

פ' וישלח תשפ"ג

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LEARNING FROM OUR ENEMIES

"I have sojourned" (32:5) Rashi: "I lived with the wicked Lovon, but still kept the 613 commandments and did not learn from his wicked deeds"

Why did Yaakov find it necessary to tell Eisov this piece of information, and what did it have to do with his fight against Eisov?

The Chofetz Chaim explains that Yaakov spoke by way of humility. He was saying that after having spent so much time in the company of the wicked Lovon he should have learned from him, as it says "Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies" (*Tehilim* 119:98). Yaakov was complaining that he had not put as much efforts into his good deeds as Lovon had into his evil deeds.

Similarly, the Chofetz Chaim would comment that the wicked work on falsehood with truth (verily, with determination and effort) whereas we work on the truth with falsehood (without enough effort).

In our times too we see how the wicked stubbornly stick to their guns, whereas we do not display as much self-sacrifice. Our job is to learn from our enemies and be as stubborn in our struggle to preserve sanctity in *Eretz Yisroel*.

There can be no doubt that were we to fight the enemies of religion with all our might, and use as least as much energy as they do against us, then we would manage to break their strength with Divine assistance. Even though we are a minority, Hashem is on our side, and we should not be impressed by their imaginary strength. As the Chofetz Chaim said to the Ponovizher Rov, "When a person enters a war he looks for the biggest hero to join forces with, and the real hero is Hashem. Therefore, when fighting the battle for sanctity, we should not worry about being a minority, since Hashem is with us, and therefore we will certainly succeed".

PIKUACH NEFESH

"And he said, "If Eisov comes to one camp and strikes it down, the remaining camp will escape."" (32:9)

Why did Yaakov invest so much effort into saving himself instead of putting all his trust in Hashem?

Saving a Jewish life is a mitzvah, and when it comes to *mitzvos* we are expected to employ every human effort possible in order to fulfil them. The *mitzvah* of saving a Jewish life applies no less to oneself than to anyone else, and Yaakov therefore wanted to do whatever he could to try to save himself and his family, also by using natural means.

When the Mirer Yeshiva fled to Japan during the Second World War some *talmidei chochomim* argued that that was too much *hishtadlus*, but Rav Leib Mallin ruled that since this was a matter of saving lives, it was not appropriate to rely exclusively on *bitochon*, and natural means had to be employed as much as possible too.

Similarly, it is well known that the Brisker Rov was very particular not to make any unnecessary *hishtadlus*, and he was always worried about whether a certain act did not constitute

a lack of *bitochon*, and yet, during the Second World War he fled immediately without worrying whether this was a superfluous act of *hishtadlus* on his part, because when it comes to saving lives one must put in a lot of *hishtadlus*, just like we do not minimize our *hishtadlus* when performing any other *mitzvah*. The Brisker Rov added that, of course, even when putting in our natural efforts, it is essential never to lose sight of the fact that everything depends on divine assistance.

EMULATING ANCESTORS

And Yaakov said, "O G-d of my father Avrohom and G-d of my father Yitzchok (32:10)

The Sforno says that by mentioning the names of his forefathers, Yaakov intended both to praise Hashem (just like we mention our forefathers in the beginning of the *Shmone Esrei*) and to invoke their merit.

Regarding the second point, it may be objected that Yaakov's brother, Eisov, had the same *zechus ovos* as he did, so what was the point of mentioning it in the context of his prayer to be saved from him?

If someone follows the conduct of his ancestors then their merit assists him, but if he abandons their ways then their merit becomes a liability. Hence, Yaakov was praying that the merit of his forefathers should be a merit for him, but a liability for Eisov, who was not emulating their good deeds.

SORROW OF THE *SHECHINOH*

Rashi (on 32:23) quotes the *medrash* that Yaakov put Dinah into a chest and locked her in, so that Eisov should not set his eyes on her. Therefore, Yaakov was punished for withholding her from his brother, because had he married her, she might have caused him to improve his ways, and so, instead, she fell into the hands of Shechem.

Rav Dessler explains that Yaakov was not obliged to have married Dinah off to Eisov, and by hiding her in the chest he was acting perfectly legitimately. The claim against him was rather that he did not feel enough sorrow for the situation that had arisen, in which his brother had become so wicked, that he was forced to act in this manner.

