

Zera Shimshon

Profound Divrei Torah culled from the writings of the
Gaon and Mekubal Rav Shimshon Chaim ben Rav Nachman Michael Nachmeni zy"l,
author of Sefer Zera Shimshon on Chumash and Toldos Shimshon on Pirkei Avos,
who promised that all who study his words will be blessed with an abundance of good, wealth
and honor, and will merit to see children and grandchildren thriving around their table.



תשפ"ה Vayaitzai

• Zera Shimshon - the Limud that brings Yeshuos •

319 גליון

אמרות שמשון

Understanding The Seemingly Bizarre Conversation Between Yaakov and The Shepherds

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם הֲיָדַעְתֶּם אֶת לָבָן בֶּן נָחוֹר וַיֹּאמְרוּ יָדַעְנוּ:
וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם הַשְּׁלוֹם לוֹ וַיֹּאמְרוּ שְׁלוֹם וְהִנֵּה רָחֵל בְּתוֹ
בָּאָה עִם הָצֹאן: וַיֹּאמֶר הֵן עוֹד הַיּוֹם גָּדוֹל לֹא עַתָּה הָאֶסֶף
הַמִּקְנֶה הַשֶּׁקֶו הַצֹּאן וְלָכוּ רְעוּ: (בראשית כט ה-ז)

He said to them, "Do you know Lavan the son of Nachor", and they said, "We know him". Then he said to them, "Is there peace with him?" They answered, "There is peace; and see, his daughter Rachel is coming with the flock!" He said, "Look, the day is still long; it is not yet time to bring the livestock in; water the flock and go on grazing".

The Midrash (בר"ר ע"א) expounds on the phrase, *is there peace to him*, which Yaakov used when inquiring about Lavan, and explains that Yaakov wasn't inquiring about Lavan's personal peace and welfare, but rather whether Lavan was on peaceful and good terms with his friends and neighbors. This was a fair question, considering Lavan's reputation as a cheat and a liar. The Midrash thus says as follows. השלום לו, השלום ביניכם. ויאמר השלום לו, ואין פוטטין את בעי, והנה לבינו. ויאמרו שלום, ואין פוטטין את בעי, והנה רחל בתו באה עם הצאן וכו'.

Then he said to them, "Is there peace with him?" Yaakov was asking them, "Is there peace between you and him?" They answered him in the affirmative, "It is well". The

shepherds continued and said, "And if it is chatter that you seek, then see - his daughter Rachel is coming with the flock!"

The Midrash goes on to expound on Yaakov's subsequent words, which seem to be a bit redundant. For when Yaakov told the shepherds, 'Look, the day is still long', his intent seems clear enough; what was he adding by saying, 'it is not yet time to bring the livestock in'? The Midrash goes on to explain what Yaakov's two statements were alluding to. אמר להם אם שומרי שכן. אתם הן עוד היום גדול, ואם שלכם אתם רועים, לא עת האסף מקנה.

- When Yaakov told the shepherds, 'Look, the day

is still long', his intention was 'If you are paid watchmen over these flocks [i.e. being paid for a full day's work] then you are shirking your duties by bringing in the animals early; since look, the day is still long'. And when Yaakov went on to say, 'it is not yet time to bring the livestock in', his intention was, 'if you are shepherding your own flocks, you should still not come in so early, since it is not yet time to bring the livestock in'. Thus, there is no redundancy in Yaakov's words, for in his two statements, Yaakov was in fact addressing two different circumstances.

The Midrash indeed explains Yaakov's words ever so clearly; however, we still need to understand how the Midrash knew these details to be so. Firstly, why did the Midrash describe Yaakov's question - 'Is there peace with him?' - as an inquiry about

their relationship with Lavan, rather than understanding it simply as an inquiry about Lavan's own personal welfare? Secondly, where did the Midrash gather that



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חוגגו
רינה בת לינדה
להפקד בורע של קיימא בקרוב
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ברכות וישועות

מרדכי בן רחל
שיזכה לזיווג הנזון פריסה טובה
ועשרות גדולה ומצאת ירידה לקניה
במדה ובריאות איתנה

ישועה והצלחה

ישעיה בן צלחה
להצלח גדולה בכל מעשי ידיו
ויצא מכל פגע פנע ויחבש בשורות
טובות

הצלחה וברכה

מאיר בן פרידא
להצלחה גדולה בכל מעשי ידיו
ולהתבשר בשורות טובות בקרוב

לזכות ולברכה

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ומשפחותיהם
החפצים בעילום שמם
שיזכו לשפע ברכה והצלחה בני
ברכי חיי אריכי ומוני רוח
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קדם אכיר

ישועה וברכה

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בן רגינה מלכה
שיזכה לעשרות שפע ברכה
והצלחה בכל העניינים
ובשורות טובות בקרוב ממש

הצלחה וכבוד

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when the shepherds told Yaakov, 'and see - his daughter Rachel is coming with the flock!', it was their response to their feeling that Yaakov wanted to chat; and moreover, how would the Midrash explain why the shepherds in fact felt that Yaakov wanted to chat?



