

Say it Nicely

"Imma, I'm home from school!"
 "Welcome home, Shira, dear. How was your day?"
 "Let me first tell you about the walk home, Imma. It is boiling hot outside, and I am dying of thirst. Give me a drink."

Shira's mother heard the rough request. She knew that Shira was very thirsty. She brought her a cold glass of water, and sat down.

"Shira dear, you must have been extremely thirsty."
 "I was, Imma."
 "Do realize how you asked for that glass of water?"
 "No, what did I say?"
 "Give me a drink."
 "What is wrong with that, Imma? Doesn't everyone ask that way?"
 "I don't know Shira dear, but questions can be asked in a much nicer way."
 "How should I ask, Imma?"
 "May I please have a drink of water?"
 "I see."
 "We actually have an example of this in this week's parasha, Shira."
 "Really!"

Yes. The time had come for Yaakov Avinu and his family to leave the house of Lavan. Hashem Himself told Yaakov to leave, as the verse states, "Hashem said to Yaakov, "Return to the land of your fathers, your birthplace, and I will be with you" (Bereshis 31:3). Let me ask you, Shira, how should Yaakov relate this command to his wives Rachel and Leah?"

"I suppose he should tell them directly: 'Hashem commanded us to go.'"
 "You might think so. I thought so too. However, look at the next nine verses. Yaakov Avinu explains to Rachel and Leah that their father Lavan is no longer happy with him. He then describes in detail how he has gone to great lengths to be honest in his dealings with Lavan. Their father, on the other hand, responded by seizing every opportunity to cheat Yaakov. Hashem performed a great miracle with the spotted sheep, and made Yaakov a wealthy man. Only then did Yaakov relate the prophesy about leaving Charan."

"Why did he go through the whole long explanation, Imma?"
 "The Shelah HaKadosh explains that Yaakov Avinu is teaching us a powerful lesson. It is not fitting for a person who wants something from a family member

to press him or her to do it. Rather, he should try to explain his request and its benefits. He will instill a desire in them, thereby making them want to do it. Family members will communicate better, be more cooperative, and enthusiastic about doing their jobs."

"That is beautiful, Imma."
 "It is, Shira. Some people hang pictures on the wall to beautify their houses. Let's decorate our home with beautiful words of explanation and kind requests."

*Kinderlach . . .
 How do you ask for things? "Give me a pencil." "You must pick up your shoes now." "Pass me the pitcher." People will understand you. They may even do what you want. However, you will be missing that subtler form of communication of the Shelah HaKadosh. Explain your request to others. Make them want to grant your wish. "Your shoes are in the middle of the floor. Someone may trip and fall over them. Therefore, can you please pick them up?" Kinderlach, do you hear the difference in this type of request? A person who uses this tool will improve his communication and relationships with people. He will promote understanding, and save himself needless misunderstanding. Take the Shelah's advice, and acquire a tool for life.*



In Hashem's Hands

Yaakov Avinu had a rough road ahead of him. Where was he headed? To the house of Lavan. There lived the evil trickster who tried to uproot the entire Jewish nation. As the verse states, "An Aramean (Lavan) sought to destroy my forefather (Yaakov)" (Devarim 26:5). How could Yaakov survive there, all alone in a foreign land? Only with Hashem's help and protection. Therefore, he prayed to the Almighty. "If Hashem will be with me, guard me on this way that I am going, give me bread to eat, clothing to wear, return me in peace to my father's house; He will be a G-d to me" (Bereshis 28:20-21).

This statement is a bit puzzling. When Yaakov was in Lavan's home, he needed a great deal of *siyata di'shmaya* (Heavenly Assistance), for he was in a very dangerous place. He constantly placed Hashem's image in front of him, thinking about Him and praying for His assistance. Why is it that Yaakov emphasizes Hashem's rule over himself only when he will return to his father's house, safe and sound? That is precisely the point, answers the Ha'amek Davar. It is relatively easy to think about the Almighty when you are in a tough situation. You realize that you need Him. You are helpless without Him. Therefore, you constantly try to please Him and beseech Him to save you. However, the situation is a little different in your father's house. There you feel at home, safe and sound. You are comfortable, with your needs taken care of. Therefore, it is easy to forget about Hashem. Yaakov Avinu did not want to fall into this trap. Therefore, he took a *neder* (vow) to serve Hashem when he returned safely to his father's home. Even in secure times, he would not forget the Almighty, and all of the good that He bestowed.

*Kinderlach . . .
 We hope never to find ourselves in a dangerous situation. May Hashem always protect us from harm. However, when a person is in danger, the first thing that he does is cry out to Hashem. He realizes that he is powerless to help himself. Only the One Above can save him. In this way, he becomes very close to Hashem. The Ha'amek Davar is teaching us to remember Him at all times. Are you comfortable right now; safe, sound, happy, and secure, sitting around your Shabbos table? Now is the time to think about The One Who gave you all of these blessings. Remember Him, bless Him, and thank Him. Do not wait for danger to bring you close to Him. Keep Hashem in front of you always.*

Parasha Questions

- What is the meaning of the name Mahanaim? (Rashi 32:3)
- What were the terms of the bris between Yaakov and Lavan? (31:50, 52)
- How quickly did Lavan run after Yaakov? (Rashi 31:23)
- How did Lavan act toward his daughters at the time of their weddings to Yaakov? (31:15 and Rashi)
- In what land would Hashem be with Yaakov and why? (31:3 and Rashi)