

מאמרי תורה – Torah Talk



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Parashat Vayetzei
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פרשת ויצא
ז' בכסלו תשע"ח

Torah Reading: *Bereshit* (Genesis) 28:10-32:3

In this *parasha*, Yaakov flees to his uncle Lavan's household and lives there for several years, marrying Lavan's daughters, Leah and Rachel, and establishing a large family.

One of the challenges of living in the modern era is grappling with ethical questions and challenges generated by new technologies. One area of particular concern is medical ethics. Where can we, as Jews, find guidance on such things as genetic engineering, which includes cloning, stem cell research, and gender selection? Why, from the Torah, of course!

In this week's *parasha* we encounter two cases of genetic engineering, one in the text itself, and one in the later *midrash*.

Lavan tries to manipulate Yaakov out of payment due to him, but Yaakov, as we know, is a master manipulator himself. Chapter 30, verses 27-43, tells the story:

כז וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹוֹ לָבָן, אִם-נָא מְצֵאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינַיִךְ; נַחֲשֵׁתִי, וַיְבָרְכֵנִי ה' בְּגִלְגָּלְךָ.
כח וַיֹּאמֶר: נִקְבָה שְׂכָרְךָ עָלַי, וְאֶתְנָה. כט וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹוֹ--אֶתָּה יָדַעְתָּ, אֵת
אֲשֶׁר עֲבַדְתִּיךָ; וְאֵת אֲשֶׁר-הָיָה מְקַנָּה, אֶתִּי. ל כי מֵעַט אֲשֶׁר-הָיָה לְךָ לִפְנֵי,
וַיִּפְרָץ לָרֶב, וַיְבָרְךָ ה' אֶתְּךָ, לְרִגְלִי; וְעַתָּה, מְתִי אֶעֱשֶׂה גַם-אֲנֹכִי--לְבֵיתִי.
לא וַיֹּאמֶר, מָה אֶתֶּן-לְךָ; וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב, לֹא-תִתֶּן-לִי מְאוּמָה--אִם-תַּעֲשֶׂה-
לִי הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה, אֲשׁוּבָה אֶרְעֶה צֹאנֶךָ אֲשֶׁמֶר. לב אָעֶבֶר בְּכָל-צֹאנֶךָ הַיּוֹם,
הִסַּר מִשָּׁם כָּל-שֶׁה נִקְד וְטָלוּא וְכָל-שֶׁה-חוּם בְּכֶשֶׁבִים, וְטָלוּא וְנִקְד,
בְּעֵזִים; וְהָיָה, שְׂכָרִי. לג וְעַתָּה-בִּי צְדָקְתִּי בְיוֹם מָחָר, כִּי-תָבוֹא עַל-שְׂכָרִי
לִפְנֵיךָ: כָּל אֲשֶׁר-אֵינְנוּ נִקְד וְטָלוּא בְּעֵזִים, וְחוּם בְּכֶשֶׁבִים--גָּנוּב הוּא,
אֶתִּי. לד וַיֹּאמֶר לָבָן, הֵן: לו, יְהִי כַדְבָּרְךָ. לה וַיִּסַּר בְּיוֹם הַהוּא אֶת-
הַתִּישִׁים הָעֶקְדִים וְהַטְּלָאִים, וְאֵת כָּל-הָעֵזִים הַנִּקְדוֹת וְהַטְּלָאֹת, כָּל אֲשֶׁר-

לָבוֹן בּוֹ, וְכָל-חַוִּים בְּכֶשֶׁבִים; וַיִּתֵּן, בְּיַד-בְּנָיו. לוֹ וְיִשָּׁם, דֶּרֶךְ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים,
 בֵּינוֹ, וּבֵין יַעֲקֹב; וַיַּעֲקֹב, רָעָה אֶת-צֹאן לָבוֹן--הַנוֹתֵרֶת. לֹא וַיִּקַּח-לוֹ יַעֲקֹב,
 מִקָּל לְבָנָה לַח--וְלוֹז וְעֶרְמוֹן; וַיַּפְצֵל בָּהֶן, פְּצָלוֹת לְבָנוֹת--מִחֹשֶׁף הַלָּבוֹן,
 אֲשֶׁר עַל-הַמִּקְלוֹת. לַח וַיַּצִּיג, אֶת-הַמִּקְלוֹת אֲשֶׁר פָּצַל, בְּרֹהֲטִים, בְּשִׁקְתוֹת
 הַמָּיִם--אֲשֶׁר תְּבֹאֵן הַצֹּאן לְשִׁתוֹת לְנֹכַח הַצֹּאן, וַיַּחֲמֵנָה בְּבֹאֵן לְשִׁתוֹת. לֹט
 וַיַּחֲמוּ הַצֹּאן, אֶל-הַמִּקְלוֹת; וַתִּלְדְּן הַצֹּאן, עֲקָדִים נִקְדִּים וּטְלָאִים. מ
 וְהַכְּשָׁבִים, הַפְּרִיד יַעֲקֹב, וַיִּתֵּן פְּנֵי הַצֹּאן אֶל-עֹקֵד וְכָל-חַוִּים, בְּצֹאן לָבוֹן;
 וַיִּשֶׁת-לוֹ עֲדָרִים לְבָדוֹ, וְלֹא שָׁתָם עַל-צֹאן לָבוֹן. מֵא וְהָיָה, בְּכָל-יַחַם הַצֹּאן
 הַמִּקְשָׁרוֹת, וְשָׁם יַעֲקֹב אֶת-הַמִּקְלוֹת לְעֵינֵי הַצֹּאן, בְּרֹהֲטִים--לְיַחֲמֵנָה,
 בַּמִּקְלוֹת. מֵב וּבְהֶעֱטִיף הַצֹּאן, לֹא יִשָּׂם; וְהָיָה הָעֵטָפִים לְלָבוֹן, וְהַקְּשָׁרִים
 לְיַעֲקֹב. מֵג וַיִּפְרֹץ הָאִישׁ, מְאֹד מְאֹד; וַיְהִי-לוֹ, צֹאן רַבּוֹת, וּשְׁפָחוֹת
 וְעֲבָדִים, וּגְמָלִים וְחֲמָרִים.

