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Parshat Vayishlach

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COLD WEATHER AND SHABBAT: A PRACTICAL HALACHIC GUIDE TO HOME HEATING

WRITTEN BY RABBI SHAY TAHAN

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During the cold winter days, one must ensure before Shabbat that the heating is set to the proper temperature. If he forgot to set it or there is another reason the house feels cold, he may **not** turn on the heat on Shabbat.

However, if the temperature reaches the **freezing point**, it is permitted to ask a non-Jew to turn on the heat due to the concern for danger. Even when it is not that cold, it is still permitted to ask a non-Jew to turn on the heat if there are **small children, elderly individuals, or someone who is ill** in the house (S.A siman 176, 5). If a non-Jew turned on the heat when it wasn't very cold, there is a distinction between two cases:

1. The heating system was already on, and the non-Jew merely raised the temperature.

In this case, one **may benefit** from the additional heat, since the system was already operating (M.B. 34).

2. The heating system was completely off, and the non-Jew turned it on.

In this situation, one **may not benefit** from the heat, since the melachah was done entirely for the Jew (Igrot Moshe Y.D. 3, 47).

Radiator Valve:

A hot-water (hydronic) heating system works by heating water in a boiler and circulating it through pipes to radiators or baseboard units throughout the home, where the heated water warms the metal and gently radiates heat into the rooms.

If the house feels cold, one should not open the radiator valve on Shabbat, since doing so allows cold water to enter the system and heat up. Allowing cold water to flow in and be boiled constitutes the prohibition of cooking. This prohibition applies only on Shabbat; on Yom Tov it is permitted, since cooking is allowed on Yom Tov.

If the room is cold and there is a need to heat the house, it is permitted to ask a non-Jew to open the valves. In this case, the water entering the system was previously heated and later cooled down. Whether reheating such water is prohibited is a dispute among the Rishonim. Although the Shulchan Aruch rules stringently that reheating it is not permitted, since it remains a matter of halachic debate, one may rely on the lenient view when the action is performed by a non-Jew.



If the room becomes too hot and one wishes to close the valve, the halacha depends on the temperature of the water already circulating in the system: If the water has already reached the temperature of **yad soledet bo**, closing the valve is permitted. At that point no further Shabbat prohibition occurs, since the water is already considered fully cooked.

However, if the water **has not yet** reached the level of **yad soledet bo**, closing the valve would cause the water to heat faster, since the circulation path becomes shorter and the water travels less. This accelerates the cooking process and is therefore a violation of the prohibition of cooking on Shabbat.

Forced-air systems pose no halachic concern when merely opening or closing the air vents, since we do not consider these actions significant enough to make the system work harder, turn on sooner, or shut off earlier, and the primary prohibition remains only on adjusting the thermostat itself, which directly controls the electric activation of the furnace.

Thermostats:

If the heating system operates with an **electric thermostat**, one may not adjust it on Shabbat at all, since any change involves the use of electricity.

If it is a **mechanical thermostat**, some authorities permit lowering the temperature **only while the**

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system is off, before the thermostat triggers the heating cycle. Lowering it merely delays the next heating cycle and does not cause the system to turn on. However, one may not raise the temperature, since doing so may cause the system to activate sooner, which would be considered causing it to turn on.

Oil-filled and electric radiators:

Fully enclosed, thermostat-free oil-filled radiators raise no unique halachic issues beyond the basic prohibition on using electricity: they may not be turned on or off or adjusted on Shabbat, but if activated before Shabbat one may fully benefit from them, and

their internal heating and circulation pose no concern. The same applies to simple electric portable heaters that lack thermostats or adjustable settings—once they are turned on before Shabbat, one may enjoy their heat throughout Shabbat, though turning them on or off or modifying any control remains prohibited.

These heaters are muktze on Shabbat and may not be moved for any reason, unless there is a danger of fire or another safety issue. The reason they are muktze is that the heating elements inside the radiator become red hot and are considered fire, while the radiator itself serves as the base (בביס) for that fire.

COURAGE AND CALCULATION: YAAKOV AVINU'S MASTERY OVER FEAR

When the messengers told Yaakov that Esav was approaching with four hundred men to attack him, Yaakov's reaction was intense fear: "Yaakov became very frightened, and it distressed him." The Ralbag explains that the word "-וַיִּצְרַעַת" expresses a feeling even stronger than fear.

