

“The sun rose for him . . . and he was limping on his hip”

The Sun Set for Yaakov as a Test of Poverty It Rose as a Test of Wealth

In this week’s parsha, parshas Vayishlach, we learn of the epic struggle that transpired between Eisav’s ministering angel and Yaakov Avinu (Bereishis 32, 5):

“ויותר יעקב לבדו ויאבק איש עמו עד עלות השחר, וירא כי לא יכול לו ויגע בכף ירכו ותקע כף ירך יעקב בהיאבקו עמו, ויאמר שלחני כי עלה השחר, ויאמר לא אשלחך כי אם ברכתנו, ויאמר אליו מה שמך, ויאמר יעקב, ויאמר לא יעקב יאמר עוד שמך כי אם ישראל, כי שרית עם אלהים ועם אנשים ותוכל.”

--“And Yaakov remained alone and a man wrestled with him until dawn; upon realizing that he could not overcome him, he struck a blow to the ball of Yaakov’s thighbone and it became dislocated as they wrestled. He said, ‘Release me, for the dawn has arrived.’ He (Yaakov) replied, ‘I will only release you if you bless me.’ He asked him, ‘What is your name?’ He answered, ‘Yaakov.’ He said, ‘Your name will no longer be Yaakov, but rather Yisrael; for you have engaged the Divine and men and you have triumphed.’”

Rashi comments: “ויותר יעקב, שכח בכים קטנים וחזר עליהם”—Yaakov remained alone, because he had forgotten some small jars and had returned for them. We learn this from the Gemara (Chullin 91a): “ויותר יעקב לבדו, אמר רבי אלעזר שנשתייר על פכין קטנים, מכאן לצדיקים שחביב עליהם ממונם יותר מגופם, וכל כך למה לפי שאין פושטין בגזל—**we see from here that tzaddikim value their money more than their bodies. Why is this so? So that they will not engage in thievery.** This, however, deserves further explanation. According to the simple understanding of the passuk, it suggests that they wrestled until the break of day, specifically because Yaakov returned to collect the small vessels.

Additionally, it is worth examining Rashi’s comment: “לא אשלחך כי אם ברכתני, הודה לי על הברכות שברכני אבי שעשו מערער” —Yaakov tells the angel that he will not release him until he concedes that the berachos Yitzchak gave him are rightfully his, despite Eisav’s objections. We must endeavor to explain why Yaakov Avinu demanded this concession at that specific moment--after defeating the ministering angel in their

historic wrestling match. Lastly, why did Yaakov require his acknowledgment?

The Sun Rose for Him to Heal His Limp

Let us continue by reviewing the pesukim that follow the struggle between the malach and Yaakov (Bereishis 32, 32): “ויזרח לו השמש כאשר עבר את פנואל והוא צולע על ירכו”—**the sun rose for him as he passed Penuel and he was limping on his hip.** Here Rashi adds: “ומדרש אגדה, ויזרח לו, לצרכו לרפאות את צליעתו, כמה דתימא (מלאכי ג-כ) שמש צדקה ומרפא בכנפיה, ואותן שעות שמייהרה לשקוע בשבילו כשיצא מבאר שבע מיהרה לזרוח בשבילו” According to a Midrash Aggadah, the sun rose ahead of schedule in order to heal Yaakov’s limp; the passuk in Malachi (3, 20) attributes healing powers to the sun; those hours that the sun hurried to set on his behalf, when he departed Be’er Sheva, it now hurried to rise on his behalf.

At the beginning of parshas Vayeitzei (Bereishis 28, 10), it states: “וילן שם כי בא השמש”—**he spent the night there, because the sun had set.** There Rashi teaches us that the passuk is indicating that the sun set suddenly, not at its proper, natural time, so that Yaakov would rest there. This is the meaning of Rashi’s comment here. In order to make up the missing hours from when the sun set early on Yaakov’s departure from Be’er Sheva, the sun now rose early.

Yet, this, too, requires further explanation: (a) We find that the sun set early for Yaakov when he fled from Eisav, and headed to Charan; whereas the sun rose early for him when he returned from Charan. Twenty-two years elapsed between these two events. Why did HKB”H wait so many years to correct this imbalance?

