

NEFESH SHIMSHON



DIVREI TORAH ON THE WEEKLY PARSHA AND HOLIDAYS FROM
THE TEACHINGS OF RABBEINU SHIMSHON DOVID PINCUS ZT"l

THIS PUBLICATION IS DEDICATED TO THE HATZLACHAH AND ZECHUS OF נחמה בן רחל ויעקב בן רחל נחמה
MAY THEY GROW TO BE TALMIDEI CHACHAMIM AND OVDEI HASHEM.

PEARLS OF WISDOM FROM THE PARSHAH

Testing Times

וַיִּשָּׂא יַעֲקֹב עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא וְהִנֵּה עֹשׂוּ בָּא וְעִמּוֹ אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת אִישׁ וַיַּחֲזֵק אֶת הַיְלָדִים עַל יָאֵה
וְעַל רָחֵל וְעַל שְׁתֵּי הַשִּׁפְחוֹת: (בראשית לג, א)

Yaakov lifted up his eyes and saw that Eisav is coming, with four hundred men. He divided the children between Leah and Rachel and the two maidservants. (*Bereishis* 33:1)

There is a wonderful allegory in the *Midrash* on this *pasuk*. It can teach us a lot about the times we live in. Nowadays we must deal with difficult and threatening situations that we are not used to facing.

R. Levi said: The lion was angry at the other animals [and they feared for their lives]. They said: Who will go and pacify the lion? The fox said: Come to me [and I will take care of it], because I know three hundred parables and I will pacify the lion. They said to him: Go ahead and do it.

The fox went a little and then stood in his place. They said to him: What's the matter? He said to them: I forgot a hundred of my parables. They said to him: There is a blessing even in two hundred.

He went a little more and stopped. They

said to him: What's the matter? He said to them: I forgot another hundred. They said to him: There is a blessing even in one hundred.

When he got close to the lion, he said: I forgot all of them. Every animal should go and pacify the lion for himself.

So it was with *Yaakov Avinu*. He said: I have the power to offer prayer and I have the power to make war.

But when he got there, "He divided the children...." He said: Each person's merits should protect himself.¹

The *Midrash* is saying that *Yaakov Avinu* at first

¹ *Midrash Rabbah Bereishis* 78:10.

got himself ready. He prepared himself for sending gifts, praying and battling against Eisav. He estimated that he has the ability to save everyone. But when he got close to the battle, he lost strength, because of his fear of Heaven's awesome judgment. [He was afraid that his sins might deprive him of Divine protection, as Rashi explains.]

Yaakov saw that he can't stand up to Eisav alone. So he decided that each person's merits should protect himself.

This is very appropriate to our times [This talk was given right before the Gulf war broke out]. The situation is worrisome because of the dangers within and without. The public is getting itself ready, either by *tefilos* and saying *Tehillim* or by distributing gas masks and other means of protection.

But we need to know that if *chas v'shalom* we should come to a time of emergency, and we find ourselves standing face to face with the danger, it's a matter of each person and his own merits and good deeds. His Torah, his *tefilah*, his closeness to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

Therefore, besides all the general preparations, which surely must be made, the true and correct and most essential preparation is for each person to know where he is holding in spiritual matters. Because at the critical moment, that is what makes the biggest difference.

The Torah said earlier, וַיִּתֵּן יַעֲקֹב לְבָדּוֹ וַיֵּאבֶק אִישׁ

עִמּוֹ – “Yaakov was left alone and a man struggled with him.”² *Chazal* say that this “man” was the Satan, the ruling angel of Eisav. This was the fateful struggle that would decide the future. Who would be the true victor: Yaakov or the Satan?

And the Torah emphasizes to us that Yaakov was alone in this awesome battle.

At this time, each person's essence is being tested; who is he and where is he holding? The test is when a person is standing all alone against the *Yetzer Hara*.

