

Parshat Vayishlach: Struggle For Simcha

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

The quintessential battle between Yaakov and Esav signifies the eternal struggle of the good and evil inclinations. Yaakov prayed, "Save me from the hands of my brother, from the hands of Esav." Rav Rice notes that this seeming repetition connotes the double guise of Esav, who will sometimes appear as an enemy and sometimes as a friend. When he seems like our brother, we need to be most vigilant. Similarly, the Torah writes that Esav embraced Yaakov and kissed him, "Vayishakeihu." The commentaries take two different approaches to this kiss. Some explain that Eisav's brotherly feelings were aroused and he kissed Yaakov. Others explain that Eisav actually bit him and Yaakov's neck miraculously turned to marble. Just as marble cannot become *tameh*, Yaakov's neck proved impervious to the venomous impurity that Esav wanted to inject within him.

In the same vein, some say the archangel of Esav came as a *rasha* and others say he appeared in the guise of a *tzaddik* to teach us that on a metaphysical level Esav will fight Yaakov in two ways.

The *Yetzer Hara* comes in dual guises too.

Sometimes he entices us to do evil for evil's sake. At other times he blinds our perception to think we are doing a *mitzvah* when we are actually sinning.

When the angel parted from Yaakov he called him Yisrael. The Chatam Sofer cites a gemara that notes that while Avraham remained Avraham, Yaakov's name switches back and forth from Yaakov to Yisrael. Yisrael connotes spiritual perfection and the angel indicates that at this level he will not attack. However, Hashem, who understands human frailty, recognizes that we will still remain "Yaakov" and even when we falter, He will not leave us. Life is about struggle in the "Yaakov" state while yearning for the ultimate "Yisrael" state. This is the challenge of emuna.

Rav Arush notes that those who live with emuna are happy and confident, while those who do not find life unbearable.

In Shearim B'Tefilah, Rav Pincus writes that we must learn to see Hashem as our master. The struggle of Esav is the battle with the evil inclination, which tries to make us think we're in control. We must realize that life is not about the "I," but about Hashem. Our most potent weapon

in this struggle is the *midda* of *simcha*, which sensitizes us to *hashgacha pratit*. There is almost no language that has as many expressions of joy as Hebrew because it is one of the most central tenets of Judaism.

When we feel that we're missing something, we often feel sad. A Jew's soul naturally thirsts for spirituality. Filling this void with material things only creates a false sense of happiness. We need to ask ourselves, "How much do I enjoy Torah and *mitzvot* and developing a connection with Hashem?" If we don't feel a bond with our Creator, then there is no desire to create beauty and joy in the relationship. We need to work on bringing Hashem into our personal lives and infusing our *avoda* with passion and enthusiasm. When we have an awareness of where we come from, our achievements and goals, and where we are ultimately headed, then we can begin to understand the purpose of life.

When we're down in the "Yaakov" state, Hashem is still there with us, but ultimately we must yearn for the "Yisrael" state. May our efforts to grow help us attain true *simcha* and *shleimut*.

The Preciousness of Chanukah

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

In his discussion of the laws of Chanukah, the Rambam writes that the *mitzvah* of *hadlakat neirot Chanukah* is a *mitzvah chaviva ad moed*, a very dear and precious *mitzvah*. This is unusual as we do not find that the Rambam uses such language for any other *mitzvah*. He further states that one should be careful with this *mitzvah* to publicize the miracle and to increase one's praises and gratitude to Hashem. The Magid Mishne comments that the source for this Rambam is the Gemara in Shabbat. Rav Huna says, "One who is careful with the lighting of Chanukah candles will merit to raise his children to be Torah scholars." What is so precious about this *mitzvah* and why is the reward mentioned? It seems from the words of the Rambam that the *chavivut hamitzvah* is connected to *pirsumei nissa* (publicizing the miracle). Yet there are other *mitzvot* connected to *pirsumei nissa* such as reading the *megilah* on Purim. Why is ner *Chanukah* singled out?

The Gemara asks, "What was the miracle of Chanukah?" The Jews found a pure cruse of oil to light the *menora* and therefore these days were set aside for praise and thanks.

The Beit Yosef then asks the famous question, the first night that they lit the *menora*, the oil burned naturally, not miraculously. Why do we have eight days of *Chanukah* when there were really only seven days of miracle? The Alter of Kelm explains that when someone witnesses a miracle that defies the laws of nature, he can come to recognize that nature too is miraculous. The fact that the oil burned on the first day was because Hashem decreed it to burn, just as he decreed that it should continue to burn another seven days.

The Ramban in Parshat Bo writes that revealed miracles help us recognize the hidden miracles of daily existence. All of creation exists through the will of Divine

providence. This was the victory of the Chashmonaim over the Greeks. The Greeks viewed nature as an entity unto itself. The celebration of *Chanukah* is the revelation that Hashem is always involved. When one recognizes this and teaches this fundamental teaching to one's children, one can merit worthy descendants. In a certain sense this concept is the foundation of all the *mitzvot* and this is why the *mitzvah* of Chanukah lights is so precious.

