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**A Parsha Weekly by the Friedman Kollel  
of Metropolitan Washington**

**Parshas Vayeitzei  
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## **Crisis of Faith**

**By Rabbi Eliezer Lachman, Rosh HaKollel**

This week's Torah reading begins: "Yaakov departed from Beer-sheva and went toward Charan." The Sages are bothered by the apparent redundancy of this verse, as the Torah had previously stated, "Yitzchak sent Yaakov away and he went toward Padan-aram to Lavan..." (Bereishis 28:5). Why is the fact of his departure repeated here? The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 68:1) explains that "Yaakov departed from Beer-sheva ..." implies that Yaakov departed calmly and securely. This is significant, because his mother had told him to flee for his life since Eisav was planning to kill him (27:42-43), and it would only be natural for a person in such a situation to feel anxious and fearful. The verse teaches us that Yaakov nevertheless went calmly, with trust (bitachon) in Hashem that all will be well.

The Sages (Bereishis Rabbah 68:2) explain further that there was an additional reason for Yaakov to feel anguish at this time. His father had told him to go to Charan to marry one of Lavan's daughters (Bereishis 28:2). There is clearly a parallel between Yaakov's journey to this family to find a wife for himself and Eliezer's journey there many years before to find a wife for Yitzchak. Yet the contrast between the two is extremely stark. Eliezer came to Charan with "ten camels ... and all the bounty of his master in his hands" (24:10), whereas Yaakov came there penniless, possessing just the stick in his hand (32:11). The contrast might have made Yaakov feel sad or depressed, and might have made him doubt his chances at getting married. The verse teaches that Yaakov nevertheless did not lose hope, but felt secure in his faith and trust in Hashem.

The Sages vividly present Yaakov as struggling with this test of his faith, and only afterwards emerging with the security and serenity that our verse hints at. "He said: What am I doing, losing hope in my Creator!? God forbid! I will not lose hope in my Creator - rather, my help will be from Hashem..." (Bereishis Rabbah 68:2). There is a lesson here for us, that Hashem sometimes puts us in situations that test our trust in Him, and that we, like Yaakov, should

emerge from these situations with our bitachon strengthened.

But why does Hashem test us in this manner? And why did Yaakov seem to momentarily falter in his trust of Hashem as he was struggling with this issue?

The Baal Shem Tov explains that trust in Hashem, and the relationship and closeness with Hashem that it engenders, is so powerful that it in effect shields a person from punishment. Even if a person has sinned and merits punishment, Hashem will not bring punishment upon him, as long as he is steadfast in his bitachon. But if he is indeed deserving of punishment, what does Hashem do? He intervenes in the person's life situations and his emotional responses to make it more difficult for him to hold on to his trust in Hashem. New life challenges arise for him, depressing or anxious thoughts start to enter his mind and consciousness, and it becomes much more difficult for the person to maintain his serene and calm state of trust in Hashem. If the person succumbs to these challenges and loses his level of bitachon, the punishment that he deserves inevitably follows.

If, however, he does not succumb, he will not be punished. Indeed, this is what the person should do - he should catch himself falling out of bitachon, as Yaakov did, and strengthen himself. He ought to, for example, pray to Hashem that his trust in Hashem be fortified. If the person succeeds in this trying situation, he emerges from the test even closer to Hashem and is no longer deserving of punishment. The challenge to a person's bitachon is, thus, a necessary preliminary that helps determine if the person will in fact be punished.

The implications of this approach are quite far reaching. We often think that a person feels dejected, sad or depressed as a result of undergoing suffering. According to the Baal Shem Tov, however, it is often the reverse: the person is undergoing suffering as a result of being dejected, sad or depressed and not feeling the security, calmness and joy of trusting in Hashem.

## About the Friedman Kollel

The Rabbi Samuel and Zehava Friedman Kollel, located in Olney, Maryland, offers learning opportunities for Jews of all backgrounds. These include one-on-one chavrusas, public lectures and classes for men and women, as well as after-school structured learning for public school teens. The Kollel operates under the leadership of Rabbi Eliezer Lachman and Rabbi Shaya Milikowsky. For more information or to sponsor an upcoming Capital Torah, please contact Rabbi Elyakim Milikowsky at [FriedmanKollel@BetterFamily.org](mailto:FriedmanKollel@BetterFamily.org).

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