In our times too Hashem requires us - and especially the *zadik* *hador* - to feel sorrow when politicians seek to expel Hashem and his Torah from the Palace of the King by seeking to do away with Shabbos, by operating public transportation, opening shops that sell pork, interfering in our education, enlisting *bnei Torah* into the army, delivering part of the *Kosel* to the Reform movement who seek to turn it into a center of heresy and immorality etc. In this situation we are obligated by *halocho* to feel the sorrow of the *Shechinoh*.

Rav Sternbuch recalls vividly how he came early one morning to Rav Moshe Schneider's house to learn with him, as he did every day. He found his Rosh Yeshiva standing outside crying and shouting, "Oy, what has become of us?" Rav Schneider told Rav Sternbuch that a visitor from *Eretz Yisroel* had told him that Jews were desecrating Shabbos in Yerushalayim. He said "I did not sleep all night and cried and cried for the desecration of Hashem's Honor and the sorrow of the *Shechinoh* with Shabbos being desecrated in public in the *Ir Hakodesh*". He could not stop the tears from flowing, and told Rav Sternbuch, "If I had the strength, I would travel to *Eretz Yisroel* and shout "Shabbos!" in the streets of Yerushalayim.

DAY AND NIGHT

“And a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn” (32:25)

The *gemoro* (*Pesochim* 2b) compares the World to Come to daytime, and this world to the night. Based on that, this *possuk* is saying that the evil inclination fights a person incessantly until the break of dawn. Only in the World to Come will its power vanish.

The concept of wrestling involves a struggle between two people. Even after one of them has managed to knock the other to the ground, the “loser” still continues to fight and tries to knock down the temporary victor in turn. Similarly, after a person has vanquished the evil inclination once, it continues to fight him, and attempts to overpower the person incessantly, and will continue to do so until the onset of dawn.

The late Belzer Rebbe, Rav Aharon Rokeach, would say that the evil inclination focuses mainly on weakening our dedication to Torah. He explained that the *yetzer horo* is an angel, and therefore knows all about how powerful the Torah study of each individual is. That is why he initiates so many temptations to be *mevatel* his victims away from Torah.

“SWEET” DECREES

“And a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn” (32:25). Rashi: so is the habit of two people who make strong efforts to throw each other down, that one embraces the other and attaches himself to him with his arms. Chazal explained that this was the angel of Eisov

Our spiritual enemies sometimes use the tactic of pretending to be our friends and seeking to look after our interests. Throughout the generations, whenever Gentiles enacted decrees against us, we would stubbornly refuse to compromise our principles, but when non-Jews or erring coreligionists would lure us with baits of religious freedoms, political rights, economic benefits etc., this resulted in many Jews joining their ranks.

During a visit to the Chazon Ish the late Satmarer Rebbe, Rav Yoel, commented that he was very afraid of the decrees which the secular government was likely to enact against the religious public. The Chazon Ish responded that he was not so afraid of those, since, on the contrary, such decrees only serve to strengthen and unite the religious public, but he was more afraid of the various “baits” which they might employ to lure away members of the religious public, because that way they conceal their hatred, pretend to have our interests at heart, and succeed in misleading members of our public.

Many Israeli politicians do not deny their goal of seeking to dismantle the partitions separating the chareidim from the rest of Israeli society. To that end, instead of fines and threats, they proffer various “temptations” under the cloak of “worrying about our future”. For example, they attempt to recruit chareidi girls into working for the army in “security organizations” using the bait of large salaries. Our duty is to be on guard, and reinforce the forces of sanctity by explaining to our sons and daughters that their real goal is to harm us and attract us into their way of life.

TORAH SUPPORTERS

“And a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. When he saw that he could not prevail against him, he touched the socket of his hip, and the socket of Yaakov’s hip became dislocated as he wrestled with him (32:25-26)

The Zohar says that the “man” was the ministering angel of Eisov, the *samech mem*. He wanted to injure Yaakov himself, who is the Pillar of Torah, but when he saw that he was not successful, since he had no control over *bnei Torah* themselves, he attempted to injure “the socket of his hip”, which symbolizes the supporters of Torah, just like the socket supports the hip, and the hip supports the whole person. In this he was successful, so that even though he does not have the power to damage the Torah itself, he does have the power to weaken Torah learning by damaging its financial supporters.

