



THE RABBI BINYAMIN KAMENETZKY
TORAH LEGACY FOUNDATION
לזכרון של הרב בנימין קמנצקי זצ"ל

אמרי בנימן

דברי תורה, מחשבה וסיפורים מאנצרו של
הגאון רב בנימן קמנצקי זצ"ל

*A Dvar Torah from the writings of Rav Binyamin Kamenetzky zt"l,
transcribed by his grandson, Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetzky*

In memory of

Rabbi S. Jerome Wallin zt"l

who passed away this week

A man who touched so many lives as a Rabbi, a teacher, and a friend.

He taught the world the beauty of Hashem and His Torah.

May his memory be a blessing

5780 - Parshas Vayeitzei - Exile Prep

In Parshas Vayeitzei, after tricking Eisav and receiving his father Yitzchok's blessing, Yaakov flees to Charan to escape the wrath of his brother Eisav, and to seek out a wife for himself. Rashi tells us that before he actually arrived in Charan, he stopped to learn in the yeshiva of Shem for 14 years.

14 Years! Not only did he simply learn, but the entire time he was there, he did not sleep. He finally laid down to rest on Har Hamoriah, where he had his dream with the angels ascending and descending the ladder.

Why did Yaakov make a detour specifically now to learn? And why specifically in the Yeshiva of Shem and Eiver?

Even though this story does not necessarily illustrate the answer to the question, but it sheds light on the situation of the "American Exile" of the early 20th Century.

When HaRav Yaakov Kamenetzky arrived in Seattle to serve as an interim Rav in Seattle in October 1937, he found the Hebrew School with budgetary issues. One of the board members, in an effort to solve the deficit, compared the situation to bread and butter. "Bread is a necessity, and butter is a luxury. When there is money, you eat butter with your bread. But when money is tight, you skip the butter." He then suggested that the Hebrew school teach only Chumash, but not Gemara.

That Shabbos was Parshas Toldos, and Rav Yaakov used his sermon to address this comment. "When Yaakov and Eisav were young, one was not able to tell the difference between them." The young Rav began. "However, once they turned thirteen, Eisav roamed the fields, while Yaakov prepared himself to fully acquire Gemara, as the Mishna says "The age of learning gemara is fifteen" (Avos Ch. 5). At fifteen, Eisav was already entrenched in his evil ways, while Yaakov was on his path to greatness."

As he finished his words, the congregation understood his message, and raised the necessary funds for a complete Gemara curriculum.

My grandfather would often repeat the timely explanation given by his father, HaRav Yaakov Kamenetzky zt"l, the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Torah Vadaath. Yes there were many places to learn, and there was plenty of time to learn. But Yaakov was put in a unique situation at this very moment.

Until now, he lived together with his father Yitzchok. There was no foreign influence, and there was no threat to his spiritual well-being. Now, however, he was about to be thrust into a foreign land, and live together with his uncle Lavan, a notorious gangster and idol worshipper. How would he remain true to his faith, without a fear that he may not remain the tzaddik that he is?

He knew that the answer can be found in the yeshiva of Shem. Shem lived in the generation of the flood, and Eiver grew up amongst those who built the Tower of Bavel after the Flood. They both remained steadfast in their service of Hashem. The yeshiva of Shem held the secret of remaining a true tzaddik even in a galus, and they would be the Rabbeim of Yaakov to teach him how to survive.

Yaakov he stopped off specifically in that yeshiva, and learned for 14 years, to prepare himself for the long road of exile ahead.

Good Shabbos!

Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetzky is the Director of Advancement at Yeshiva of South Shore - ישיבה תורת חיים - בית בנימן. He is currently compiling the vast storehouse of all the Torah thoughts from his grandfather. If you have any stories to share from his grandfather, you can email him at skamenetzky@yoss.org.