

SICHA SUMMARY

Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 25

Vayishlach, Sicha 2

The Context:

After departing from his encounter with Eisav unscathed, Yaakov arrived in Shechem where he proceeded to purchase a field to accommodate his family's encampment: "And he bought the part of the field where he had pitched his tent from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, for a hu

What is a *kesita*? Rashi writes: "This is a coin known as a *ma'ah*. Rabbi Akiva said, "When I traveled to the cities by the sea, they called a *ma'ah*, *kesita*." (The Targum renders it מְּוֹרָח, good, acceptable everywhere, like [Bereishis 23:16] "accepted by the merchant").

The Questions:

Other commentaries offer various interpretations of *kesita*. Targum Yonasan and the Talmud Yerushalmi render it as a kind of adornment, a pearl. Ibn Ezra translates it as a "small lamb."

1. Why does Rashi select the translation from "the cities by the sea" and not the

interpretations that emerged from the commentaries based in the Holy Land?

2. A *ma'ah* coin has a small value — twenty *ma'ah* comprise one *Shekel*. 100 *ma'ah* is therefore five *Shekalim*. Furthermore, the Torah usually refers to a *ma'ah* as a *gera*. According to Rashi's interpretation, why would the Torah use this obscure term, *kesita*, and not the usual term, *gera*, or more fittingly, just say five *shekalim*!?

The Explanation:

Yaakov's settling in Shechem was a temporary stop on his way to return to his father in Chevron. There is no reason to assume that he would have paid a premium for the land, unlike Avraham who paid an exorbitant price for a burial plot for him and his descendants. Indeed, the text does not suggest any negotiation or bargaining between Yaakov and Shechem, leading to the conclusion that Yaakov must have paid a nominal fee appropriate for a piece of land to be used as a temporary encampment. The Targum which render *kesita* as precious pearls, therefore, does not accord with the plain understanding of the narrative. There is no evidence that Yaakov paid 100

precious pearls for this plot of land. As for sheep, this, too, is not a preferred translation, because why is this information relevant or important to our understanding of the narrative? Indeed, if this purchase was nominal, why does it merit narration at all?

It must be, then, that Yaakov made a point of purchasing this plot of land out of love for the Land of Israel, even if it was temporary. He expressed this love by using a prominent form of payment, even though it was not an expensive purchase. Rashi therefore cites Rabbi Akiva's report that the cities overseas, meaning prominent centers of commerce, refer to the ma'ah coin as *kesita*. *Kesita* means an adornment; the fact that his coin is referred to as an adornment implies that, even though the coin did not have a high value, it was still respected as a prominent currency, fit for use as an adornment. Thus, Yaakov used this prominent coin to complete his purchase of a mere temporary settlement in order to express his cherishing of the Land of Israel.

One might still ask why this merits mention? For a man of Yaakov's wealth, a negligible purchase, even if it was made with a coin of cultural value, is still not an impressive statement of love and dedication. To address this, Rashi cites the author of the interpretation, Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Akiva had the reputation of seeking out merits of the Jewish people, even seemingly negligible

ones. According to Rabbi Akiva, it is reasonable for the Torah to record even Yaakov's minor expression of his love for the land by purchasing it with a special currency, because the Torah seeks to elevate the merits of the Jew at every opportunity.

This interpretation is buttressed by the Talmud's discussion of the context of Rabbi Akiva's characteristic love of the Jewish people. The Talmud relates that Akiva's characteristic piety is evident in the dispute. A beraisa teaches that minor children of the wicked who died with neither their own virtue nor the virtue of their parents, do not come into the World-to-Come. But Rabbi Akiva says: They come into the World-to-Come, as it is stated: "G-d preserves the simple [pesa'im]" (Tehillim 116:6), as in the cities overseas the residents call a child *Pasya*. (Sanhedrin 110b)

In other words, one might say that Rabbi Akiva travelled all the way to the cities overseas in order to retrieve an interpretation that would elevate the children of the wicked to the World to Come. This leads to the observation that in the same overseas location he found another interpretation that highlights the merits of the Jewish people — that Yaakov purchased even his negligible encampment with a *kesita*, a prominent currency.