(b) We must also endeavor to explain why HKB”H changed the natural order of things—making the sun set early to bring on nightfall and subsequently having the sun rise early to bring on daybreak, in order to return the missing hours. After all, we have a fundamental principle that HKB”H does not perform a

miracle without a specific purpose. One might suggest that the purpose was to insure that Yaakov would spend the night in the place of the Mikdash. Nevertheless, HKB”H could certainly have arranged for this to happen without altering the natural order of events. For example, he could have made Yaakov extremely sleepy, etc.

(c) From Rashi’s comment here, it appears that the sun rose for Yaakov for two reasons. Firstly, it rose so as to heal his limp. Secondly, it rose early to make up the deficit that remained from when it initially set early on Yaakov’s behalf. Let us try to explain why HKB”H chose to accomplish these two goals simultaneously.

Interpreting Rabbi Akiva’s Enigmatic Statement

Before proceeding to resolve all of these issues, let us examine a passage in the Gemara (Chullin 91b) regarding the passuk: “וּזְרַח לוֹ הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ”—**the sun rose for him**. There we find an enigmatic statement by Rabbi Akiva:

“אמר רבי עקיבא, שאלתי את רבן גמליאל ואת רבי יהושע באיטליז של אימאום, שהלכו ליקח בהמה למשתה בנו של רבן גמליאל, כתיב וזרח לו השמש, וכי שמש לו לבד זרחה והלא לכל העולם זרחה. אמר רבי יצחק, שמש הבאה בעבורו זרחה בעבורו, דכתיב ויצא יעקב מבאר שבע וילך חרנה, וכתיב ויפגע במקום, כי מטא לחרן אמר, אפשר עברתי על מקום שהתפללו אבותי ואני לא התפללתי, כד יהיב דעתיה למיהדר קפצה ליה ארעא, מיד ויפגע במקום. כד צלי בעי למיהדר, אמר הקב”ה צדיק זה בא לבית מלוני ויפטר בלא ליגה, מיד בא השמש.”

Rabbi Akiva asks Rabban Gamliel and Rabbi Yehoshua a question regarding this passuk, while they are in a meat market purchasing an animal for the wedding feast of Rabban Gamliel’s son. According to the passuk, the sun rose for him. Is it possible that it rose only for him and not for the rest of the world? Rabbi Yitzchak answers that the sun that had set prematurely on his behalf now rose prematurely on his behalf. When Yaakov reached Charan, he was bothered by the fact that he had journeyed past the place where his fathers had prayed without also stopping to pray. He decided to return to that place; immediately the ground contracted, placing him at that sacred site. When he finished praying, he intended to return to Charan, but HKB”H intervened, saying, “This tzaddik has come to My lodging place; shall he depart without resting the night.” Immediately, the sun set miraculously.

The great author of the Ben Ish Chai in his sefer Ben Yehoyada (ibid.) on the “aggados” (homiletic passages) in the Talmud, addresses the issue of why Rabbi Yitzchak answers Rabbi Akiva’s question—as opposed to Rabban Gamliel, to whom the

question was addressed. He writes that Rabbi Yitzchak actually provides the answer he had personally heard Rabban Gamliel give Rabbi Akiva. Nonetheless, numerous interpretations of this baffling encounter have been offered by our holy scholars and sources. For instance, why was it necessary for Rabbi Akiva to emphasize that he presented this question to Rabban Gamliel and Rabbi Yehoshua while they were on their way to purchase an animal for the celebration of Rabban Gamliel’s son’s wedding? I would also like to humbly submit my interpretation of this passage.

In order to address these issues, let us begin by examining a subject the Rishonim and Acharonim have discussed at length—the two trials with which HKB”H tests mankind, the test of poverty and the test of wealth. Concerning the test of wealth, we find a strong admonition in parshas Eikev (Devarim 8, 11):

“הַשֶּׁמֶר לְךָ פֶּן תִּשְׁכַּח אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ... פֶּן תֹּאכַל וּשְׂבַעַת וּבַתִּים טוֹבִים תִּבְנֶה וּיִשְׁבַּת, וּבִקְרָךְ וּצְאֻנְךָ יִרְבִּיוּ וְכֶסֶף וְזָהָב יִרְבֶּה לְךָ וְכָל אֲשֶׁר לְךָ יִרְבֶּה, וְרֵם לְבַבְךָ וּשְׂכַחַת אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ הַמוֹצִיאֲךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים... וְאָמַרְתָּ בְּלִבְבְּךָ כֹּחִי וְעֹצֶם יָדַי עָשָׂה לִי אֶת הַחֵיִל הַזֶּה, וְזָכַרְתָּ אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ כִּי הוּא הִגִּיתָ לְךָ כַּח לַעֲשׂוֹת חֵיל.”

