

# Vayishlach

## Your Money is Your Life

*Yaakov was left alone, and an Ish fought with him until daybreak.*

Bereishis 32:25

“Yaakov risked his life, remaining to retrieve some small jugs. From this story, we see that a righteous person’s money is even more beloved to him than his body. Why is this so? Because he does not engage in theft.”<sup>1</sup>

Some see wealth as a god. Others see it as the devil. Either it’s a lifelong consumption with amassing money, or a monkish denial of materialism. As with everything, the truth is found somewhere between extremes. Wealth is tricky – it is all subjective. The poorest American today has it better in many ways than the wealthiest person from a few hundred years ago. Even today, a wealthy person in one place may be poor elsewhere. Thus, the Mishnah<sup>2</sup> says, “Who is wealthy? He who is happy with what he has.” In order to define wealth in absolute terms, we must understand that wealth is really about how little we miss, rather than how much we have. So what is “having a lot of stuff” called? And how does Torah relate to those objects?

One of the greatest things that a person can do for the society around him is to be successful. In fact, we are told that Yaakov established a system of currency for the residents of Shechem, and opened a marketplace for them.<sup>3</sup> Business is a kindness to others. There is certainly self-interest involved, but if that self-interest is indulged in with the simultaneous intent to help others, it becomes a noble thing.<sup>4</sup> A person can own a supermarket. Should he give the food away for free, or even at cost, he’d have to close down. By charging his customers, and keeping himself in business, we all have a place to do our grocery shopping. In the Soviet Union, there were times when there were fields full of produce, but there was no motivation at all to harvest them and nourish the masses of fellow countrymen suffering from starvation.

Money, however, can be twisted into a goal, rather than a means. “He who loves money will never have enough money.”<sup>5</sup> He who has one hundred soon wants two hundred. And it becomes a vicious cycle – the constant pursuit of more and more. There is some truth in the dissatisfaction that Marx and Trotsky had with money and capitalism. It can truly fuel some of the most pointless of human behavior. But there is much depth to a person’s property.

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1 Chullin 91a

2 Pirkei Avos 4:1

3 Shabbos 33b

4 See Pesachim 6b: “One can look for a lost object with his candle while at the same time searching for chametz,” as explained in *Michtav MeEliyahu*, vol. 4.

5 Koheles 5:9

The Torah uses the word *baal* (owner) for both “baal hashor” the owner of the ox, and “baal haIsha” The husband of the wife. Superficially, this sounds a bit misogynistic; is a wife “owned” by her spouse!? Rav Yitzchok Hutner<sup>6</sup> explains that, in fact, it is the opposite. The word “husband” is being borrowed and used for material possessions. You see, “Righteous people possess certain sparks that are related to the root of their soul. Even his servants, animals and vessels contain these holy sparks, which they must perfect and elevate to their spiritual source.”<sup>7</sup> To put it into less mystical and more rational terms, each person has reasons for his life, and everything that God sends his way is a tool for that fellow to use, and accomplish something by using it. Thus the word “baal” – owner – comes from the word “baal” – husband. Each person has a relationship, almost a marriage, to each and everything that he owns! The word for money in Hebrew, *damim*, is the very word for blood! Both relate to man’s essence.<sup>8</sup> Thus the Gemara<sup>9</sup> says, “When a person steals from his fellow man, it is as though he has snatched his friend’s very soul.” “A righteous person’s money is more beloved to him than his body...”<sup>10</sup> for it is part of his soul!

For this reason, righteous people have a special relationship with their property. We find Yaakov risking his life in order to retrieve some small jugs that he had forgotten. The righteous person realizes that each and every piece of property that Hashem has given him is to be used for Hashem’s purposes, and was given to him as a gift. “Because they don’t steal” and their money is coming directly from God, they value it as relating to their immediate growth.<sup>11</sup>

We have much to accomplish in our lives. Everything that we own, our houses, cars and goldfish are related to our souls. “Forty days before the formation of a fetus,<sup>12</sup> a voice emanates from Heaven and declares, “This girl will marry this boy, this field will go to this boy.” The girl that this man will marry is announced together with his future address. Can there be any two more distant things? One’s wife is possibly the most important thing in his life. It will define his family, his happiness, and his spiritual life to a large degree! One’s house does not seem to come close. It is almost as if we are discovering that the announcement as to who Heaven has decreed that one will marry is made simultaneously with the announcement of when this fellow will have his garbage picked up by the city. Who really cares what house he lives in?

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6 *Sefer Hazikaron LiMaran Baal Pachad Yitzchak*, p. 118 note 192; the same is found in the earlier *Divrei Sofrim* 3 (R. Tzadok of Lublin)

7 *Degel Machane Ephraim*, Lech Lecha, and R. Tzadok Hakohen of Lublin in *Tzidkas Hatzaddik* 86, 91, and *Divrei Sofrim* 3. See *The Vision of Eden* of R. Dovid Sears, p. 114.

8 Reb Mendel and His Wisdom (Greenwald, Artscroll) p. 136, n. 1

9 Bava Kamma 119a

10 Chullin 91a; Sotah 12a

11 R. Tzadok Hakohen of Lublin in *Pri Tzaddik*, Vayishlach; Likkutei Torah (R. Chaim Vital quoting Arizal). See as well *Matnas Chaim* (R. Matisyahu Salomon): Moadim, p 30.

12 This is a reference to the moment of conception. The formation of a fetus takes forty days from conception. Thus, this announcement is made at conception.

But the answer is simple, says Rav Tzadok of Lublin.<sup>13</sup> One's house is also something that he must have a relationship with. He must recognize that his relationship with his possessions is no less an obligation than his relationship with his spouse. The righteous man knows that even the smallest of jugs, when used properly, can be incredibly valuable.

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13 *Divrei Sofrim*, ibid. See also *Orot Eilim* of R. Eliezer Papo to Sotah 2b, where he explains that, in fact, that voice also announces every single thing that the person will ever own in the course of their lifetime – not just one's spouse, home, or field!