



# MISHNAS CHAYIM

# משנת היום

## MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

פרשת ויצא תשס"ט • Parshas Vayeitzei 5769

### HOW DID HE GET INVITED?

On the night of Pesach, as we sit assembled around the Seder table in front of open *Haggados*, we recount and relive the events of *yetzias* Mitzrayim (the Exodus from Egypt). After performing some preliminary rituals and reciting parts of the text, we arrive at the main body of the *Haggadah*: the concentrated account of the Pesach story as recorded in Devarim (25:5-8). This central point of the Seder begins with a description of one of the main characters of the story, of course: none other than... Lavan.

The source for the inclusion of this passage as part of the order of the evening is the Mishnah in Pesachim (10:4):

וְדוֹרֵשׁ מֵאַרְמֵי אוֹבֵד אָבִי, עַד שֶׁיִּגְמֹר כָּל הַפְּרָשָׁה כְּלָהּ.

One expounds the section which begins, ‘An Aramean (Lavan) sought to wipe out my forefather (Ya’akov)...,’ and continues with the remainder of that section (which discusses Ya’akov’s descent to Mitzrayim and all of the events that unfolded there for the Jewish people, from the slavery to the redemption).”

The obvious question is: How did Lavan come into the picture? How did this unscrupulous character from parshas Vayeitzei manage to figure so prominently at the focal point of a narrative that seems not to concern him?

The truth of the matter is that Lavan actually *does* play a pivotal role in the episode of *yetzias* Mitzrayim.

### MA’ASEH AVOS SIMAN L’BANIM

The Ramban (*Bereishis* 12:6,10) lays out the principle known as “*ma’aseh avos siman l’banim* (the actions of the fathers were precursors for their descendants).” Our forefathers’ distinction goes well beyond the fact that they were merely the beginning founders of the Jewish people. As a result of their righteousness and immense spiritual stature, the lives of the *avos* went a long way toward shaping the course of Jewish history. As the Ramban explains, the experiences that the *avos* underwent were not mere personal events but prophetic indicators of the future of the Jewish people. Thus we find, for example, that upon arriving in Eretz Yisrael, one of the first places to which Avraham Avinu laid claim was Shechem. Hundreds of years later, when the Jewish nation arrived in the land, this was the first city they conquered.

The Vilna Gaon tells us (*commentary to Tikunei Zohar* 80:3) that the events that transpired during Ya’akov Avinu’s stay with the wicked Lavan are to be viewed similarly. In fact, the happenings surrounding Ya’akov’s sojourn in Lavan’s house mirrored and set the stage for the future Jewish experience in Mitzrayim.

Consider the following uncanny parallels:

Lavan subjected Ya’akov to many years of back-breaking labor.

In the midst of Ya’akov’s servitude, the tribes of Israel, who formed the backbone of the nation, were born. Similarly, during the enslavement in Egypt, the Jewish nation, comprising 600,000 souls, was established (“And as they oppressed them, so they multiplied...” [*Shemos* 1:12]).

לזכר נשמת חנה מירא בת שלמה ע"ה

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# משנת חיים

פרשת ויצא תשס"ט א Parshas Vayitzei 5769

In this week's *parshah* a lot of space is devoted to a somewhat mysterious occurrence. In great detail, the Torah depicts how Ya'akov, while tending to Lavan's sheep, employed a technique that involved strategically-placed staffs. Through this method he was able to affect the birthing process of Lavan's sheep, and they produced the kind of speckled and marked offspring that were designated as Ya'akov's payment. In short, he was able to amass great wealth this way from the wicked Lavan's own flocks. As Lavan's sons remarked (*Bereishis 31:1*), "Ya'akov took all of our father's possessions." Indeed, when Ya'akov took leave of Lavan's house, he was a very wealthy man.

Did you ever wonder what this whole episode was about? Note, however, that this is exactly how the Jewish people left Mitzrayim: laden

with the gold, silver, and garments that once belonged to their former taskmasters. They effectively cleaned out Mitzrayim.

Ya'akov took his family and possessions and fled from Lavan's house. Their escape was not noticed until the third day ("**And it was told to Lavan on the third day that Ya'akov had fled,**" [*Bereishis 31:22*]).

The Jews' departure from Mitzrayim took place in a similar fashion. Originally, they requested permission to leave for three days (*Shemos 5:3*). It was at the conclusion of that **three-day period**, when the Jews did not return, that "**It was told to the king of Mitzrayim that the nation had fled**" (*Ibid. 14:5; see Rashi there*).

"And he (Lavan) took his brethren with him, and he pursued (Ya'akov) on a seven-day journey and overtook him" (*Bereishis 31:23*). Rashi explains the *passuk* to mean that Lavan caught up to Ya'akov on the **seventh day** of the latter's departure.

And so it was in Mitzrayim. "And he (Pharaoh) harnessed his chariot, and he took his nation with him... And Mitzrayim pursued and overtook them as they encamped by the sea..." (*Shemos 14:6,9*). That day the sea split, and the Egyptians were drowned. This was the **seventh day** since the Jews left Mitzrayim; hence, on the seventh day of Pesach, the Torah reading is that of *Az Yashir*, the "Song of the Sea" (*Rashi to Shemos 14:5*).

This is in fact only a sampling of the relationship between the events that took place in Lavan's house and the story of *yetzias* Mitzrayim. It should now be clear what Lavan has to do with the Pesach Seder: the entire episode played itself out in his backyard. And we thank Hashem on this night that Lavan was not successful.

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