

Yaakov departed from Beer Sheva ... He encountered the place and spent the night. (28:10,11)

Chazal (Megillah 17a) glean from the word *sham*, there, that this was the first time the Patriarch lay down to sleep. He had spent the past fourteen years “hidden” within the *yeshivah* of Shem and Eivar. I use the word “hidden” to underscore that Yaakov *Avinu* became a part of the *yeshivah* in such a manner that no one even knew he was there. He studied day and night, focused on one thing: learning Torah. The question that should be addressed is how *Chazal* knew that Yaakov was in the *yeshivah*. Simply put, after calculating Yaakov’s age at present and the age that he was when he left home, we have fourteen years that are not accounted for. Yet, how do we know that those fourteen years of his life were spent ensconced in the *bais hamedrash*?

Horav Avraham Yudelevitz, Shlita, recalls an incident that received much coverage in the news. Two children had disappeared from their home (or so it was thought). At the end, Hatzalah members were able to locate them – within the confines of their own home! How did they achieve this? They interviewed the parents, seeking a detailed schedule of their childrens’ daily activities to ascertain where they might have gone. Who were their friends? What excited them? After listening to the answers, the men decided that the children had not wandered off very far, since their entire lives were centered around their home and immediate community. After some more room-to-room searching, the children were found sleeping in the linen closet in their parents’ bedroom! They were sleeping peacefully without a care in the world, oblivious to all the chaos their “nap” had generated. Apparently, they had been playing, and this was a perfect place to hide. They became tired and naturally fell asleep.

A similar idea (explains *Rav Yudelevitz*) applies to our Patriarch who personified Torah study at its apex. If Yaakov is “missing,” we have no question that he is to be found in the *bais hamedrash*. This is his permanent address. Everything else is distraction. Conversely, his twin brother, *Eisav ha’rasha*, after returning from a day out in the “field,” is “tired.” *Chazal (Bava Basra 16B)* explain that he had committed five transgressions that day. How do we know this? This is *Eisav*. When he goes out in the field and returns “tired,” it can only mean one thing: his base personality and moral perversion acted themselves out, through adultery, murder and their accompanying transgressions. A person’s proclivities and activities are usually an indication of his personality. Some gravitate to the *bais hamedrash*; others, sadly, do not.

Truthfully, had Yaakov *Avinu* not “hidden” himself in the Torah, he would not have survived two decades with Lavan, the arch swindler. Yaakov was cheated from day one. Yet, he neither complained nor allowed his righteous indignation to cloud or lessen the commitment he had to execute his job faithfully. He worked for Lavan without holding back, because he had made a commitment. He viewed every swindle, every challenge, every obstacle as Heavenly-ordained. His *emunah* in Hashem was absolute and unshakeable. *Horav Eliezer HaLevi Turk, Shlita*, relates what is a well-known story, which grants us a window into the evil of Lavan and the equanimity of

Yaakov.

The *Alshich HaKadosh* was giving a *shiur*, lecture, in the *shul* in Tzfas. His topic was the *pasuk*, *Va'tachlif es maskurti aseres monim*; "And you changed my wage ten times" (ibid. 31:41). The *Alshich* brilliantly detailed one hundred times and ways in which Lavan cheated Yaakov. The *Arizal* was seated in the *bais hamedrash* listening to the *shiur*. At one point, a smile came across the *Arizal's* face. After the *shiur*, the *Alshich* asked the *Arizal* why he had smiled. He explained that Lavan had also attended the *shiur* (obviously the *Arizal's* vision was far above our natural ability to see): "Concerning each one of the swindles that you detailed, he would shake his head in agreement. At one point, however, you mentioned something that even he did not realize. He said, 'I never thought about this.'" This is why the *Arizal* smiled.

Yet, despite all of this, our Patriarch maintained his calm and never once complained. This was due to his Torah-generated *emunah* that allowed him the clarity of vision to see and accept all that occurred as ordained by Hashem.

The *Meshech Chochmah* notes the Torah's description of Yaakov and Lavan's parting of the ways: *V'Yaakov halach l'darko*; "Yaakov went on his way" (ibid.31:2). Despite having been with Lavan *ha'rasha* for over twenty years, our Patriarch's unwavering commitment to Hashem was not altered. He continued along the path upon which he had started. Lavan was a distraction, but not a game changer. Concerning Lavan, the Torah writes, *Vayashav Lavan limekomo*; "Lavan went and returned to his place" (ibid. 31:1). Lavan was unchanged by his exposure to Yaakov, even though he had lived with him for over two decades. He remained the same *rasha* he had been until this point. Some people never change. As a swindler, Lavan was his own biggest enemy.