

## **Golus Jews**

*By Rabbi Pinchos Lipschutz*

Yaakov Avinu is referred to as "The Av of *Golus*." Though he wasn't the first of the *avos* to be exiled, he spent much of his life in exile and handed down lessons for us to survive and succeed in exile.

The Torah states that when Moshe Rabbeinu, who had grown up in the palace of Paroh, left and saw the suffering of his brothers in Mitzrayim, "*Vayar besivlosam – And he saw their pain.*" The *Chiddushei Horim* adds a component to what Moshe saw. He writes that "*sivlosam*" hints to the idea that his brethren had begun to be "*soveil*" what was transpiring. They were tolerant of the sad reality and accepted it as a fact of life.

When Moshe saw that, he perceived that they were in deep trouble and that it was time to begin agitating for their release. They had begun to accept the Mitzri culture, its depravity no longer abhorring them. They had become accustomed to being slaves and accepted it.

As *beni* Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov, it needs to bother us that it is becoming acceptable to hate Jews. Rising numbers of people tell pollsters that they don't hire Jews. Professional athletes and cultural trendsetters are becoming more vocal in their hatred for Jews and are repeating old, worn tropes about us. Democrat politicians are increasingly brazen about their anti-Israel policies, and we know that couching their hatred this way is essentially just a more diplomatic way to say that they can't stand Jews.

For others, Palestinians as a prominent example, hatred is not enough. They aim to kill and destroy anything Jewish.

What are we to do about it?

*Parshas Vayishlach* is a guide for relations with the world. *Chazal* state that *chachomim* who traveled to Rome would carefully study this week's *parsha* before setting out on their missions. As our *chachomim* throughout the ages studied this *parsha* and Yaakov's behavior before confronting the exile, we must do the same.

The *Ramban* writes that the *parsha* "contains a hint for future generations, for all that transpired between our forefather Yaakov and Eisov will happen to us with Eisov's children, and it is fitting for us to follow the path of the *tzaddik* (Yaakov)."

Throughout the generations, the children of Eisov sometimes present themselves as brothers concerned with our welfare, while other times their evil intentions are more apparent.

No matter how they present themselves, our response to Eisov remains the same. We deal with Eisov the same way our forefather Yaakov did.

The *posuk* says, "*Vayishlach Yaakov malochim lefonov el Eisov ochiv*" (*Bereishis* 31:4). Yaakov sent *malochim* to his brother, Eisov, to let him know that he was returning to the Land of Israel, seeking a peaceful brotherly reunion.

What was the message Yaakov sent to convince his wicked brother to retreat from his threats to inflict bodily harm on Yaakov? He told the *malochim* to tell Eisov, "*Im Lovon garti*, although I lived many years with our wicked uncle Lovon, *taryag mitzvos shomarti*, I observed the 613 *mitzvos*."

The *parsha* and the dealings between the brothers have historical significance. They are written in the Torah for us to learn from as we navigate our *golus* experience. There are several issues that bear explanation to understand the message Yaakov sent Eisov. Yaakov chose to send *malochim*, actual angels, rather than human messengers (*Rashi* 32:4). Why? And since when does man have the ability to send angels on missions with messages? Furthermore, why would Eisov even care that Yaakov was able to maintain his lofty levels while living by Lovon? Of what interest was it to him that Yaakov had observed the 613 commandments?

*Chazal* teach that the performance of *mitzvos* creates *malochim*. Every time we do a *mitzvah*, a *malach* is created. The Vilna Gaon taught that since every word of Torah studied fulfills a *mitzvah*, it follows that every word of Torah we study creates a *malach*. The *malochim* created surround us and protect us from harm.

In his message, Yaakov was telling Eisov, "You won't just be fighting me and my family. If you go to battle against us, you will be fighting the *malochim* created by the 613 *mitzvos* I fulfilled in the house of Lovon. Lest you think that I fell under his influence, be forewarned that I am the same Yaakov *ish tom* you knew back home. *Im Lovon garti, vetaryag mitzvos shomarti*. There will be thousands of *malochim* defending me as I enter your turf. Beware."

There is no protection stronger than the Torah. The *Gemara* (*Sotah* 21a) teaches that Torah and *mitzvos* are *magna umatzla*; Torah and *mitzvos* protect a person. Torah study and *mitzvah* observance create a fortress, a protective wall.