At the moment a person feels afraid, the body reacts almost instantly. The brain sounds an alarm, sending out hormones like adrenaline that make the heart race and the breathing speed up. Muscles tighten, vision sharpens, and a person may feel their stomach drop or their hands tremble. The skin can grow cold as the body shifts its energy to survival. Emotionally, fear brings a sense of danger and a strong urge to run away, freeze, or respond without thinking. These reactions are built into human nature.

Accordingly, we would expect Yaakov to respond the same way—to panic, flee, or plead for mercy. Yet the Torah shows us something very different. Instead of being overwhelmed by fear, Yaakov calmly plans his next steps. He divides his people into two camps to increase their chances of survival. He prepares generous gifts to send to Esav. And then, instead of running away, he walks toward the meeting he has been dreading.

Human nature would suggest that Yaakov should avoid the confrontation entirely or send Esav a letter begging for forgiveness—apologizing for taking the blessings, explaining his shortcomings, insisting that it all happened long ago and that he has changed. But Yaakov chooses a different path: one of strength, strategy, and responsibility.

When the moment finally comes to face Esav, he does not hide behind servants or family. He places everyone behind him and goes forward himself. Our goal is to explore why Yaakov reacts in a way so different from normal human behavior—and what powerful lesson this teaches us.

Another important fact about fear should be noted: fear can actually attract a perpetrator because it signals vulnerability and hesitation. When someone shows obvious fear—trembling, avoid-

ance, stammering, or appearing unsure—the aggressor's brain interprets these signals as a lack of resistance or confidence. This can trigger a predator's instinct to assert dominance, take advantage, or attack, since most threats are assessed based on perceived strength or weakness. In other words, fear communicates that the person is less likely to fight back, making them a more appealing target.

At the same time, fear can cloud judgment and slow decisive action, further reinforcing the impression of weakness and making it easier for the perpetrator to control the situation. This is why courage—or at least the appearance of calmness and control—can often deter an aggressor far more effectively than submission or panic.

This appears to have been Yaakov Avinu's deliberate technique. As soon as he

recognized his fear, he took control of it and carefully planned each step to achieve the best possible outcome. He positioned himself directly before Esav to project confidence and strength, understanding that showing fear could make him appear vulnerable and invite harm—something he worked hard to avoid. At the same time, he bowed respectfully, signaling honor and deference. This balanced approach was intended to prevent Esav from reacting out of anger or a feeling of being slighted.

This reaction of Yaakov is repeated consistently throughout his life. For example, after Dina was violated, his immediate response was silence: "Yaakov kept silent until his children arrived." Later, when his children took revenge with the massacre of the people of Shechem, he rebuked them, saying, "You have discomposed me, making me odious among the people of the land." When Reuven moved his mother's beds, the Torah simply states, "And Yaakov heard"—with no visible reaction. Why does he not react immediately? Does this mean he is emotionless? Of course not; we see clearly that he experienced great fear from Esav. Rather, Yaakov trained himself to control his emotions and not act without carefully calculating the best course of action.

The lesson is that we, too, should avoid reacting impulsively when confronted with danger. When passing someone who appears



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threatening, we should not show fear, as that can draw unwanted attention and signal vulnerability. Instead, one should appear calm, confident, and focused on one's own path. If the person makes a comment, there is no need to respond; rather, it is best

ONE MUST EXERCISE CAUTION WHEN PREPAYING FOR SHABBATON RESERVATIONS

One must exercise caution when prepaying for Shabbaton reservations, hotel rooms, car rentals for vacation, and similar services, due to the concern of ribbit.

As Chanukah approaches, advertisements for trips, Shabbatonim, and various vacations increase. It should be noted that a potential issue of **ribbit** may arise when someone pays for such a vacation in advance.

The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Yoreh De'ah* 173:7) rules that it is forbidden to pay money in advance for goods at a discounted price when the goods will only be received later. When payment is made upfront, the money is considered a **loan**, and the **discount received due to early payment** is considered *rabbinic ribbit*.

Although there are situations in which advance payment is permitted—such as when the seller already has the product in his possession at the time of payment, or when the item has no fixed



price—in our case the price is set in advance, and the “product” is not considered to be in the seller’s possession. R’ Akiva Eiger (*Bava Metzia* 72b) writes regarding a rented house that the landlord may

not lease it to another person at a reduced rate for a later period, since the house is currently rented and not in his possession to offer at a discount.

Similarly, *Sefer Toras HaRibbis* (ch. 14, n. 11) notes that there is a concern of ribbit with hotels that advertise that customers who book and pay in advance receive a discount. At times, only a small deposit is requested in order to finalize the deal; some authorities permit this only if the deposit is around 5% and no more.