For instance, when he is *davening*, and no one knows if he has proper *kavanah*, or if he just lets his thoughts go. And so it is when he is at home in the evening. Other people don't know if he dedicates all his free time to learning, or if he lets other things take his interest. And no one knows if he is careful about what his eyes look at, and what he thinks about. The real test of a person's spiritual mettle is when he is all alone and no one else knows what he is doing. It's just him and *Hashem*.

There are many other situations like these in which a person stands on his own, in which he is like “Yaakov was left alone” to fight the Satan, the *Yetzer Hara*.

We need to put our main energy into being victorious in times and situations like this; the main thing is to defeat evil. In this *zechus*, may *Hashem* be with us to help us and protect us in times of trouble. ●

2 Bereishis 32:24.



Keep Your Distance

וַיֹּאמֶר לְמַצָּא חֵן בְּעֵינֵי אֲדֹנָי. (בראשית לג, ח)

He said, “To find favor in my master’s eyes.” (Bereishis 33:8)

Here’s a question from *Sefer Maggid Meisharim* [the *sefer* in which R. Yosef Caro, the *Beis Yosef*, wrote down what he heard from the angel who was sent from heaven to teach him].

Why did Yaakov lower himself before Eisav, and call him “my master” several times?

There is a secret teaching alluded to here. Someone who is from the side of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* should not act belligerently and angrily toward those who are from the other side [i.e., toward evil people]. Rather, he should reach out to them with words of love, again and again.

We can learn this from *David Hamelech*. Even though he did *Hashem’s* Will by battling the Canaanites, he was not permitted to build *Beis Hamikdash*; he was told, “You spilt a lot of blood.”¹

This is why Yaakov did not want to act belligerently and angrily toward Eisav, but rather wished to reach out to him with love and grace.²

What does it mean, “He should reach out to them with words of love”? Does this mean we should draw *resha'im* close to us, to be our friends and companions? Is this what Yaakov tried to do with Eisav?

Not really. We see from the *parshah* that Yaakov was very careful not to get friendly with Eisav. When Eisav said *נסעה ונלכה ואלכה לנגדך*, offering to travel along with Yaakov, Yaakov turned down his offer with all sorts of excuses. Then Eisav said *ואציגה נא* *ואני עמך מן העם אשר אתי*, he offered to have some of his

men go along with Yaakov, but Yaakov would hear nothing of it.

Only when “Eisav went back on that day on his way to Seir,” when Yaakov finally got rid of Eisav and put a healthy distance between them, then “Yaakov came, **complete**, to the city of Shechem.” Yaakov reached completeness, *sheleimus*.

Thus, we see exactly the opposite from the whole *parshah*. It is not as many of us think, that if we meet someone who lacks any redeeming qualities, and he has no intention of changing his ways, that we must choose between one of two tactics: either fight and argue and put him down, or draw him close and try to be his friend.

Both tactics are wrong. It is true that we should speak to him nicely and with love and grace. But at the same time, we should make sure we keep our distance. We should not join up with him in any way. Just say “shalom and goodbye” nicely, and each goes his own way, and then “Yaakov came, complete,” without sin. That’s the way to handle it.

There is a wonderful message for us on this subject from the *mitzvah* of *gid hanasbeh*. All Jews down to this very day are forbidden to eat *gid hanasbeh*, the sciatic nerve. Why?

עַל כֵּן לֹא יֹאכְלוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת גִּיד הַנֶּשֶׁה
אֲשֶׁר עַל כַּף הַיָּרֵךְ עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה כִּי נָגַע בְּכַף
יָרֵךְ יַעֲקֹב – Therefore, the people of Yisrael shall not eat *gid hanasbeh*, which is on the socket of the hip, because he touched the socket of Yaakov’s hip.³

That which the ruling angel of Eisav had contact with, that which he temporarily affected, is something from which Jews must stay away, for all time.

1 I *Divrei Hayamim* 22:8.

2 *Maggid Meisharim*.

3 *Bereishis* 32:33.

This shows how much danger there is in having contact with evil. This is surely true for us, as we hear a lot about the world of Western society, which is Eisav's spiritual heir. We hear about their wisdom, how they talk, their lifestyle, etc. There is so much danger inherent in this contact we have with them via the media.