At the *yeshiva* of Sheim V'Eiver, Yaakov merited learning Torah, and in the house of Lovon he learned Torah through suffering and challenge. He rose above the distractions and oppression, creating *malochim* the entire time. Try as he may,

Eisov would not be able to escape that fact and knew that he would not be able to defeat Yaakov.

The *Chofetz Chaim* participated in the construction of a hospital in Radin. At a meeting of sponsors, wealthy philanthropists each announced how many beds he would sponsor. They turned to the *Chofetz Chaim* and asked how many beds he would sponsor.

"Fifty," he said.

"Oh, wow," the board members said, impressed.

The *Chofetz Chaim* explained that the Torah studied by the *bochurim* in his *yeshiva* protects the town and prevents illness and suffering. In their *zechus*, the town would require fifty fewer hospital beds.

Torah saves lives. *Malochim* created by observance of *mitzvos* and *limud haTorah* stave off punishment, creating a security fence that saves lives and prevents pain and suffering.

To help our situation in the world, the first thing we can do is create *malochim*. Every time we learn, every time we do a *mitzvah*, every time we *daven*, we must do so with an awareness that we have the ability to impact the balance of power in this world. Every time we make a *brocha* and every time we answer *amein* to a *brocha*, we create an angel of protection.

The *Gemara* in *Maseches Brachos* teaches that the *tefillah* of *Arvis/Maariv* was instituted by Yaakov.

Yaakov was the first *av* to go into extended *golus*. Yaakov also had the most difficult life of the three *avos*. From the womb until his passing, he was beset by trouble.

The *tefillah* he instituted is recited in the dark and signifies that even in times of darkness, a Jew never gives up. He maintains his faith and can exude and bring holiness into the darkness of exile.

Every time Yaakov was beset by a problem, he grew from it. His parents sent him into exile to escape from Eisov and to find a wife. He took advantage of the opportunity and studied in the *yeshiva* of Sheim V'Eiver for fourteen years before going to Lovon. He encountered the angel of Eisov, and rather than surrender to defeat at the hands of the higher power, he battled him to a stalemate and extracted a *brocha* for himself and his future generations.

Lovon cheated him out of his wages, so Yaakov made a deal to obtain his money in payments of spotted sheep and then designed a way to cause sheep to give birth to animals bearing the uncommon markings.

The *Maharal (Derech Chaim 5)* teaches that the experiences of each of the three *avos* parallel different periods in Jewish history. Yaakov corresponds to our final *golus* under Edom, in which we find ourselves today. Just as Yaakov Avinu traveled a difficult, dark path until he tasted peace, so will his descendants travel a lengthy *golus* before the eventual redemption.

As we learn the account of Yaakov Avinu's struggle with the *malach*, the *sar* of Eisov, in this week's *parsha*, we can sense that in these *pesukim* lies the secret to a destiny that would prove to be an enduring battle between the forces of *kedusha* and *tumah*, good and evil. It's the battle that defines our mission, both as individuals and as a nation, always forced to fight for what's right and holy.

Often, we are confronted by obstacles and hindrances. We are ready to give up and allow the forces of evil that torment us to win. Sometimes, people think that they are doomed, with no way out. Survival becomes a daily battle. However, if we summon our inner strengths, we will find within us resources of energy and resilience to keep on going, just as Yaakov did.

The *parsha* recounts (35:21) that following the passing of Rochel Imeinu, Yaakov and his sons traveled on, setting up camp near Migdal Eider, where they enjoyed a rare moment of tranquility and relative quiet. *Targum Yonasan Ben Uziel* writes that this place, “*meihol’oh leMigdal Eider*,” is the location from where “*Moshiach* will reveal himself.”

The aspect of *maaseh avos siman labonim* carries through here as well. Yaakov’s rest symbolizes our respite from the bitterness and pain of *golus*. After the battles, after the wars, after enduring the chicanery of Lovon and the depravity of Eisov, Yaakov merits some tranquility. And so shall we.

The Jewish road is strewn with obstacles, and that is the biggest testimony that ours is the path to victory. We keep marching on, secure that there’s a plan.