“Take care lest you forget Hashem, your G-d, by not observing His commandments, . . . lest you eat and be satisfied, and you build good houses and settle, and your cattle and sheep increase, and you increase silver and gold for yourselves, and everything that you have will increase—and your heart will become haughty and you will forget Hashem, you G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt from the house of slavery, . . . And you may say in your heart, ‘My strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth!’ Then you shall remember Hashem, your G-d, that it was He Who gave you strength to make wealth.”

We see clearly from these verses that an abundance of possessions carries the inherent danger of leading one to a situation of: “וְרֵם לְבַבְךָ וּשְׂכַחַת אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ”—**and your heart will become haughty and you will forget Hashem, you G-d.**” Ultimately, this person says to himself, chas v’shalom: “כֹּחִי—‘My strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth!’” Similarly, we find the following explicit statement (Devarim 32, 15): “וַיִּשְׁמַן יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּבְעֵט, ‘Yeshurun became fat and kicked. You became fat, you became thick, you became corpulent—and it deserted G-d its Maker, and was contemptuous of the Rock of its salvation.’”

This is the same stern message expressed in the Gemara (Berachos 32a) elucidating the passuk (Devarim 1, 1): **”וְדִי זֶה־בְּכֹסֶף בְּשִׁבְלֵי עוֹלָם בְּשִׁבְלֵי כֹסֶף וְזֶה־בְּהַשְׁפַּעַת לָהֶם לְיִשְׂרָאֵל עַד שְׁאִמְרוּ דִּי, הוּא גַרְם שְׁעָשׂוּ אֶת הָעֵגֶל. אִמְרוּ דְּבִי רַבִּי מֹשֶׁה יִנְאִי, אִין אַרִי נוֹהֵם מִתּוֹךְ קוֹפָה שֶׁל תַּבֵּן אֲלֵא מִתּוֹךְ קוֹפָה שֶׁל בֶּשֶׂר”**—Moshe argues that Hashem is partially to blame for the sin of the eigel, because He gave Yisrael the gold and silver of the Egyptians which provided them with the means to commit this sin.

Conversely, we also find the inherent difficulty in the opposite situation—the test of extreme poverty. The Gemara (Eiruvin 41b) teaches us that one of the three things that causes a person to violate his own will and the will of his Creator is **”רְדוּקֵי עֲנִיּוֹת”**—**“the tribulations of poverty.”** Concerning these two trials, Shlomo HaMelech proclaims (Mishlei 30, 8): **”רַשׁ וְעוֹשֶׂר אֶל תֵּתֵן לִי”**—**“Give me neither poverty nor wealth.”** He beseeches Hashem that he not be subjected to these two trials—neither the trial of poverty nor the trial of wealth. Rather, **”הִטְרִיפְנִי לַחֵם חֲקִי”**—merely provide me with my basic needs and sustenance.

Which Is More Difficult the Trial of Poverty or the Trial of Wealth?

Let us investigate which of these two tests is the more difficult. We find an answer to this intriguing question in the writings of the Chasam Sofer (Shelach). He explains the reason the meraglim, who were esteemed leaders of Yisrael, delivered defamatory reports regarding Eretz Yisrael. They feared the trial of wealth in the land more than the trial of poverty in the wilderness.

Similarly, the Ktav Sofer, in parshas Mishpatim (Shemos 23, 25), citing his father, the Chasam Sofer, zy”a, brings a proof supporting this conclusion from the Mishnah (Avos 4, 9): **”כֹּל”** **“whoever fulfills the Torah in a state of poverty is destined to fulfill its precepts in a state of wealth.”** This Mishnah indicates that HKB”H tests a person initially with the easier test, poverty. If he passes that test, HKB”H subjects him to the more difficult test, wealth and affluence. This then is the message conveyed by the Mishnah: **”כֹּל הַמְקִיִּים אֶת הַתּוֹרָה מִעוֹשֶׂר”**—if a person passes the easier test, by fulfilling the tenets of the Torah even in poverty; **”סוֹפֵה לְקִיּוּמָה מִעוֹשֶׂר”**—he will ultimately succeed in the more difficult test—observing the Torah even when wealthy.