It further says in the *parshah*:

וַיִּתֵּר יַעֲקֹב לְבָדּוֹ – Yaakov was left alone.⁴

⁴ *Ibid* 32:25.

Chazal say that just as it is written, “*Hashem* alone was exalted,” so it is written, “Yaakov was left **alone**.” When Yaakov lives his own life, the life of Torah and *tefilah*, of holiness and purity, and doesn't mix in with the world at large, then if “a man struggles with him,” if Eisav attacks, then Yaakov will be able to defeat him entirely. Only after this incident did Yaakov merit the name of Yisrael, and *Hashem* took pride in him: **יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר בָּךְ אֶתְפָּאֵר**. ●

PARSHAH TOPIC

We Don't Want Violence

וַיִּירָא יַעֲקֹב מְאֹד וַיִּצְרָ לוֹ. (בראשית לב, ז)

Yaakov was very afraid, and he was troubled. (*Bereishis* 32:7)

“Afraid” – lest he be killed. “Troubled” – lest he kill others. (*Rashi*)

Drive Carefully

Yaakov Avinu was afraid not only that he might himself be killed. He was even more afraid that he might kill other people.

I can't forget an incident from my own life in which I saw how great Torah personalities look at things, and what a Jew should really be afraid of.

When I was a young man, I was in a traffic accident. I was the driver and the car flipped over. *Baruch Hashem*, I wasn't hurt, just a few cuts, but I was sent to the hospital nevertheless.

A policeman came to me in the hospital to get a report on the accident. He asked me, “How did it happen?”

I answered, “Look, I am a new driver. There were very strong winds, I lost control of the car, and it flipped over.”

The next week I went in to my *rosh yeshivah*, R. Yosef Dov Soloveitchik of Brisk, and he, too, asked about the incident: “I heard you were in an accident.

What exactly happened?”

I tried to describe how the accident happened, and then came the reaction I will never forget. “*Oy*, you could have killed someone!”

Do you get it? The policeman, whose job is essentially to protect the lives of citizens, when I told him that the wind knocked the car off balance, my explanation satisfied him. “Oh, okay.” But the *rosh yeshivah* wasn't so pleased with my explanation. And he didn't remark, “You could have been killed,” but rather, “You could have killed someone!”

He looked at me like I was crazy. How could you get into a situation where you are liable to kill someone?

That's the Jewish way to look at things.

Why don't we all think that way? Why isn't the fear to kill others the first reaction we have?

Carrying on Shabbos

R. Yosef Liss recounted that he once asked the Brisker Rov a question.

During World War II, many people needed to flee at short notice when they heard that the enemy was approaching. Once they needed to flee on *Shabbos*, and some Jews left home with just the clothes they were wearing, while others brought along a sack of items such as a spare shirt, *tallis* and *tefillin*, and more.

R. Liss asked the Brisker Rov at that time: Who allowed these people to carry a sack on *Shabbos*? How could they treat the laws of *Shabbos* so lightly?

The Brisker Rov replied: When the air is full of *chilul Shabbos*, it affects everyone. Everyone's zeal for *Shabbos* observance cools down. The Jewish Communists go to plow the fields on *Shabbos*, and the *bnei Torah* take a shirt with them when they flee.

This is a wondrous insight from the Brisker Rov. I want to apply it to our subject.

Violence is in the Air

We live in a generation when there is violence everywhere. Even in *frum* newspapers you can see how much violence is going on in the world.

There are a lot of people, it doesn't matter what nationality or ethnic group they belong to, that if they feel that they are being stepped on, that someone is depriving them of their rights, they don't take it sitting down. They react violently. They pull out a gun, they hijack a plane and threaten to kill the passengers if their demands are not met in full. There is a mafia, there are killings, may *Hashem* protect us.

I was born in the US, and I know very well the mentality of "No one is going to step on me!" If someone tries to put such a person down, he immediately raises his fists and reacts violently, sometimes to the point of bloodshed.