Truthfully, the dialogue between Yaakov and the shepherds in itself is quiet puzzling; on the shepherd's part as much as on Yaakov's part. When Yaakov initiated the conversation, asking the shepherds, 'Do you know Lavan the son of Nachor' and 'Is there peace with him?', the shepherds replied in a most curt manner, with exactly one-word answers, ידענו - We know him, and שלום - There is peace. But when Lavan's daughter, Rachel, arrived with her flock, the shepherds offered Yaakov the unsought information about her arrival without mincing any words. What was behind this bizarre behavior? On Yaakov's part, as well, it is very difficult to comprehend what exactly it was that brought him to reprimand these shepherds whom he literally just met, and whom he barely knew.



We can explain that the Midrash was bothered by the peculiarity of the conversation, and therefore tried to make sense out of it. The Midrash thus first and foremost established that it was Yaakov's question which prompted the shepherd's curt replies. Accordingly, the Midrash explained that Yaakov's inquiry wasn't in regard to Lavan's personal welfare, but rather in regard to the shepherd's relationship with Lavan.

In view of this, we can understand why the shepherds were at a loss for words. The shepherds thought to themselves, that if this stranger was asking them about Lavan and about their

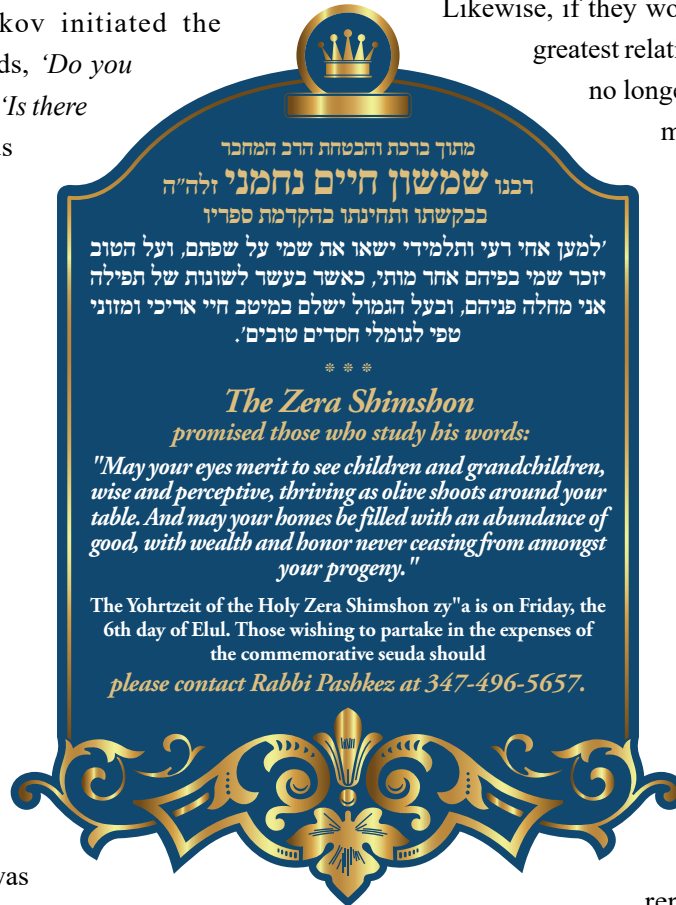
relationship with him, it must be that he is seeking to find out about this Lavan, and thus this conversation will clearly be one long and drawn-out conversation. Furthermore, they felt that there is no way to appropriately give over their feelings about Lavan. For if they were to say that they were friendly with him, then Yaakov would no longer accept any positive feedback they were to offer about Lavan; as he would assume it to be only natural for friends to talk positively about their colleague.

Likewise, if they would imply that they didn't have the greatest relationship with him, then Yaakov would no longer accept any negative feedback they might have to say about Lavan. This is the reason for the shepherds' short and curt replies to Yaakov's inquiries.

We can thus also understand why the shepherds would feel that Yaakov was looking for a chat, and why the shepherds did not want to have that chat. This is why they felt that Rachel's arrival was the perfect way out of this conversation; which is what in fact prompted their unsolicited proposal, that 'if it is a chatter that you seek, then see - his daughter Rachel is coming with the flock!'

We can also understand why Yaakov felt it proper for him to reprimand these shepherds whom he

barely knew. This is because when Yaakov heard their terse replies, he assumed it to be due to their honesty and morality not to waste their paid time on idle chatter. This puzzled Yaakov, and he expressed it to the shepherds. He told them, 'if it's the hired time that you're being so righteously particular about, not wanting to waste your time by replying in a more respectful and gracious manner, then you should be even more meticulous to utilize the remaining hours and not shirk your duties by bringing in the animals early, since look, the day is still long'. זרע שמשון פרשתנו אות ט



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