

# *Is Keeping Torah Difficult?*

PARSHA INSIGHTS - VAYAITZAI (5760)

**NO, IT IS NOT HARD TO BE A JEW**

In the beginning of the *parsha* [Torah portion], Yaacov journeyed to Lavan and married his daughters and their maidservants: Rachel, Leah, Bilha, and Zilpa. All the *shevatim* [tribes] except Binyamin were born. Rachel did not bear Binyamin until *Parshas Vayishlach* (35:18 - next week's *parsha*). After twenty years in his father-in-law's house in the city of Charan, in Aram (Mesopotamia), Yaacov was ready to travel back southwest to *Eretz Yisroel* [the Land of Israel]. (Study our *parsha* for the breakdown of these twenty years. Also refer to *Gemara Megila* 16B plus *Rashi Vayaishev* 37:34 for an analysis of the years and experiences.)

Yaacov heard Lavan's sons suspecting him of accumulating wealth at the expense of his father-in-law. He also noticed that Lavan's demeanor toward him had changed. **Hashem then directed him to return to his father's land, Canaan.** Yaacov called a meeting with Rachel and Leah, explaining in detail his need to depart immediately (31:1-13). Here is the response of his righteous wives (31:14-15): "Do we still have a portion and an inheritance in our father's house? Are we not considered by him like strangers? For he has sold us, and has completely consumed our money. All the wealth that Hashem rescued from our father belongs to us and our children. Now, do whatever Hashem has said to you." *Rashi* clarifies: there was no hope for Rachel and Leah to inherit among the males of Lavan's family. Furthermore, instead of giving a dowry to his daughters when they had married, Lavan acted like a stranger toward them by "selling" them to Yaacov as wages for his labor! In addition, he "consumed their money" by withholding Yaacov's payment for the last six years he worked, besides the fact that he had worked fourteen to "earn" Rachel and Leah.

Rav Moshe Feinstein remarks that the reply of Rachel and Leah is incredibly difficult to comprehend. Yaacov had informed them that Hashem commanded him to leave Aram. They answered that indeed it was a great idea to pick up and go, because **there was nothing to gain if they remained there.** Their response should have been that SINCE HASHEM HAS SAID TO DEPART, IT IS THE CORRECT THING TO DO! Even if they stood to prosper in Lavan's house, they would still need to journey away to obey Hashem's order. How do we understand their reply? It does not bother us that Yaacov explained to them his motives for leaving in a lot of detail. This was to make it easier for them to depart from their homeland. But why did they remark that of course it was the right decision to leave SINCE THEY WERE CONSIDERED LIKE STRANGERS, etc.? This should not have been the justification to listen to Hashem. His Will is to be fulfilled even if there are no perceived "fringe benefits!"

The solution is that Rachel and Leah surely consented to leave solely because Hashem said so. However, they wanted to show that HASHEM'S *MITZVOS* [commandments] ARE NOT DIFFICULT TO OBSERVE. One should not view *mitzvos* as overly challenging and burdensome. A person does not suffer monetary losses because of *shmiras hamitzvos* [observing commandments]. *Chazal* [our Sages] inform us that our livelihood and food-supply are planned in Heaven. It is possible to sustain oneself in a permissible way, within the guidelines of *halacha* [law]. By desecrating *Shabbos* [Sabbaths] and skipping *davening* [prayers], a person will not actually gain anything (although initially it may appear that way). Therefore, there is really no difficulty in keeping Hashem's Torah.

If a person educates his children in this manner, they will easily adhere to *mitzvah* [commandment] observance. On the other hand, those who proclaim (in a certain tone of voice) that "they have been in America for over fifty years already and have still not violated the laws of *Shabbos*" are sending a damaging message to their children. Such statements imply that *mitzvos* are really tough to keep, and who knows if my descendants will be able to stand up to the challenge? Someone who realizes that *mitzvos* are not such an ordeal, because his faith in Hashem is firm, will have a relatively smooth experience in keeping Hashem's Torah.

This is why Rachel and Leah declared that it would be a synch to leave Aram. Hashem's plan is what guides us, but we want you to know that doing His bidding is not a burden at all. It is a "*mitzvah kala*" [easy commandment] a simple *mitzvah*, to pick up and go. And the same goes for all the *mitzvos*.

*By Rabbi Moshe Heigh*