Instead of becoming bitter and asking, “Why me?” Yaakov looked at each new day as a fresh opportunity to learn more Torah, establish a holy family, and toil in the vineyard of Hashem following his father and grandfather. Thus, he was successful in what he did, fulfilling his mission as he prospered and prevailed.

Some people have problems and grow despondent. Yaakov saw them as opportunities. He was never let down, never got down, and was never put down or defeated. His example guides us in our *golus*. Often, things don’t go the way we planned. We are upset by people we counted on. We lose friends or *chavrusos*. We

didn't get the job we wanted. We were turned down for a *shidduch*. We couldn't come up with the money we needed to get into a deal. Our child didn't get accepted into the *yeshiva*, seminary, school, or playgroup we wanted.

We have to take each disappointment as an opportunity to go after something better and more appropriate. Instead of becoming angry and resentful, we should objectively examine what happened and analyze what we can do better the next time. We don't become negative and pessimistic. Rather, we remain optimistic and remember that everything that happens in this world to us personally, to other people and to the community occurs because Hashem willed it so. And we remind ourselves that Hashem cares about us and wants the best for us. Therefore, we can learn from whatever it is that transpired, and become improved and better people for it. We can turn around what happened and continue on, looking forward to the day when we will perceive what happened as a beneficial bump along the way, propelling us on to something better.

When I was in Eretz Yisroel recently, I had the good pleasure of meeting Rav Shimon Biton, who works for Lev L'Achim, establishing and monitoring *shiurim* and learning groups in the Be'er Sheva area. I asked him to tell me about himself. The people in the group prodded him to tell me "The *Asher Yotzar* Story."

This is his story, which tells us so much about him, the type of person he is and the type of people the *tzaddikim* of Lev L'Achim are, and it bears a lesson for all of us.

A few days before this past *Pesach*, Rabbi Biton began suffering from terrible stomach pains. One evening, the pain was unbearable, so he headed to the Siroka Hospital emergency room. An MRI test was conducted, and it was determined that he was suffering from an abdominal blockage, which the doctors said required

immediate surgery. They said that they would operate first thing the next morning and he would be hospitalized for some days following the surgery.

He called his wife to tell her the diagnosis and that he would have surgery the next morning, explaining that he would have to be in the hospital at least until *Erev Pesach* and maybe longer. She began to cry bitterly, "I can't manage without you. All the children will be home from school. Everything will be flying. How will I be able to prepare and cook for *Yom Tov*?"

She knew it wasn't his fault, but she was inconsolable. He knew he had to do something. He went outside, away from everyone, and lifted his hands, eyes and heart heavenward. He began to speak and cry out to Hashem.

"Hashem, you afflicted me with this pain. If Rav Chaim Kanievsky were still alive, I would have someone drive me to him. He would tell me what to learn as a *segulah*, give me a *brocha* for a *refuah sheleimah*, and I would be all better. But Rav Chaim is no longer with us. That is not my fault. My wife is home crying and I must do something.

"I know that You are merciful. I know that you are causing me this pain for a reason, for me to better myself. I promise that from now on, every time I say *Asher Yotzar*, I will do so with much *kavanah*. Please have mercy on me and accept this improvement and heal me."

With that, he went back inside, got into his hospital bed, and went to sleep. He awoke early and *davened*. Shortly after he finished, the orderlies came to take him down to the surgery room. They gave him a few consent papers to sign. He asked to have the MRI done again before the surgery. They called down to the surgeon

and he refused, saying that the insurance wouldn't cover it and that it would cause his surgery schedule to be off kilter.

But Shimon Biton insisted and said that he wouldn't sign the forms without another test. The doctor checked and the machine was available, so he relented and the test was administered.

The doctor read the results and was astounded. "*Mah asita!* I can't believe this! The blockage is gone. There is no more blockage. Everything is clear. I've never seen anything like this. No surgery for you. You can go home! *Chag sameiach!*"

Like a quintessential *golus* Jew, when Rabbi Biton had a problem, he didn't become broken. With *emunah sheleimah*, he used it as an opportunity. He reached out to Hashem, *davened*, and engaged in self-improvement. And he was rewarded.

May Hashem have mercy on all of us, hear our *tefillos*, and reward our *limud haTorah*, *bitachon* and *shemiras hamitzvos* with the *geulah sheleimah bekarov*.