Therefore, before advertising such payment arrangements—or before actually making such advance payments—one should consult a Rav knowledgeable in the laws of ribbit to determine whether any leniency or heter applies in the specific case.

FROM FLAX TO SPARK: HOW ISRAEL'S STRENGTH BURNS BRIGHT

In the end of the parasha, the Torah lists the descendants of Esav, with the list continuing extensively. One who reads it is left wondering how Am Yisrael could ever manage if all these masses were to turn against them, as they have done repeatedly throughout history. Similarly, Hashem tells Avraham Avinu that Yishmael’s descendants will multiply and fill the entire world, a prospect that also seems daunting.

Rashi (32:8) explains that this was precisely how Yaakov Avinu felt when he learned of Esav’s vast population. However, Hashem reassured him, saying that Yosef, Yaakov’s son, would overcome them.

Rashi brings a parable to explain Hashem’s reassurance to Yaakov Avinu. He describes a man carrying large loads of flax to a blacksmith’s store. Seeing the sheer volume, the blacksmith wondered, “Where will all this flax fit?” A wise man responded, “One spark from your furnace can burn it all.”

The parable illustrates that while Esav’s descendants seemed numerous and intimidating, Yosef, symbolized by the spark, had the power to overcome and nullify their strength. For generations, Jews read these comforting words and believed in them wholeheartedly, even when they seemed out of touch with the harsh realities of relentless persecution and suffering, often without a glimpse of light.

In recent years, this message feels even more alarming, as the enemies of Israel amass enormous arsenals of deadly rockets and dig extensive tunnel networks, encircling the small country from all sides. The situation appears almost impossible to defend, leaving many wondering how the Jewish people can endure and protect themselves in the face of such overwhelming threats. Yet, the parable continues to remind us of Hashem’s promise and the hidden strength embedded within.

No one imagined that within a few short weeks, the entire chokehold on the small country would collapse. It all began with a spark from the blacksmith’s workshop—behind the computer—where the press of a button ignited thousands of beepers in Lebanon, leading to the collapse of Hezbollah’s mighty army. This was followed by a domino effect: Syria was significantly diminished, and Iran’s influence weakened, leaving the entire world in shock at how swiftly the tide had turned.

The tunnel infrastructure in Gaza and Lebanon was dismantled, leaving them exposed to devastation.

This is a true unfolding of the prophecy in Rashi, something no one could have predicted. However, it requires a closer look and deeper understanding, as Chazal’s parables are profound and carry inner meanings.

First, let’s analyze the man carrying the flax who enters the

FROM FLAX TO SPARK: HOW ISRAEL'S STRENGTH BURNS BRIGHT

blacksmith's shop in an intrusive manner, bringing his heavy load without the blacksmith's consent. Since the man with the flax represents the hostile nations and the blacksmith symbolizes Israel, this clearly conveys that the nations will attempt to conquer the Jewish nation by overwhelming it with vast armies and weapons, despite the Jewish nation posing no threat to them.

We also need to understand why Chazal chose the example of the flax versus the blacksmith and the spark for their parable? The answer lies in the symbolism: the flax represents earthly, material

possessions, while the spark is spiritual—it is not made of anything tangible. This teaches us that Israel's power to defeat its enemies lies in Torah learning and spirituality, not in building a strong army or amassing weapons.

This message especially resonates this month, the month we celebrate the victory of Chanukah, where the few and weak triumphed over the many and strong. This is the Jewish legacy—the legacy of spirituality and purity prevailing against evil and overwhelming odds.

From the upcoming sefer: Shaf Vayativ – Traveler's Guide

זמן התפילה בטישה נקבעים על פי המקום שבו הוא נמצא בו באותה העת. אין לך מכך במקומות אם הדבר מפיע לנוסעים, וכן לא יתפלל ואם אין ידוע היכן נמצא, יקבע לפי זרחת ושיקעת השמש הנראית מעבר היחיד במעבר. לחולן. ולכתחילה ישאה עד שיאיר הים גם על הארץ.

