rachel's silence. Yaakov wanted to marry Rachel. He sent gifts to her. Lavan intercepted the gifts and gave them to Leah instead. Rachel was quiet. The Medrash praises her silence by quoting the Mishnah (Avos 1:17). Shimon the son of Rabban Gamliel said, "All of my life I have been raised among the sages and I have not found anything better for the body than silence." Our sages praise silence in many other ways. Rebbe Akiva said, "The fence that protects wisdom is silence" (Avos 3:17). The Gemora (Megilla 18a) writes, "The best medicine in the world is silence." "Those who listen to insults and do not answer back are beloved by Hashem. They will grow stronger as the rising sun from morning to midday." The Vilna Gaon zt"l writes in the name of the Medrash, "Each and every minute that a person seals his lips he merits to see the light that was hidden away (from the time of the creation of the world). This value of this reward is beyond the comprehension of any creature."

Kinderlach . . .

Let's go around the Shabbos table giving examples of when we should be silent. "When we are thinking of saying Loshon Hora." Very good Dovid. "When someone who will not listen to criticism says something insulting to us." Excellent Rivkah. "When we are bored and just want to say something silly." You're right, Chaim, it's better to say nothing. "When we are in the middle of an argument." So true, Esti. The other person cannot continue arguing with himself. Kinderlach, quiet is a beautiful sound.

True Beauty

"Rachel was beautiful of form and beautiful of appearance" (Bereshis 29:17). The Vilna Gaon asks the following question. Shlomo Hamelech writes at the end of Mishley (31:30) "Charm is false and beauty is vain." We know that the Torah only praises a person's most important qualities. If so, then why does the Torah praise Rachel's beauty? She is not the only one. The Torah also praises Rivkah's beauty, "The young woman had a very fair appearance" (Bereshis 24:16). If beauty is vain, why does the Torah praise it? To answer this question, we must read the end of the verse in Mishley. "A woman who fears Hashem should be praised." The false charm and vain beauty referred to in the beginning of the verse are unaccompanied by fear of Hashem. Beauty for its own sake has no value. It is like jewelry on the face of an animal. When a woman fears Hashem, then she is praised and her beauty is praised.

Kinderlach . . .

Aren't kinderlach beautiful? Of course! What is beautiful about kinderlach? Their pure souls and beautiful middos (character traits). The way kinderlach dress is another aspect of their beauty. They dress so wholesome and tznuah (modestly). Modest clothes reflect the person's fear of Hashem. That is the beauty that we praise.

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