

Divrei Torah on Vayetzei

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In this week's parsha (29-10) we find that Yaakov avinu was incredibly strong. He moved a stone that required many shepherds to roll without difficulty. Rash"i says that the torah tells this to us to show us that he was very strong.

The obvious questions are:

1. How did he get so strong, we know that he was sitting and learning all day and not working out in the gym?
2. Who cares, is physical strength such a big deal?

The answers can be found in the tefilas geshem that we say on shmini atzeres. There it says about Yaakov, "yichad lev v'gol even mayim". (He unified his heart and rolled the stone off the water.) The mefarshim explain that what it is saying here is that by us there are conflicting desires within us. Our neshama wants one thing, our physical body wants another thing and different parts of our body may want something else. These result of these conflicting desires in that when we do something we do it with only part of ourselves (and part might be even fighting against it). This makes us very weak. By Yaakov Avinu, his entire being physical and spiritual was subjugated to the service of Hashem. Therefore when he determined that ovodas hashem required he do something, his entire being was into it and that resulted in a tremendous strength.

The lesson to us is that we need to appreciate that what is best for our ovodas hashem is in fact best for our physical interests as well. Internalizing that will give us strength that we otherwise would not have known is possible.

At the end of the Parsha (31, 1-16) we find a very interesting conversation between Yaakov and Rochel & Leah. Hashem told Yaakov it was time to return to his parents and in the conversation between Yaakov and his wives this seems almost like an afterthought and the main emphasis is on what a rotten guy Lavan is and how he did not treat them like family.

The mefarshim explain that where a person is, is more than where he is physically located, but also where his mind and emotional attachment are to (the same concept is said in the beginning of Parshas Lech L'cho when Hashem told Avrohom to leave Charan), therefore, in order to keep the instruction they were given to leave, they needed to emphasize how they do not feel related and connected to Lavan emotionally etc.

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