

# Zera Shimshon

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## Chapter VII: Vayetzei (Gen. 28:10-32:3)

### Essay 9. Jacob and the Shepherds

*“Jacob said to them, ‘My friends, where are you from?’ And they said, ‘We are from Haran.’ He said to them, ‘Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?’ And they said, ‘We know.’ He said to them, ‘Is he well?’ They answered, ‘Yes, he is; and there is his daughter Rachel, coming with the flock.’ He said, ‘It is still broad daylight, too early to round up the animals; water the flock and take them to pasture.’ – Gen. 29:4–7*

**מְדַרְשׁ רַבָּה** "וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם הַשְּׁלוֹם לוֹ" בִּינְיָכֶם לְבִינוּ "וַיֹּאמְרוּ שְׁלוֹם" וְאֵי פִטְטִין אֶתְּ בְּעֵי "וְהִנֵּה רְחֵל בְּתוֹ בָּאָה עִם-הַצֹּאן", הִדָּא אִמְרָה שְׁהַדִּיבּוּר מְצוּי בְּנָשִׁים, "וַיֹּאמֶר הֵן עוֹד הַיּוֹם גָּדוֹל לֹא-עֵת" וְכוּ' אָמַר לָהֶם אִם שׁוֹמְרֵי שְׂכָר אַתֶּם "הֵן עוֹד הַיּוֹם גָּדוֹל" וְאִם שְׂלָכֶם אַתֶּם רוּעִים "לֹא-עֵת הָאֶסְרָף הַמְקַנְהָה הַשְּׂקוּ הַצֹּאן" וְכוּ' עכ"ל.

### **Midrash Rabbah:**

**“He said to them: ‘Is he well?’ ”—[I.e.,] is there peace between you and him? “They said: ‘He is well,’ ”—but if it is prattle that you seek, “Here is Rachel, his daughter, coming with the sheep.” That is what is said: Speech is found among women.**

**“He said: ‘It is still broad daylight, too early to round up the animals’ ”—[I.e.,] if you are hired watchmen, “it is still broad daylight.” If you are herding your own, “ ‘too early to round up the animals; water the flock.’ ”**

- Gen. Rabbah 70:11

מִתְחִלָּה קָשָׁה מְנַא לֵן שְׁיַעֲקֹב הוֹכִיחֶם "הֵן עוֹד הַיּוֹם גָּדוֹל" וְכוּ', וְהַמְפָּרְשִׁים תְּרִיצוּ דְּמִדְּכַפִּיל קְרָא בְּלִישְׁנֵיהּ "הֵן עוֹד" וְכוּ' "לֹא-עֵת" וְכוּ' נִפְקָא לִיָּה לְבַעַל הַמְדַרְשׁ הַכִּי, אֲבָל קָשָׁה עַל יַעֲקֹב לָמָּה הַכְּנִיס עֲצָמוֹ לַמְדָּה זֹו שְׁאִינָה מְמַדַּת דְּרַבָּ אֲרַץ שְׁ"הָאֶחָד בְּאֵל-גּוֹר וַיִּשְׁפֹּט שְׁפוֹט". וְעוֹד קָשָׁה מְנַלֵּן שְׁהֵם הַשִּׁיבוּ לְיַעֲקֹב אֵי פִטְטִין אֶתְּ בְּעֵי, וּמִי הִגִּיד לָהֶם שְׁיַעֲקֹב מְבַקֵּשׁ פִּטְטִין. וְעוֹד קָשָׁה לָמָּה לֹא פִירֵשׁ "הַשְּׁלוֹם" כְּפִשׁוּטוֹ וְנִדְחַק לְפָרֵשׁ "הַשְּׁלוֹם" בִּינְיָכֶם לְבִינוּ.

**Initially, it is difficult to understand how we know that Jacob was rebuking them with the words, “It is still broad daylight.” The commentators explain that because the verse has the duplicative language, “it is still broad daylight” and “too early.” Thus the author of the Midrash also derives this interpretation.**

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However, it is still difficult to understand why Jacob involved himself in this behavior, which is not normal behavior, that “the fellow came here as an alien, and already he acts as the ruler.”<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, it is difficult to understand how they responded to Jacob, “but if it is prattle that you seek,” for who told them that Jacob wanted prattle?

It is also difficult why [the author of the Midrash] didn't explain *ha'shalom* [השלום] according to its plain meaning, i.e., “is he well,” but instead insisted on interpreting it as “is there peace between you and him.”

וְנִרְאָה דְחָדָא מִתּוֹרְצָת בְּגִרָה חֲבָרְתָּהּ לְפִי שְׁעָדִין יֵשׁ לְהַקְשׁוֹת עַל הַפְּסוּק. מֵאֵי שְׁנָא שְׁבִשְׁתֵּי שְׁאֵלוֹת הָרֵאשׁוֹנוֹת לֹא הִשְׁיבוּ הֵם רַק תִּיבָה אַחַת בְּיַקְצוֹר, “נִיאָמְרוּ יִדְעֵנוּ” “נִיאָמְרוּ מִחֶרֶן אֲנַחְנוּ”, וְכֵאן הוֹסִיפוּ לְהִשְׁיב, “וְהִנֵּה רַחֵל בְּתוֹ” וְכוּ, מֵהַ שְׁאֵלָה שְׁאֵל מֵהֶם, וּמִכֵּן קוֹשֵׁיָא זֶה בָּא הַמְדַרְשׁ כְּמִתְרַץ, דְּעַל כְּרַחֵק לֹמֵר שֶׁהוּא כְּשִׁשְׁאֵל “הַשְּׁלוֹם” שְׁאֵל דְּבַר אַחַר חוּץ מִהַמּוֹבֵן מִהַפְּשׁוּט.