Now, come and witness the wonders of Hashem. He tested Yaakov Avinu, the head of the people of Yisrael, with these

two tests. When Yaakov fled from his brother, Eisav, Eliphaz pursued him and confiscated all of his belongings—making him a pauper. Nevertheless, he did not complain and remained staunch in his faith in Hashem.

Subsequently, he became very wealthy in Lavan’s house, as it is written (Bereishis 30, 43): **”וַיִּפְרוֹץ הָאִישׁ מְאֹד מְאֹד וַיְהִי לוֹ צֹאן רַבּוֹת”**—**“the man became exceedingly prosperous and he had proliferating flocks, and slave women and slaves, and camels and donkeys.”** Nevertheless, he remained steadfast in his faith in Hashem, as evidenced by his proclamation to Lavan (ibid. 31, 42): **”לֹלֵי אֲלֵקִי אָבִי אֲלֵקִי”**—**“had not the G-d of my father—the G-d of Avraham and the Dread of Yitzchak—been with me, you would surely have now sent me away empty handed.”**

The Deeds of the Fathers Foreshadow the Events of the Children

Thus, we see that the words of the Mishnah are exemplified by Yaakov: **“Whoever fulfills the Torah in a state of poverty will ultimately fulfill it in wealth.”** As the Chasam Sofer and Sefas Emes explain, HKB”H tested him initially with the easier ordeal—that of poverty. After withstanding that ordeal, He tested him with the more difficult ordeal—that of wealth. We can explain this sequence of events based on the writings of the Ramban (Bereishis 12, 6):

”וַיַּעֲבֵר אַבְרָם בְּאֶרֶץ עַד מְקוֹם שְׂכֵם. אָמַר לֹךְ כָּלֵל, תִּבְנֶינּוּ אוֹתוֹ בְּכָל הַפְּרָשִׁיּוֹת הַבָּאוֹת בְּעֵינֵי אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק וַיַּעֲקֵב, וְהוּא עֲנִין גְּדוֹל הַזְּכוּרוֹהוּ רַבּוֹתֵינוּ בְּדֶרֶךְ קְצֵרָה (מִדְּרַשׁ נִתְחוּמָא לֹךְ לֹךְ אוֹת ט), וְאָמְרוּ כָּל מָה שְׂאִירֵעַ לַאֲבוֹת סִימָן לְבָנִים, וְלִכְּן יֵאָרִיכוּ הַכְּתוּבִים בְּסִיפּוֹר הַמִּסְעוֹת וְחַפְּזֵי הַבְּאֵרוֹת וְשֵׁאֵר הַמְקָרִים, וַיִּחְשׁוּב הַחֹשֶׁבֶת בְּהֵם כְּאֵלוֹ הֵם דְּבָרִים מִיִּזְתְּרִים אִין בְּהֵם תּוֹעֵלֵת, וְכוּלָּם בָּאִים לְלַמֵּד עַל הָעֵתִיד.”

Here the Ramban introduces a basic principle, based on the Midrash Tanchuma (Lech Lecha 9), that plays a vital role throughout the parshiyos involving Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov: The events experienced by the Avos foretell future events that their descendants will experience—**“ma’aseh Avos siman la’banim.”** Therefore, the Torah depicts at length their journeys, the digging of the wells and other events that might otherwise seem superfluous. They are all related to the future of the children of Yisrael.

We can now understand full-well why HKB”H arranged for Yaakov to first experience the ordeal of poverty and then the ordeal of wealth—both of which he passed with flying colors. These ordeals represented examples of **“ma’aseh Avos**

siman la'banim." The events Yaakov endured paved the way for all of Yisrael throughout the generations. By adhering to and emulating Yaakov's kedushah, his children would also successfully withstand the trials of poverty and the trials of wealth.