Rav Chaim Shmuelewitz asks, why does the Gemara mention the miracle of the oil and not the miracle of the victory over the Greeks? The love a father has to his child is not evidenced by the fact that he provides him his basic necessities. It is expressed by the extra luxuries he showers upon him. Likewise, the military victory was necessary for Klal Yisrael to survive. However, they could have technically lit with impure oil. Yet Hashem showed

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his love for us through the miracle of the oil. On Chanukah, we celebrate the light of Hashem's loving countenance upon us.

The Bach explains that the Greek persecution was a consequence of the Jews' spiritual failings. The kohanim were lax in serving Hashem. Therefore, victory was only attained when they showed extraordinary sacrifice for

Torah and *mitzvot*. Through the ages, the Jewish people continue to treasure this *mitzvah* by performing it mehadrin min hamehadrin, in the best possible way.

Light Up The Soul

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Yitzchak Cohen

Rav Schwadron presents several questions in relation to the *mitzvot* and celebration of Chanukah. *In Al Hanissim*, we thank Hashem for the war, the salvation and victory? It would seem logical to assume that gratitude for the war would be subsumed under the general idea of "deliverance." Further, since we experienced a physical salvation from Greek tyranny, why did our Sages not mandate a festive meal, the symbol of physical joy, on *Chanukah*?

Rav Schwadron explains that one of the best battle strategy is to postpone a direct frontal assault until the enemy has been weakened through indirect attacks. The Greeks did not begin by forbidding Torah study, or barring brit milah, *Shabbat* and *Rosh Chodesh* observances. They knew that such an egregious assault on Jewish life would mobilize the Jewish people against them. Instead, they allowed Torah study. They just wanted Torah study to focus would on intellectual and philosophical pursuits, rather than as a means of connecting to Hashem. Similarly, the Greeks did not dispose of the purified oil, they merely contaminated it. Light your menorah in your Temple, but keep sanctity out of the process. The learned among the assimilated argued that according to halacha it would have been permissible for congregational needs to light the menorah with impure oil. Extending that philosophical analysis, the Greeks further argued that if one could sacrifice an animal in the *Beit Hamikdash*, a pig was no different than an ox. If everything was important only in the physical sense, then there really isn't a difference. The strategy of the Greeks worked, and indeed many Jews assimilated. While they retained the outer trappings of Judaism, the spiritual

core and connection to Hashem disintegrated.

The *Chashmonaim* recognized the danger of the Greek strategy. They girded themselves for battle to fight for the soul of Judaism. When the physical war was over, they dedicated themselves to reestablishing the spiritual essence of the *Beit Hamikdash* and the *mitzvah* of lighting the *menorah*. Under these circumstances, impure oil would not be appropriate. Only pure, untainted oil would be acceptable. The sages established the holiday with exclusively spiritual focus. This is why they did not mandate a holiday feast.

The candles and the miracle of the oil remain the symbols of the struggle and the physical manifestation of our inner gratitude. "For the candle of God is the soul of man." As the flame is always searching for the last drop of fuel to keep it continually striving upward, so did the *Chashmonaim* draw on every last bit of their inner strength to fight the onslaught of assimilation into Greek culture. As we light the *Chanukah* candles today, we must continuously draw on our inner strength to combat the encroachment of the mores of western culture.

When we light our *Chanukah* candles and ponder the miracle of the oil and the miracle of the victory, we realize that nothing is impossible if Hashem wills it. We must keep this thought in mind as we go about our lives. If I believe Hashem is always beside me, then I won't take anything for granted. Nothing is impossible, and there is no ceiling to my spiritual growth.

The Tolne Rebbe takes a somewhat different approach, based on the work of the Sefat Emet. He maintains that we must thank

Hashem specifically for the darkness of our troubles and our daily battles. When we realize we are in Hashem's presence, we are filled with joy and are aroused to thank Him for all the *chesed* He shows us. We would even thank Him for our struggles and challenges, for they bring us closer to Him.

In fact, explains the Netivot Shalom, all gratitude must have its basis in joy. He cites Psalm 100. "A Psalm of Thanksgiving.... Serve Hashem with gladness, come before Him with joyous song." Psalm 30 celebrates the dedication of the *Beit Hamikdash*. In the *Chanukah* celebration, the Jews celebrated the re-dedication of the Temple just as they celebrated the original dedication. The *Chanukah* lights are a present day reflection of the lights in the menorah of the *Beit Hamikdash* which themselves were a reflection of the primordial, hidden light of creation. As people felt Hashem's presence in the *Beit Hamikdash*, so too should we sense His presence throughout Chanukah. As the *Beit Hamikdash* was the place for thanking Hashem and singing His praises, says the Siftei Chaim, so too do the days that reflect the light of the original menorah in the light of our *Chanukah* menorahs offer us an expanded opportunity to thank and praise the Almighty.

The Greeks wanted to silence this song and sever our connection to the Creator. The *Chashmonaim* would not let the fire of God within the souls of *Bnei Yisrael* be extinguished. That light had been hidden from the days of creation and revealed in the *Beit Hamikdash*. It was reflected in the light of the *Chanukah menorah*, and will again be fully revealed in the days of *Moshiach* when all will again recognize Hashem.