A Jew who was in the US army once told me that he served in some distant country. He was together with a non-Jew from Texas, a tall and broad-shouldered fellow. In the army base there was also an Arab. The Arab thought that if there is a Jew in this particular army unit, the rest of the members

of that unit must also be Jews. One time he walked past the tall Texan and spit on him, assuming he was a Jew.

The Texan did not hesitate. He just went and killed him on the spot. Simple as that. He's not going to let an Arab spit on him.

This is what is going on in the world today. If somebody spits on you, take off his head. Don't be a sucker; you have rights! And when the world is full of this kind of violence, it affects everyone.

There is a certain level of violence that can sometimes be detected even in our circles. I remember that during the period when there were problems here with the public transportation, when the buses were not coming frequently enough, and there was a lot of public anger about it, someone picked up a rock and wanted to smash the window of a bus when there were people inside. This is not the Jewish way. This is violence.

We need to stop this tendency. We cannot allow ourselves to get carried away by the violent atmosphere in the world, because the Torah outlook on the use of violence, even to a low degree, is completely different.

Last Resort

The Torah recounts that when Yaakov came to Lavan's region, and saw Rachel at the well, "He raised his voice and cried."¹

Rashi explains that he cried because he came emptyhanded, whereas Eliezer, the servant of his grandfather Avraham, had come to this well carrying rings and bracelets and delicacies.

And why was Yaakov emptyhanded? Because Eisav sent his son Elifaz after Yaakov to kill him. When Elifaz, who was raised on Yitzchak's lap, caught up with Yaakov, Yaakov convinced him to take all his possessions, and it would thereby be considered as if Elifaz fulfilled his father's command to kill Yaakov, because a pauper is considered as if he is dead.

I always had a question about this incident.

¹ *Bereishis* 29:11.

The rule is that if someone comes to kill you, you are permitted to kill him first. Now, Yaakov was stronger than Elifaz. We know that when Yaakov came to the well, he flipped the stone off the well as if it was nothing, even though it normally took several strong men to move it.

Why did Yaakov just give in to Elifaz and hand over all his possessions? Why didn't he knock his head off?

The answer is as follows. If someone comes to kill you, you indeed are permitted to kill him first, but only if there is no other alternative. Yaakov had another option. He could get out of the situation by giving his property to Elifaz. Yaakov preferred to become a pauper rather than become a killer. Violence, even where permitted, should always be the last resort.

Your Money or Your Life

So far we have been talking about physically hurting someone or even taking his life. What about just damaging his property? Is that something to be treated lightly?

Some people will claim that there is difference between killing and damaging property, but it's not so simple. Both killing and damaging another's property stem from the same character trait.

I won't go at length into the *Halachah* on this subject. I will just mention that there is a *machlokes rishonim* about this point in *Bava Kama* 60b. Rashi holds that a person may not save himself by damaging his friend's property, even if it is a case of *pikuach nefesh*. However, *Tosafos* disagree,

and say that he may, and it is just a question of whether he needs to pay afterward for the damage he caused.

In any case, we learn from Rashi how careful we must be about other people's property. We may not cause damage even if it is *pikuach nefesh*, according to Rashi's view.

Why is it such a serious matter?

Because taking something that belongs to another is like taking something from Mars. It is something totally out of your domain.

The Torah teaches us that another person's property should be treated as if it was his soul. There are many places in the teachings of *Chazal* where we see that stealing another's property is like taking his life. When the issue is withholding the wages of a day laborer, the Torah expresses this as follows:

– כִּי עֲנִי הוּא וְאֱלֵיוֹ הוּא נִשְׂא אֶת נַפְשׁוֹ

Because he is poor, and he puts out his soul for it.²

It goes so far that R. Chayim Vital recounts that his *Rav*, the holy Arizal, before he would go to *daven minchah*, would make sure to pay the wages of whoever worked for him that day, a practice about which he remarked, "How can I stand before G-d when I have the soul of my friend in my hand?"

Someone else's penny is a piece of soul. It's like taking his soul. And surely this is true with raising a hand against him. Jews always knew that raising a hand against someone is a last resort. ●

² *Devarim* 24:15.