



The Path To Follow

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE

When Nothing New is Revealed

The prohibition against gossip applies even when a statement reveals no new information to the listener. If the listener already knows what another person said or did to him, but did not realize that he had harmful intentions in saying or doing what he did, it is prohibited to inform the listener of it.

For example, suppose that the Beit Din rules against Reuven, and Shimon meets him and asks about the ruling. If Reuven says, "The court ruled against me," and Shimon replies, "That's not right" (or a similar statement), even that is prohibited. This is because by making such a statement, although nothing new is revealed to Reuven, animosity will be aroused in his heart against the Beit Din.

– Chafetz Chaim

LEARNING TORAH FOR ITS OWN SAKE (BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

It is written, "Jacob sent messengers [literally "angels"] before him to Esau his brother, to the land of Seir, the field of Edom. He commanded them, saying: 'Thus shall you say to my lord, to Esau: So says your servant Jacob – I have sojourned with Laban and stayed until now'" (Genesis 32:4-5). Our Sages have said that Jacob sent Esau actual angels (Bereshith Rabba 75:4). At first glance, it seems that several things in this passage require an explanation:

1. Could Jacob not have sent human messengers to Esau? Why was he obligated to use angels?

2. If Jacob merited to be served by angels, what could he fear from Esau? In fact why was he so afraid of him, to the point that we read: "Jacob was greatly afraid" (Genesis 32:8)?

3. Why did our Sages teach that Jacob said to Esau, "I have sojourned [gart] with Laban, but I observed the 613 [taryag] mitzvot" (Midrash Aggadah on Genesis 32:5)? This is surprising, for what did it matter to Esau if Jacob observed the mitzvot with Laban or not?

4. Why does Scripture use the term angels in this account, whereas concerning Abraham, the angels who visited him are described as men, as it is written: "Behold, three men were standing over him" (Genesis 18:2)? The Sages have explained that these were the angels Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael (Bava Metzia 86b).

5. After Abraham's three visitors left, the verse explains that they were angels, as it is written: "Two angels came to Sodom" (Genesis 19:1). Now if the Torah wanted to tell us that they were angels instead of men, why did it wait until they had already left? It is also difficult to understand why Jacob thought that it was good to call Esau "my lord."

We may say that our father Jacob's greatness stemmed from that of his fathers, Abraham and Isaac. This emerges from the earlier parshiot. At the beginning of Parsha Vayeitzei we read, "He dreamed, and behold: A ladder was set up on earth, and the top of it reached to Heaven. And behold: Angels of G-d ascending and descending on it" (Genesis 28:12). Then at the end of Parsha Vayeitzei we read, "Jacob went on his way, and angels of G-d met him. When he saw them, Jacob said: 'This is the camp of G-d,' and he called the name of the place Mahanaim" (ibid. 32:2-3).

From these two passages we learn that Jacob would normally have revelations, for he often saw angels. When he left Eretz Israel to venture into another country, the angels who accompanied him in Eretz Israel departed, and other angels accompanied him in their stead. Therefore when Jacob saw an angel, he immediately knew that it was an angel rather than a man. Such was not the case with Abraham, who was not as accustomed to seeing angels as Jacob, and who did not always know how to distinguish between men and angels.

A Great Deal of Torah

We should not be surprised that Jacob reached a higher level than Abraham, for the prophet Isaiah said: "Thus says the L-RD, Who redeemed Abraham" (Isaiah 29:22). Here the Sages have explained, "Abraham himself was only created for the sake of Jacob" (Vayikra Rabba 36:4). Furthermore, the Zohar teaches: "The Patriarch Jacob is the Throne of Glory... as it is written: 'Then will I remember my covenant

with Jacob' [Leviticus 26:42]. The Holy One, blessed be He, established a covenant with Jacob alone, more than the covenant that He established with all his fathers. He made him a Throne of Glory for His Divine Presence to rest upon, distinguishing him from his predecessors" (Zohar, Va'eira 22). This teaches us that Jacob's power was greater than that of his fathers, and he merited things that they did not.

We may ask how Jacob managed to reach such a level, one greater than that of the other holy Patriarchs. It is because he studied a great deal of Torah. As our Sages have said in the Midrash, Jacob would go from the Beit Midrash of Shem to the Beit Midrash of Eber, and from the Beit Midrash of Eber to the Beit Midrash of Abraham (Tanhuma, Vayishlach 9). The Mishnah states, "Whoever occupies himself with the Torah for its own sake merits many things" (Pirkei Avot 6:1), for it makes him grow spiritually and elevates him and all his deeds. Since Jacob was constantly studying Torah for its own sake, he merited what his fathers did not.

Yet in that case, why did Jacob – who had all this power of the Torah – fear Esau?

The answer is that Jacob was not afraid that Esau would harm him, for he had faith in Hashem. Furthermore, since Jacob used angels, he could avenge himself on Esau. In fact the Sages say that the angels struck Esau and his men during the night until they uttered Jacob's name, at which point they halted their attack (Bereshith Rabba 78:11).

Despite all this, Jacob was afraid of Esau. He was not afraid of death, but of sin, for he sent the following message to Esau: "Be careful. I've observed all the mitzvot while I was with Laban, and you cannot harm me because my Torah is protecting me. If you don't fear the Torah, I am sending angels that will strike you, both you and your men. If you fail to fear one or the other, and if you don't change your ways, I will invoke G-d's Name." Jacob mentioned this to Esau by way of allusion, for he said: "to my lord, to Esau," with G-d's Name in mind.

When Jacob realized that this evildoer was hiding his true intentions and coming to his meet him along with 400 men, without fearing Torah, mitzvot, angels, punishment, or the Holy One, blessed be He, he immediately felt great fear. Actually, such is the way of the tzaddikim: When they see someone committing a sin, they immediately begin to examine their own deeds and think, "This is certainly a result of a slight sin that I committed, for if I had watched my every deed, I certainly would not have seen this man commit a sin."

This concept is mentioned by the Sages in the Gemara: "Jacob was greatly afraid [Genesis 32:8]. He thought that some sin might cause [G-d's promise to go unfulfilled]" (Berachot 4a). When Jacob saw Esau committing a sin and realized that Esau was still intent on doing evil – despite having been warned that angels would strike him and that he (Jacob) would invoke G-d's Name – Jacob immediately began to search his own soul. He wanted to know why the Holy One, blessed be He, had made him see this evildoer acting with scorn towards the Torah and towards G-d. Likewise King David was afraid when he saw evildoers, saying: "Trembling seized me because of the wicked who forsake Your Torah" (Psalms 119:53).