Based on what we have learned, we can now appreciate the juxtaposition of the two events: "ויותר יעקב לבדו"—Yaakov remaining alone for the sake of small vessels and "ויאבק איש עמו"—Yaakov's battle with the "samech-mem," Eisav's ministering angel. Eisav's ministering angel knew that Yaakov had withstood the ordeal of poverty—after Eliphaz, Eisav's son, stripped him of all his belongings. Yet, when he saw Yaakov return for small containers, he made an error in judgment, thinking that Yaakov had failed the ordeal of wealth. He concluded erroneously that Yaakov coveted material belongings to the degree that he even troubled himself to return for the smallest of containers. Therefore, the malach fought with Yaakov to insure that he failed the ordeal of wealth—the more difficult of the two ordeals.

Notwithstanding, "וירא כי לא יכול לו"—**he realized that he could not overcome him**—he saw that Yaakov himself was beyond reproach; even in the face of great wealth, he remained steadfast and perfect in his "emunah." Therefore, the treacherous "samech-mem" devised another ploy: "ויגע בכף ירכו"—**he struck the ball of his thighbone**. The Midrash (B.R. 77, 3) explains that this is an allusion to his descendants, the products of his loins. In other words, based on our interpretation, he shifted his focus from Yaakov to his descendants—trying to insure that they would not maintain the high standards of their forefather Yaakov and would succumb to the influences of wealth and affluence. The Torah continues: "ותקע כף ירך יעקב בהיאבקו עמו"—**the ball of Yaakov's thighbone became dislocated as he wrestled with him**. We can interpret this passuk based on the following elucidation in the Gemara (Pesachim 119a) of the passuk (Devarim 11, 6): "ואת כל היקום אשר ברגליהם, אמר רבי אלעזר: "and all the wealth at their feet." Rabbi Elazar said, "This refers to a person's wealth, which stands him on his feet." Hence, Yaakov's thighbone was injured alluding to the defect transmitted to Yaakov's descendants—for many, good Jews would fail, chas v'shalom, the trial of wealth.

"I Will Not Release You unless You Bless Me"

Following this path, we will proceed to explain Yaakov's ultimatum to Eisav's ministering angel: "לא אשלחך כי אם"

"ברכתני—I will not release you unless you bless me. Rashi explains: "concede to me with regard to the berachos which my father blessed me, over which Eisav objects." It is seemingly difficult to comprehend--and the commentaries deal with this at length--why Yitzchak refused to give the berachos to Yaakov. It was certainly obvious to Yitzchak that Yaakov was a Torah scholar with pure intentions.

Based on what we have discussed, we can suggest an explanation. Yitzchak feared that if he gave the berachos to Yaakov, he would not be able to withstand the ordeal of wealth. On the other hand, he figured that Eisav's deeds were already corrupt regardless. If he were to be given the berachos of this world, perhaps he would reform and perform teshuvah. Now, however, that Yaakov overcame Eisav's ministering angel—who attempted to trip him up with the ordeal of wealth—it became evident that Yaakov was a worthy recipient of the berachos that he received from Yitzchak. Therefore, he demanded from Eisav's ministering angel: "concede to me with regard to the berachos which my father blessed me." With this concession, he wished to pave the way for all Yisrael to successfully subdue Eisav's ministering angel at all times and to remain adherent to his own kedushah.

In this light, we can begin to understand the malach's response: "לא יעקב יאמר עוד שמך כי אם ישראל, כי שרית עם אלהים ועם"—**no longer will it be said that your name is Yaakov, but Yisrael, for you have striven with the Divine and with men and you have prevailed**. According to our interpretation, the name Yaakov, which derives from "עקב"—the lowly, down-trodden heel—alludes to the trial of poverty; whereas the name Yisrael, suggesting power and dominance, alludes to the trial of wealth.

Consequently, at that precise moment, after Yaakov had defeated Eisav's ministering angel—who attempted to trip him up with the ordeal of wealth—the malach proclaims: "no longer will it be said that your name is Yaakov," alluding to the fact that you have withstood the trial of poverty; "but Yisrael," alluding to the fact that you have also withstood the trial of wealth; "for you have striven with the Divine and with men," you have combated the forces of tumah in the form of Eisav's malach, desiring your total failure; "and you have prevailed."

