

SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 20

Vayetze, Sicha 1

The Midrash:

Yaakov fled Eisav for his uncle Lavan in Charan. On the way, the Torah tells us:

“He arrived at the place and lodged there because the sun had set, and he took some of the stones of the place and placed [them] at his head, and he lay down in that place.” (Bereishis 28:11)

The sages inferred from the phrase, “he lay down in that place” that Yaakov only slept there, on the way to Lavan, but during his twenty years with Lavan he did not sleep. “What did he say? He recited the fifteen chapters of “Song of Ascents,” Shir Hamaalos, in Tehillim.” (Bereishis Rabbah 68:11)

The Explanation:

The question “what did Yaakov say” during those twenty sleepless years is not simply “what was he occupied with?” We know he was busy shepherding Lavan’s flocks. It is an inquiry into his spiritual fortitude. How did Yaakov maintain his connection with G-d,

his hope and spiritual sensitivity, while living in Lavan’s deceitful environment? With the secret embedded in the fifteen psalms of Songs of Ascent.

The Chidah explains that the fifteen psalms correspond to the fifteen years when all three forefathers lived together. The patriarchs each embodied one of the three primary Divine emotions, love, awe, and compassion. Reciting the fifteen psalms corresponding to the overlapping lifespans of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, alludes to Yaakov’s marshaling the forces of all these emotions in his battle against Lavan.

During the Alter Rebbe’s lifetime, a war was fought where the victor concentrated all three of their divisions on a single flank of the enemy, overwhelming that one division and paving the way for an easy conquest. Similarly, Yaakov contended with his enemy by concentrating all his spiritual weaponry, love, awe, and compassion, one negative entity at a time.

Singing in the Dark:

These psalms are called “songs of ascent,” and a song implies a joyous, upbeat, perspective. How was Yaakov “singing” as

he entered into exile with Lavan? Yaakov understood that the descent into exile was only in order to allow him to reap greater spiritual light from the darkness. Therefore, even if the experience of exile itself was painful and dark, he was able to “sing” within it because he knew it was leading to a greater ascent.

This is alluded to in the first chapter of the fifteen psalms, “I come in peace, but when I speak, they come to wage war.” (Tehillim 120:7) A Jew does not seek out darkness and confrontation, “I come in peace,” but when G-d nonetheless places a Jew in exile, he does not cower, he sings. Because we know that we will emerge victorious, with greater light.
