

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 Power of The Soul: The Tzaddik Within You #4

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Eliezer Miller

Our holy writings teach us that Hashem's main purpose in forming the world was to create a relationship with us. The way to attach oneself to Hashem is to bind oneself to one's Divine inner spark and through that to connect to the "*shoresh haelyon*," the Upper Source.

The Nefesh Hachaim writes that the *keruvim* served as a symbol of Hashem's closeness to us. When the Jews did His will, the two *keruvim* faced each other. When they sinned, their backs were turned. Hashem's great love for us and the significance he placed on developing a bond with us can be discerned from the fact that the *keruvim* were in the holiest place in the *Beit Hamikdash*. Just as Hashem's love for us is everlasting, so is our love for Him.

The Chiddushei Harim taught that each Jew has a spark, an inner *tzaddik*, which is protected by Hashem. It is about this very spark that we say "*magen avraham*." Hashem shields it and nothing can extinguish it. When we sin, a partition rises up around the spark and our natural love for Hashem is dulled. Yet we must believe that it is still there and will burn forever no matter how far we may stray.

The *keruvim* were atop the *aron*, which held the *luchot*. This teaches that our connection with Hashem is dependent on Torah. The *aron* would carry its carriers. People who study the Torah find that it sustains them. The Zohar writes that the world reached a certain perfection when the *Beit Hamikdash* was built as the *keruvim* served to connect

the Jewish people to Hashem.

Similarly, the foundation of prayer is to connect to Hashem. *Tefila* is service of the heart. Through prayer we break through the barriers separating us from Hashem. The Maharsha in Kedishin writes that *tefila* has the power to change nature. A person must never give up hope, for when he succeeds in connecting to Hashem, who transcends natural boundaries, he too can merit to go beyond nature.

Hashem yearns to hear the prayers that stem from our inner spark. He desires His revelation in this world. May we merit to expand the *tzaddik* inside of ourselves to reach ever greater heights in *avodat Hashem*.

Tree of Life: A Woman's Relationship To Torah - #1

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

Chazal tell us, "Histakel b'orayta ubara alma." Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world. What is the implication of this in our own lives? First, Torah is the blueprint of the world. Second, we pre-existed the Torah. The world was created as a backdrop to the soul's need for free choice and Torah is the key. Our collective soul, the part that makes us one, is as close to the essence of Hashem as anything can possibly be. We are complex beings. When we sin, our animal self overtakes our spiritual self. We constantly struggle and the only way to strengthen our spiritual selves is through Torah. Therefore, Torah had to be created before the world came into existence.

Chazal tell us, "Barati yetzer hara, barati Torah tavlin." I created the evil inclination and I created the Torah as its spice. People try to drive evil out of their lives in myriad ways but

only Torah really works. The yetzer hara takes the world with its existing components and makes evil out of it. It is the force that makes us think that evil is creative. We all confuse good with evil at times, by seeing the physical world as more vivid than the spiritual world and letting it overtake us. Only Torah can cure us of this spiritual blindness.

What should a woman's relationship to Torah be? Women have a part in Torah that is distinctly their own. Historically a Jewish woman's connection to Torah was mostly experiential and largely osmosis. However, within the last century, Hashem has brought women to a more direct access to Torah. This is not because we've changed, but rather because Hashem is taking us to a different place. Although today there is more of an intellectual connection, women are still drawn to the feminine aspects of Torah. Studies that are technical and analyze the entire mosaic of

being and the reasoning behind it do not resonate with most women. Maharal notes that *emuna* – faith – is feminine, while *emet* – truth – is masculine. *Emet* means seeing things as they are by knowing Torah well. This involves studying the technicalities of *halacha*, such as what is prohibited and permitted. This movement is from above to below. *Emuna* is looking at the world, perceiving Hashem, and uplifting physicality. *Emuna* moves from below to above. Men achieve perfection by encountering the yetzer hara and beating it. Torah gives us guidelines to do this. Women are drawn to the part of Torah, which focuses on the inner self.

The Yetzer Hara makes us feel autonomous and distant from Hashem. The only way to return is to go back to the pattern in which Hashem created the world. The only real weapon we have is Torah.

Rebbetzin's Perspective III Class 1

Excerpted from Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller's Question and Answer series on Naaleh.com

Question:

Although children did not come easily to me, thank G-d I now have three school age children. Sometimes I can't help feeling like I'm neither here nor there - not really immersed in child-rearing to the exclusion of everything else, but not entirely free to go back to school to pursue my interests. I can only imagine how betrayed women who planned careers or employment as prospective mothers and were not yet fortunate enough to get married and/or have kids must feel!

Answer:

It seems like you only see two possibilities of fulfillment. One is full time employment in a demanding career, and the other is full time mothering. However, there are many

other possibilities and ways to spend time that are fulfilling and interesting. When a person's basic physical needs are met, people usually pursue aesthetic pleasure. After that, people search for relationships. Think about the individuals you like the most, ask yourself why you like them. The answers are always spiritual. You can't weigh loyalty or measure kindness. Feeling loyal, kind, and positive when you are with the person makes you like them even more. This is called spiritual bonding, and it is a very deep pleasure.

You need opportunities for spiritual bonding. It can take place within your family, through tefila, through chesed, or by taking a course which can equip you to help others. If Hashem gave you the ability to do more, than by all means do more. Some single or childless women may feel betrayed, but the proper response is, "This

is where I am supposed to be and I am going to find the good in it."

The Sefat Emet explains that when Hashem told Avraham, "Lech lecha," he did not tell him where to go because he wanted to bring Avraham to the maximum level of bitul haratzon, negation of his own will. Hashem gave him the opportunity to say, "I will go where you will lead me, wherever that may be."

Everyone is told, "Lech lecha," to go to Eretz Yisrael, in a theoretical sense, the place of bitul haratzon. Ask yourself, "How can I do Hashem's will without questions?" By giving you time and space, Hashem is saying, "Go where I am leading you." Don't waste this time. Fill it with meaning and depth by nurturing your relationship with Hashem and giving to others in a way that will expand your inner self.