The Zohar adds that when it says “*And a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn*”, this refers to the eternal war which the *Soton* wages throughout the *golus* (which is likened to the night) until the coming of *moshiach* (which is likened to the break of dawn). The *Soton* discourages wealthy people from supporting Torah properly, and conceals from *baalei batim* the great merit of supporting Torah.

Rav Chaim Volozhiner was once asked a difficult question in *hilchos kilayim*, to which he did not manage to find an answer. That night a tailor came to him in a dream and explained the depth of the *sugyah* with the *rishonim* and up to *halocho lema’ase*. Rav Chaim was amazed and asked him how someone who had been an *am ha’oretz* during his lifetime was now speaking like a great *talmid chochom*. The tailor answered that when he was alive he had a charity box into which he put half of all his earnings, and would give this money to Torah learners. When he reached the next world it was pronounced that he would merit to become a *godol baTorah* like those he had supported, and partake of the Divine radiance like a major *talmid chochom*. He was then taught Torah until he reached this level. When Rav Chaim woke up, he commented that he knew about the great reward awaiting supporters of Torah, but he had not been aware that they literally become *talmidei chachomim* in the World to Come.

OUR ENEMY WANTS TO LOSE

“He said, “I will not let you go unless you have blessed me” (32:27)

Chazal (*Chulin* 91b) say that the angel told Yaakov that from the day that he had been created, his time had not come to sing a song of praise until now.

The Chebiner Rov, Rav Dov Berish Weidenfeld, explained in the name of the *Avodas Yisroel* that although the *yetzer horo*’s task is to lead us astray, since he is an angelic being who knows the truth, he is happy when we overcome him. Therefore, when he saw that he was unable to overcome Yaakov, neither in his pose as a *talmid chochom* nor in his pose as a Gentile, he was happy and asked to be released, because now, for the first time, the time had come for him to sing Hashem’s praises: in other words, there had been no more appropriate time for him to be happy and sing than now when Yaakov had overcome him.

Yaakov replied that he would not release him until he had blessed him: in other words, until he had confessed that Yaakov had managed to overcome him, and that the *yetzer horo* no longer had any power over him. Even if we cannot emulate this completely, it remains our task to attempt to vanquish the *yetzer horo* to the best of our ability, thereby causing our “enemy” ultimate joy and satisfaction.

ANTI-SEMITISM

“And he fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept” (33:4). Rashi: R. Shimon ben Yochai said: It is a well-known principle [halocho] that Eisov hates Yaakov, but his compassion was moved at that time, and he kissed him wholeheartedly

Rav Menachem Zemba comments that R. Shimon is known as being *doresh ta'ama dikro* (deriving practical conclusions from rational reasons for commandments), but in this case he emphasizes that the phenomenon of anti-Semitism is an irrational principle. How else can we explain the fact that the Jews are accused of being socialists, on the one hand, and capitalists on the other hand; of being rich and successful, but simultaneously also poor and lazy and a burden on the state?

One *rov* told Rav Sternbuch that Rav Chaim Brisker told him that when he walks in the street in Brisk and sees a Gentile opposite him, he wonders why he does not hit him, since the Gentile hates him and is able to hit him. It must be that the only thing preventing him from hitting me, he concluded, is that Hashem has made him lazy, and so I must thank Hashem for His immense kindness towards me.

GUARDING OUR CHILDREN

"Now, let my master go ahead before his servant, and I will move at my own slow pace, according to the pace of the work that is before me and according to the pace of the children" (33:14)

Eisov told Yaakov: "Let's not live so far removed from each other. My people won't be so wicked, and your people weren't be so righteous. Let's compromise with each other". Yaakov knew that he would not be influenced by Eisov, but he responded that his children would.

Rav Yisroel Friedman, the Chortkover Rebbe derived from this that if a person is asked to move to a place with no suitable Torah environment in order to engage in *kiruv* work, even if he is convinced that this will not have detrimental effect on him, he is not entitled to assume the same about his children.