The Sun Rose for Him to Heal His Limp

We can now begin to glimpse the rays of light and comprehend the greatness of Hashem's ways. He had the sun

set prematurely on Yaakov's behalf, when he fled from Eisav, because the setting of the sun suggests the condition of poverty. It is as if one's shining success has come to an end and he has lost all that he once owned. Therefore, at that moment, when Eliphaz stripped Yaakov of all his belongings, leaving him naked and penniless, the sun set upon him—alluding to the ordeal of poverty.

After twenty-two years had passed, and Yaakov returned from Lavan's house an affluent man—with countless flocks of sheep, camels, servants and maidservants—HKB"H had the sun rise for him. For, the rising of the sun represents the situation of wealth. It is as if the sun is shining upon this person; he is successful and has accumulated great wealth. This is precisely what happened to Yaakov; the sun of success shone upon him in Lavan's house.

In this manner, let us focus on the passuk (Bereishis 32, 32): **"וַיִּזְרַח לוֹ הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כַּאֲשֶׁר עָבַר אֶת פְּנוּאֵל וְהוּא צוֹלַע עַל יָרְכוֹ" —the sun rose for him as he passed Penuel and he was limping on his hip.** Rashi explains: **"וּמְדַרְשׁ אַגְדָּה, וַיִּזְרַח לוֹ, לְצַרְכוֹ לְרַפְאוֹת אֶת צְלִיעָתוֹ, כְּמָה דְתִימָא (מְלָאכִי ג-ב) שֶׁמֶשׁ צָדְקָה וּמְרַבָּא בְכַנְפֵיהּ, וְאוֹתָן שְׁעוֹת שְׁמִיּהָרָה לְשִׁקּוּעַ" —according to a Midrash Aggadah, the sun rose ahead of schedule in order to heal Yaakov's limp; the passuk in Malachi (3, 20) attributes healing powers to the sun; those hours that the sun hurried to set on his behalf, when he departed Be'er Sheva, it now hurried to rise on his behalf.**

Let us explain. When HKB"H had the sun set miraculously for Yaakov—alluding to the trial of poverty—He prepared the way for all of Yisrael, the children of Yaakov, to withstand the ordeal of poverty just as Yaakov had—even when the sun of their success sets upon them. Similarly, HKB"H had the sun rise miraculously for him, subsequently, on his return from Lavan's house. This alluded to the trial of wealth. Here HKB"H made preparations for all future generations of Yisrael to also remain adherent to Yaakov's kedushah and withstand the ordeal of wealth, remaining steadfast in their "emunah," even when the sun of success shines upon them.

This then is the meaning of the passuk: **"The sun shone for him"** miraculously. The Torah provides the reason for this phenomenon: **"And he was limping on his hip"**—due to the damage inflicted upon his descendants, causing them to struggle with the ordeal of wealth. Therefore, HKB"H made the

sun rise for him and shine on him: **"to heal his limp"**—so that when Yisrael remain true to his standards of kedushah, they will also succeed in withstanding the trial of wealth.

With this understanding, we have achieved a better appreciation of the Gemara's elucidation: **"וַיִּזְרַח לוֹ הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ, וְכִי שָׁמַשׁ הִבָּאָה בְּעִבּוּרוֹ זְרַחָה לּוֹ לְבַד זְרַחָה וְהִלָּא לְכָל הָעוֹלָם זְרַחָה. אָמַר רַבִּי יִצְחָק, שֶׁמֶשׁ הִבָּאָה בְּעִבּוּרוֹ זְרַחָה" —Rabbi Akiva queried why the passuk implies that the sun rose only for him; Rabbi Yitzchak replied that the sun that set for him now rose for him. In other words, the sun set upon him when he lost all of his possessions and, nevertheless, withstood the ordeal of poverty. Therefore, the sun of success, shone upon him while living with Lavan. As we have learned, whoever fulfills the Torah in a state of poverty will ultimately fulfill it in a state of wealth.**

The Depth of Rabbi Akiva's Wisdom

Taking the high road, let us tackle the matter of Rabbi Akiva's enigmatic question. Why did he pose his question to Rabban Gamliel specifically when he was on his way to purchase an animal for his son's wedding feast? We have learned in the Gemara (Kiddushin 29b) that after a man marries a woman, it is more difficult to learn Torah. Rabbi Yochanan expresses this notion as follows: **"רִיחַיִּים בְּצוּאָרוֹ וַיַּעֲסוֹק בַּתּוֹרָה" —with a millstone around one's neck can one study Torah?**

