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HOW TO ATTAIN SPIRITUAL PROTECTION **Parshah**

Life is complicated. From the moment that we awake in the morning there are various different pressures and demands on our time; many distractions and nuisances that get in the way of us fulfilling the days' tasks. We may ask ourselves, imagine if Hashem had created the world in a way that we are not pulled in all different directions and in a world where we are not constantly being distracted from what is really important in life? Envision our day being occupied primarily with Torah, Mitzvos and acts of Chessed. Our financial worries would be to a minimum.

In our Parsha, Vayeitzei, the Torah discusses the journey of our father Yaakov from Be'er Sheva to Charan. The Torah describes Be'er Sheva as a holy and spiritual environment where Yaakov sat near his father Yitzchak learning Torah. Charan, however, as Rashi describes at the end of Parshas Noach, is a place that angers Hashem. It was a place of idol worship and where peoples' behaviours did not follow in the ways of Hashem.

Even though this journey from Be'er Sheva to Charan meant going to a less holy and spiritual environment, nonetheless Yaakov understood that being with his father Yitzchak was a preparation for him. He saw the Jewish people would go into a dark Galus – exile, as the Rambam explains, and have the strength to bring light and Kedusha into the bleakest corners of the world.

Charan also represents the physical and material world we are living in. Hashem does not want us to live an angelic life without any connection to the world. On the contrary, He wants us to play our part in being a partner with Him in transforming the world to a place of holiness.

What is the first thing that Yaakov does when he leaves Be'er Sheva? He does not seek the tourist office or look for accommodation; He davens to Hashem, asking that he should

have the strength to overcome the challenges that he would now face in the new Galus of Charan, and that everything that he had learned and experienced in Be'er Sheva should be a source of energy and strength for him.

When Yaakov lay down to daven, the Posuk tells us that he took from the stones of the place and he put them around his head. Rashi (28:11) explains that he put the stones around his head to protect it from the wild animals that would harm him.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe zt"l asks the question, why should Yaakov want to protect only his head from the wild beasts, what about the rest of his body?

Yaakov was not worried about the physical wild animals. He was worried about the new spiritual challenges that he would now face. He knew that exposure to the lifestyle of the people in Charan can lead one on a path of immorality and decadence.

Yaakov was willing to expose his hands and feet to the elements of Charan, but not his head. He would do whatever it would take to succeed in the secular world, which is filled with wild beast of all shapes and sizes. Nevertheless, his enthusiasm and passion for Torah and spirituality would be protected and preserved.

Dovid Hamelech writes in Tehillim (128:2) *Yegia kapecha ki sochel ashrecha vetov lach.* Fortunate is you who eats from the labour of your hands, You will be happy and full of goodness.

When it comes to commerce and business, and our daily mundane routine, one should invest in the labour of one's hands. The head, the intellect, should primarily focus on Torah and Mitzvos.

This journey from Be'er Sheva to Charan represents our life. Be'er Sheva is the warm and comforting atmosphere of our homes, the sanctuary for our moral and spiritual growth. Eventually we have to face the "real" world, filled with obstacles and challenges. The world is Charan – anger, the total dichotomy of physical and spiritual, where the material is in a constant state of dispute against the spiritual and 'angers' G-d.

Yaakov knew that ultimately he would become involved in the material and mundane. He and we would have no choice but to do so. However, he committed to keeping a distance, to not become consumed with these things. In this way, his passion and love for Torah and spiritual development would always remain and grow.

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