It seems that one question is answered by its counterpart, for there is still a difficulty with the verse. That is, in the first two questions, they only answered him with one word, briefly, saying ‘We know’ when Jacob asked if they knew Laban, and saying ‘We are from Haran’ when he asked where they were from. But here, they added more to their answer, “and there is his daughter Rachel,” something that he did not ask of them. Why is that?

The Midrash necessarily comes as a solution to this difficulty, for you must say that when he asked “Is he well,” he was asking something beyond the simple meaning.

וְלִכֵּן פִּירֵשׁ שְׁשִׁשְׁאֵל לְהֵם אִם יֵשׁ לְהֵם שְׁלוֹם עִמּוֹ, וְאֵז חֲשַׁבּוּ בְּעַצְמָם לְמָה שְׁאֵל לָנוּ כֵּן, אֵלָּא וְדָאֵי שֶׁהוּא רוֹצֵה לְשִׁאֵל לָנוּ דְּבָרִים הַרְבֵּה. וּמִשּׁוֹם הֵכִי רוֹצֵה מִתְּחִילָה לִידַע אִם אָנוּ אוֹהֲבִים אוֹתוֹ, יִשְׁאֵל לָנוּ מֵה טוֹבוֹ וּמֵה חֲסָדוֹ. וְאִם אָנוּ שׁוֹנְאִים אוֹתוֹ, יִשְׁאֵל לָנוּ מֵה רַעְתּוֹ. וְעוֹד אִם אָנוּ אוֹהֲבִים אוֹתוֹ, לֹא יֵאֱמִין לָנוּ בְּמֵה שְׁנִדְבַר מִמֶּנּוּ טוֹב. וְאִם אָנוּ שׁוֹנְאִים אוֹתוֹ לֹא יֵאֱמִין אִם נִדְבַר מִמֶּנּוּ רַע. וְלִכֵּן הִשְׁיבוּ לוֹ תַּקְּף אֵין אָנוּ רוֹצִים לְהִשְׁיב לְךָ כֹּל שְׁאֵלְתֶּךָ וְאֵי פִּטְטִין אֶתְּ בְּעֵי “וְהִנֵּה רַחֵל בְּתוֹ” וְכוּ.

Therefore, it is explained that [Jacob] asked them if they had peace with [Laban]. Then they thought to themselves, “Why is he asking us this way? Surely, he wants to ask us many things. For this reason, he first wants to know whether we like [Laban] or not, and if so, he will ask us about his goodness and kindness. If we hate him, he will ask us about his evil deeds.

Also, if we like him, he would not believe everything we say about his goodness. If we hate him, he would not believe everything we say about his bad qualities.”

Therefore, they immediately replied that they did not want to answer all of his questions, and instead said, “if it is prattle that you seek, ‘Here is Rachel, his daughter, coming with the sheep.’”

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<sup>1</sup> Gen. 19:9.

וּכְשֶׁשָׁמַע יַעֲקֹב שֶׁהֵם לֹא רָצוּ עוֹד לְהֵאָרִיךְ בְּדִיבּוּר עִמּוֹ, אָמַר לָהֶם וְכִי שְׂכִירֵי יוֹם אַתֶּם שֶׁהִשְׁפִּיר יוֹם אֵינּוּ רָשָׂא לְהֵאָרִיךְ בְּדִיבּוּר בְּדֵאִיתָא בְּחֻשְׁן מִשְׁפָּט (סימן של"ז סעיף כ'), יִנָּהַר הַפּוֹעֵל שְׁלֹא יִבְטֵל מְעַט כָּאֵן וּמְעַט כָּאֵן אֲלֵא חַיִּיב לְדַקְדָּק עַל עֲצָמוֹ בְּזִמְנוֹ שֶׁהָרִי הַקְּפִידוֹ עַל בְּרָכָה רְבִיעִית שֶׁל בְּרַכַּת הַמַּזֶּן שְׁלֹא יִבְרַךְ אוֹתָהּ, וְאִם הָיִיתֶם שְׂכִירֵי יוֹם "הֵן עוֹד הַיּוֹם גְּדוֹל" וְכוּ' הֲיָה לָכֶם יוֹתֵר לְדַקְדָּק בְּזִמְנוֹ הָאֲבוּד מִמָּה שֶׁדַּקְדַּקְתֶּם בְּדִיבּוּר. וְאִפִּילוּ אִם הִבְהֵמוֹת שְׁלָכֶם וְאַתֶּם מְקַפְּדִים בְּנֹה, הֲיָה לָכֶם לְדַקְדָּק יוֹתֵר בְּזִמְנוֹ.

**When Jacob heard that they did not want to continue speaking with him, he said to them, "Are you day laborers?"** That is, a day laborer is not permitted to prolong the conversation, as it is taught in *Choshen Mishpat* (siman 67, section 20). A worker must be careful not to waste time here and there, and he must be diligent with his time, as they were strict about not reciting the fourth blessing of the Grace after Meals, in order not to waste time. Thus, Jacob asked if they were day laborers, thinking that would explain their reluctance to have a conversation with him.

**"If you are day laborers, 'It is still broad daylight' etc., i.e., you should have been more careful with your time, as you were with your speech."** I.e., if the shepherds were reluctant to talk because they were hired help, then they should still be letting the animals graze.

On the other hand, **"Even if you are not day laborers, and instead the animals are yours, and you are diligent about the time, and that is why you don't want to speak with me, then you should have been more careful about the time,** as it is still early and you should be letting your animals graze to get their fill of food."

In other words, whether the shepherds were the owners of the animals or hired help, it seemed odd to Jacob that they were unwilling to speak with him at length, as they obviously weren't busy letting the animals graze in the fields. He thus answered them in a way that pointed out that they were apparently being rude, as there seemed to be no halachic basis for their behavior.

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