Yet, who provided us with a better living example than Rabbi Akiva of the Mishnah's dictum: **"Whoever fulfills the Torah in a state of poverty will ultimately fulfill it in a state of wealth"**? As the Gemara (Ketubos 62b) teaches us, after Rabbi Akiva wed the daughter of Kalba Savua, her father banned her from his house and disowned her. Despite their meager circumstances, Rabbi Akiva engaged in Torah study while extremely poor and ultimately developed a following of twenty-four thousand students. In the end, he became extremely wealthy, as the Yerushalmi explains (Shabbat 34a):

"מַעֲשֵׂה בְּרַבִּי עֲקִיבָא שְׁעֵשָׂה לְאִשְׁתּוֹ עִיר שֶׁל זָהָב. חֲמַתִּיהָ אֵיתִתִּיהָ דְרַבִּין גַּמְלִיאֵל וְקַנְיִיתָ בָּהּ, אֵתָת וְאִמְרַת קוּמוּי בְּעַלְהָ, אָמַר לָהּ, הַכִּין הוּוִית עֲבַדְתָּ לִּי כְּמָה דְהוּוִית עֲבַדְתָּ לִּיהָ, דְהוּוִית מְזַבְנָה מִקְלִיעָתָא דְרִישָׁא וַיְהִיבָה לִּיהָ וְהוּא לַעֲי בְּאוּרִיתָא."

It so happened that Rabbi Akiva had a piece of jewelry made for his wife out of gold. Rabban Gamliel's wife saw her and became jealous; she reported this to her husband. He asked her: "Did you do for me what Rabbi Akiva's wife did for him? She sold the braids of her hair and gave him the money so that he could engage in Torah study."

Based on this story, we can suggest that Rabbi Akiva was hinting to Rabbi Yochanan that it is important to encourage his son who was about to get married. Even if his wife and marriage are like **“a millstone around his neck,”** he must continue his Torah studies—even under circumstances of poverty and duress. For in this merit he will eventually merit engaging in Torah study while wealthy. Now, Rabban Gamliel was the “Nassi,” the leader of the community, and it would not have been respectful to tell the “Nassi” what to say.

Hence, Rabbi Akiva cleverly asked Rabban Gamliel: **“כתוב”** **“ויזרח לו השמש, וכי שמש לו לבד זרחה והלא לכל העולם זרחה”**—**the passuk states: “The sun rose for him.” Did the sun rise only for him? It most certainly rose for the entire world.** By asking this question, he prompted Rabban Gamliel to answer the answer provided by Rabbi Yitzchak in his name: **“שמש הבאה בעבורו”** **“זרחה בעבורו”**—**the sun that set for him rose for him.** In other words, in the merit of withstanding the trial of poverty, when the sun set upon him, ultimately the sun rose miraculously for Yaakov when he was in Lavan’s house—allowing him to fulfill the precepts of the Torah in a state of wealth. There are no better words of encouragement to offer someone about to get married to motivate him to continue his Torah studies even if his financial circumstances are difficult.

We can add to this a lovely idea based on the Arizal’s Sha’ar HaPesukim (Vayechi). He teaches us that Rabbi Akiva was a spark of Yaakov Avinu. He provides an allusion from the following passuk (Bereishis 49, 24): **“ותשב באיתן קשתו ויפוזו זרועי”** **“ידיו, מידי אביר יעקב משם רועה אבן ישראל”**. In the berachah given to Yosef at the end of Yaakov’s life, the term **“אביר יעקב”**—literally the **“Mighty Power of Yaakov”**—is employed. Rearranging these letters, they spell **“רבי עקיבא”**.

As we have learned, Yaakov was initially tested and valiantly withstood the test of poverty; in this merit, he became wealthy and also withstood the test of wealth. Therefore, Rabbi Akiva was also subjected initially to the test of poverty; he was expelled from his wealthy father-in-law’s house. Ultimately, he became extremely wealthy. So, just as Yaakov made preparations for all of Yisrael to follow in his footsteps, so, too, Rabbi Akiva was able to accomplish the same feat. He set an example for his students and inspired them to follow in his footsteps—to engage in Torah study even under difficult circumstances, believing that in this merit, the sun of success would ultimately shine upon them.



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