TEACHERS AS PARENTS

"And Devorah, Rivka's nurse, died, and she was buried beneath Beis El, beneath the plain; so he named it Alon Bochus" (35:8)

The name *Alon Bochus* implies that Yaakov's family greatly mourned the death of Rivka's nurse. Why were they so upset about someone who, on the face of it, merely fulfilled the function of servant in their household?

Devorah had not only been a physical nurse for Rebecca but also a spiritual one. She was the one who taught ethical behavior to Rivka during her childhood, and became a role model at a time when she was surrounded by corrupt relatives. Hence, Yaakov and his household mourned a personality who had played the role of a spiritual mother for his mother, Rivka.

This teaches us about the crucial role that every educator plays in the life of his or her students. If they are successful in inculcating Torah values into them, they become quasi-parents, complementing the work performed by their students' biological parents.

AMOLEK

"And Timna was a concubine to Eliphaz, son of Eisov, and she bore to Eliphaz, Amolek" (36:12).

Rashi writes that this passage proclaims how much people longed to attach themselves to Avrohom's descendants. Timna, a daughter of chieftains, wanted to convert to Judaism. She

approached the *ovos hakedoshim* and asked them to convert her, but they refused. She then became a concubine of Eliphaz, the son of Eisov, saying: “I may not be worthy of marrying you, but if only I could be your concubine, since I would rather be a concubine in a family descended from Avrohom, than a princess of some other nation.”

Timna’s desire to convert indicates that she must have possessed *nitzozos* (sparks) of *kedusha*. When such sparks merge with *tumoh* such as that of Eisov’s son Eliphaz, this results in descendants with especially powerful *tumoh*. This phenomenon explains why her descendant Amolek (and his spiritual descendants today) possess such power for evil.

LOOKING FORWARD FOLLOWING TRAGEDIES

“And it came to pass, when her soul departed for she died that she named him Ben Oni, but his father called him Binyomin” (35:18)

Rochel called her son *Ben Oni* (“The son of my pain”). Her objective was to commemorate for all eternity that her son had survived a birth during which she was to die, thereby praising Hashem for the miracle of his survival. However, even though her intention was to focus on the positive aspect of her personal tragedy, Yaakov nevertheless felt that it would not be appropriate for his son to bear a name that would serve as a reminder of Rochel’s death, and, to this day, he is known as Binyomin, meaning Ben Yamin, “the son of right”, signifying goodness, physical and moral strength, success and *chesed* (see Ramban and Alshich). Yaakov wanted his son’s name to serve as an impetus for keeping Torah and *mitzvos* joyfully with *gevuro* without any hint of Rochel’s death.

When tragedy occurs, ideally we should be on the level where we realize that, in the divine plan, even seeming tragedies are no less aspects of Hashem’s *chesed* than any other event. Sometimes this becomes apparent very quickly, sometimes after a long time, and sometimes it will only be understood when *moshiach* comes. Nevertheless, Yaakov’s intervention (the only time he took an active part in the naming of one of his children) teaches us that the correct approach when tragedy strikes *rachmono liztlan*, is not to look back at all, but only forward with optimism and faith in Hashem’s absolute goodness and to endeavor to continue to serve Hashem with happiness. The name of Binyomin *Hatzaddik* reminds us that with *gevuro* (spiritual fortitude) we are capable of overcoming tragedy.

Similarly, a *baal teshuva* must first completely forget his past, and think only about the future and building up a Jewish home full of Torah and *mitzvos*, because thinking about past misdemeanors would make it very difficult for him to live joyfully in the present. Part of the *mitzvah* of *teshuva* consists in forgetting about the past and living exclusively in the present. Only subsequently, once he has become totally accustomed (or re-accustomed) to living a Torah lifestyle, should he contemplate gradually atoning for past transgressions.

On the national level, Rav Sternbuch recalls how, after the end of the Second World War, when the extent of the destruction of European Jewry, including many *gedolim* and *tzaddikim*, became clear, everybody said that there was no point in attempting to reconstruct the Torah world, and the only thing to be done was to sit and wait for *moshiach* to come and save us.

However, some distinguished individuals, *gedolim* and *tzaddikim*, got up and declared that this was no time to sit by idly and wait. On the contrary, it was a time to take action and re-establish the Jewish nation. With much divine assistance, they succeeded in reigniting chareidi Jewry, so that within a relatively short period yeshivos, kollelim and chadorim were set up in every Jewish center.