27 And Lavan said to him [Yaakov]: 'If now I have found favor in your eyes—I have observed the signs, and Hashem has blessed me for your sake.' **28** And he said: 'Appoint me your wages and I will give it.' **29** And he said to him: 'You know how I have served you, and how your cattle have fared with me. **30** For it was little which you had before I came, and it has increased abundantly; and Hashem has blessed your wherever I turned. And now when shall I provide for my own house also?' **31** And he said: 'What shall I give you?' And Yaakov said: 'You shall not give me anything; if you will do this thing for me, I will again feed your flock and keep it. **32** I will pass through all your flock today, removing from there every speckled and spotted one, and every dark one among the sheep, and the spotted and speckled among the goats; and of such shall be my hire. **33** So shall my righteousness witness against me hereafter, when you shall come to look over my hire that is before you: every one that is not speckled and spotted among the goats, and dark among the sheep, that if found with me shall be counted stolen.' **34** And Lavan said: 'Behold, would it might be according to your word.' **35** And he removed that day the he-goats that were streaked and spotted, and all the she-goats that were speckled and spotted, every one that had white in it, and all the dark ones among the sheep, and gave them into the hand of his sons. **36** And he set three days' journey between himself and Yaakov. And Yaakov fed the rest of Lavan's flocks. **37** And Yaakov took him rods of fresh poplar, and of the almond and of the plane-tree; and peeled white streaks in them, making the white appear which was in the rods. **38** And he set the rods which he had peeled over against the flocks in the gutters in the

watering-troughs where the flocks came to drink; and they conceived when they came to drink. **39** And the flocks conceived at the sight of the rods, and the flocks brought forth streaked, speckled, and spotted. **40** And Yaakov separated the lambs—he also set the faces of the flocks toward the streaked and all the dark in the flock of Lavan—and put his own droves apart, and did not put them into Lavan's flock. **41** And it came to pass, whenever the stronger of the flock did conceive, that Yaakov laid the rods before the eyes of the flock in the gutters, that they might conceive among the rods; **42** but when the flock were feeble, he did not put them in; so the feebler were Lavan's, and the stronger Yaakov's. **43** And the man increased exceedingly, and had large flocks, and female and male servants, and camels and donkeys.

In a sense, Yaakov was employing genetic engineering here. He was using perhaps a different methodology than we would employ in the 21st century, but manipulating genetic outcomes all the same.

The second case involves gender selection. The following *midrash* appears in the Babylonian Talmud Tractate *Berachot* 60a:

Leah passed judgment on herself. She said, 'Yaakov is destined to beget twelve tribes. I have already given birth to six sons, and the handmaids have given birth to four, making a total of ten. If the child I am carrying is a male, it would leave only one son for Rachel; consequently, my sister, Rachel, will not even be equivalent to one of the handmaids.' Thereupon the child was changed to a female [hence, the birth of Deena, the daughter of Yaakov and Leah].

Granted, Leah's methodology was through prayer and supplication, but the outcome is effective, and the Talmud lauds Leah for this selfless act.

These two stories do not necessarily give Jews free license to experiment with genetic engineering in the modern era; such monumental decisions remain up to individuals and their spiritual advisors. These stories do indicate, however, that Judaism is not philosophically averse to genetic engineering.

Shabbat Shalom.

For Discussion:

- Do you think that Yaakov creating lots of spotted and speckled animals the way he did was honest? Why or why not?
- What do you think of Leah's act of changing the baby she was carrying from male to female? Would you do such a thing for someone you loved?
- Do you think cloning is okay? Why or why not?