הගרי"ש אלישיב (הובא בספר ישמעו משה עמוד לא) נשאל על אנשים שעושים מכך במעבר המטוס, באשר יש נסעים המתלוננים שהדבר מפיע להם לעבור, בגין שהיו צריכים לצאת לשירותים וכדו'. והשיב שכון שלכל הנסעים שיר' זכות במקומות, אין לך מכך שם מבנים, ואפילו אם יש רק נסע אחד שምפיע לו ומתנגד לזה. וכן כתוב הגור"ש וזנור (שו"ת שבת הלוי ח' י"א סימן בה), וביאר שיש להשתדל להתפלל את אשר התפילה בישיבה במקומו, ורק את תפילת השמונה עשרה יתפלל סמוך למקום באופן שאינו מפיע להולכים ושבים. ואם אין אפשרות להתפלל במקומו, מוטב לשבת בשעת התפילה, ויש בכך תועלת גם לבונת התפילה וגם לצניעות. גם הגרא"ז אוורבעך (הילכות שלמה פ"ח ה"ב) כתוב שהמתפלל בטישה, יתפלל שמונה עשרה בישיבה במקומו ולא במקומות כי הדבר מפיע לעוברים ושבים, וכן התייר הרב משה פינשטיין (אגרא"מ או"ח ח"ד סימן כ') להתפלל בישיבה אם קשה לעמוד או אם יהיה טרוד בעמידה.

ובספר בלבתך בדרך (עמוד לד) כתוב שרבה של חברות אל על, הרב יוחנן חייט, שאל את הגרא"ש וזנור לגבי אדם שביקש לתרום לנוסעים ספר תורה קטן וארון דלענן השקיעה אם הוא טס ורואה את השימוש למעלה, אין יכול לנחות אליו להתפלל במנין או לעזרך מנים בטישה.

ובספר יליקוט יוסף (תפילה סימן צ"ט הערא לה) הביא בזה מעשה רב, עדות מאביו הגרא"ע יוסף שסירב להצטרכם למן שארגנו במטוס.

בר כתוב הרב משה פינשטיין (שו"ת אגרות משה או"ח ח"ג ס"י צ): "ולענין תפילה בנסע ממקום למקום תיפכ' בשיתחיל להoir אף שעבר רק זמן מועט הוא יום עצמו, ואם יתאחר מלהoir לא יוחל היום עצמו אלא בשיאו ואז תפיל ו אין בזה שום נידון. וחשבון הג' שעתו למן קראת שמע ול' שעתות למן תפילה לא שיר' עצמו כי נידון לעלה קוצר, אך יתפלל תיפכ' בשתען החמה". וכן סבר גם למטה, שמשתנה זה בזמן קצר, אך יתפלל תיפכ' בשתען החמה". והגרא"ש אלישיב (הובא בספר שבות יצחק פורים עמוד יב), שהנמצא במקומות מתח"יב באנשי המקומ שתחתיו בכל המצוות התלוויות בזמן, כגון קראת שמע, מלבד בקריאת המגילה בלבד אין עמהם.

והנה הרב משה שטרנברג (שו"ת תשבות והנוגות ח"ד סימן בה) הסתפק אם הימים מתחילה במקומו בזמן שההරקיע מאיר או על פי הזמן שהאור מאיר בארץ: "מסופוקני בשאנני נסע באירון שראית השמש שם היא בשעה קודם שנראית מלמטה מחמת הגובה העצום. אם הנץ תליה באותו מקום למטה ומאחר הזמן או דתלי במקומו, ואם באירון מקרים לאות יש לו להקדים הזמן. וכן יש להסתפק לענין השקיעה אי מאחר מפני גובה המקום או מקרים והדבר נוגע למעשה לאלפי בני אדם הטעים מדי יום ביום. ונראה לענ"ד דלענן השקיעה אם הוא טס ורואה את השימוש למעלה, אין יכול לנחות אליו השקעה המשמש מחתמת שלמטה כבר לא חאים את השימוש".

ושוב כתוב כן (שו"ת תשבות והנוגות ח"ה סימן לה): "ומייהו באירון יש להסתפק האם כל זמן שראה את השימוש דינו ביום, אבל נראה דכון שהזה באקראי לא נקבע בן, וקובעים יום ולילה מפני מקום הטבעי למטה, ואז שנראה לו השימוש מצד גבבו הוא לילה, ותליי כפי הזמן למטה, וכן כתוב הגרא"ז מלצר צ"ל שבדבר העשיי ידי אדם כגון מגדל או בשואה באירון ודאי דיש לנכות הגובה וגם הגרא"ט הסכים לו בזה".

Shaare Ezra is a one of a kind, multi-faceted organization that's there for the community. Under the leadership of HaRav Shay Tahan. Shaare Ezra feels that proper Halachic guidance should be accessible to everyone, therefore we offer the community the opportunity to call, text, WhatsApp, or e-mail any halachic questions they may have, through the Bet Horaah, where qualified, trained and ordained Rabbis are available to answer your questions in English, Hebrew and Russian. Shaare Ezra is from the community—for the community.

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