

Zera Shimshon

by Rabbi Shimshon Chaim Nachmani zt"l

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Chapter VII: Vayetzei (Gen. 28:10-32:3)

Essay 21. Fleeing from Laban

פסוק "ויגנב יעקב את לב לִבְנוֹ הָאֲרָמִי עַל־בְּלִי הַגִּיד לוֹ כִּי בָרַח הוּא". קוֹשֶׁה אִם הִנֵּה רוֹצֵה לְבָרוּחַ אִיךָ אֶפְשָׁר שְׂגִיד לוֹ, שְׂמִיד שְׂגִיד לוֹ, אִינוֹ נִקְרָא "בוֹרַח". וְנִשׁ לֹאמַר שְׂעֵקֵב הִנֵּה פּוֹעֵל בְּבֵית לָבָן וְאֵינוֹ קִיָּמָא לֵן פּוֹעֵל יְכוּל לְחַזֹּר בּוֹ אֶפְיֵלוּ בְּחֻצֵי הַיּוֹם. וְאִם הִנֵּה יֵעֲקֵב מֵגִיד לְלָבָן הִנֵּה נִקְרָא "בוֹרַח" מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהִנֵּה רוֹצֵה לְחַזֹּר בּוֹ.

There is a verse: **“Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean, not telling him that he was fleeing”** (Gen. 31:20). A question is, if he had wanted to flee from Laban, how would it have been possible to tell [Laban], for immediately after he told him, it wouldn’t have been called **“fleeing.”** In other words, one might think that “fleeing” suggests running away in secret, and without authorization, and that perhaps Jacob thought he had no right to leave. If he had advised Laban that he intended to flee, that would have removed the element of surprise, and so how could it then be called “fleeing”?

It can be said that Jacob was a laborer in the house of Laban, and we have learned in Bava Metzia 10a, “Rav said [that] a laborer may reconsider [and quit his job], even at midday?” Thus, even if Jacob had told Laban, it would have been called “fleeing,” because he wanted to reconsider [and quit his job]. That is, Jacob did have a full legal right to leave, and if he had wanted to, he could have informed Laban of his intent, and Laban wouldn’t have been able to stop him legally. The word “fleeing” could still be used, because it doesn’t necessarily mean running away in secret, and without authorization. The word could simply mean “to hurry away.”

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