

YOSEF FARHI
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Parashat Vayishlach English Version

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# The Art of Living Like an Angel

Three times a day we take three steps forward and stand before Hashem. The middle of the Amidah changes all the time. Weekday, Shabbat, Yom Tov, Rosh Hashanah: each has its own. But the first three blessings never change. Not one day of the year.

Why? Because those three blessings are our three fathers. Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov.

We open by calling Hashem *Elokei Avraham, Elokei Yitzchak, v'Elokei Yaakov*, and we ask Him to hear us in their merit. But there's a problem. The Gemara (Shabbat 55a) already discusses when *zechut Avot*, the merit of the fathers, ran out. So what are we standing on?

Their merit isn't a bank account we inherited. It's a road. If we walk in their ways, their merit walks with us. So before we ask Hashem for anything, we remind ourselves who we come from, and who we're supposed to become.

The first blessing belongs to Avraham. It ends *Magen Avraham*, and in it we call Hashem *HaKel HaGadol*, the great G-d. Great? Hashem has no size. He is infinite. So what does *gadol* mean? The Torah calls the sun *hama'or hagadol*, the big light, and the moon *hama'or hakatan*, the small one (Bereshit 1:16). The sun is the giver. The moon is the taker. *Gadol* means giver. When we say Hashem is *gadol*, we're saying He is the ultimate giver and provider. That is *chesed*. And Avraham showed the world what that looks like in a human being: *chesed l'Avraham* (Micha 7:20). How do we know it was really his nature? The Gemara (Bava Metzia 86b) tells us. It was the third day after his *brit milah*. He was weak and in pain. Most of us, three days after surgery, aren't even answering the phone. Nobody expected him to host anyone, and Hashem even made the day blazing hot so no travelers would trouble him. And Avraham? He sent Eliezer out to find guests. When Eliezer found none, he went out to look himself. He wasn't giving because he had to. He gave because he couldn't not give. Avraham personified Gomel Hasadim Tovim.

The second blessing opens *Atah gibor*, You are mighty, and ends *mechayeh hameitim*, who brings the dead back to life. This is Yitzchak's blessing, and Yitzchak's *midah* is *gevurah*. Not muscle. Inner strength. "Who is strong? One who conquers his inclination" (Avot 4:1). Look at Yitzchak in the Torah. He hardly says a word. What we see, again and again, is his ability to hold. He accepts Hashem's will at the *Akedah*. The Pelishtim fight him over well after well, and he moves on and digs again (Bereshit 26). Most of us would still be fighting over the first well. Esav's wives, with their idol worship, embitter his home (26:35), and he doesn't throw his son out. Yaakov takes the blessings, and Yitzchak accepts that too: *gam baruch yihyeh* (27:33). There's serving Hashem by doing what He commands. And there's another way: accepting what He wills. That's Yitzchak.

But why is his blessing about bringing the dead to life? After the *Akedah*, the Torah says Avraham returned to his young men (22:19). Yitzchak isn't mentioned. Then, when Rivka arrives, he comes



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out to the field (24:62-63). The commentaries ask: where was he? He was 37 at the *Akedah* and 40 at his wedding (25:20). One opinion says he was in Gan Eden. Another says he was in yeshiva, learning Torah. Someone once told me something beautiful. These aren't two opinions. They're one. If a yeshiva boy sits in the *beit midrash* and disconnects from the world while studying, it's like he's in Gan Eden.

How does one achieve that experience? The Gemara (Berachot 63b) says Torah stays only with a person who "dies" for it: *Zot haTorah, adam ki yamut b'ohel* (Bamidbar 19:14). When he's learning, he's gone. You can't reach him. He's contactless. His phone isn't on silent. It's off. He's "dead" to the world, and more alive than ever. And then, *mechayeh hameitim*. He comes back into the world to build a home. That's how our fathers got married. Straight out of a Gan Eden like Yeshiva learning. Yitzchak came to his wedding from his learning. So did Yaakov, after fourteen years in the yeshiva (Megillah 17a).

The third blessing is *Atah kadosh*, ending *HaKel HaKadosh*, the holy G-d. This is Yaakov's blessing. The Navi even calls Hashem *Kedosh Yaakov*, the Holy One of Yaakov (Yeshayahu 29:23). Yaakov is the father who lived with angels. And he teaches us that a Jewish home and a Jewish life, wherever you are, is holier than the angels.

That's what *Kedushah* is. *Nakdishach v'na'aritzach*. We sanctify Hashem with the praise of the angels. And here's the astonishing part: the angels have to wait for us. The Gemara (Chullin 91b) says the angels don't say their song above until the Jewish people say theirs below. Ten tired Jews in a shul on an ordinary morning, and all of Heaven is waiting for them to begin. And where does the Gemara teach this? In the middle of the story from this week's *parashah*, Vayishlach: Yaakov's fight with the angel.

Where did that fight happen? At a crossing called *Ma'avar Yabok* (Bereshit 32:23). Yabok. *Yud, bet, kuf.* Now look at *Kedushah*. It always has three parts. *Kadosh, kadosh, kadosh* (Yeshayahu 6:3). *Baruch kevod Hashem mimkomo* (Yechezkel 3:12). *Yimloch Hashem l'olam* (Tehillim 146:10). The first letters of each passuk spell *Kuf, bet, yud.* The letters of Yabok. Rav Moshe David Valle explains what this means for us. In the hardest test of your life, *b'chol derachecha da'ehu*, in all your ways know Him (Mishlei 3:6). Connect to Him right there, in whatever you are dealing with in your life journey. That connection, is where the holiness is found. Because we tell ourselves a story. "Me? An angel? You don't know where I'm holding." We think that from the low places, we can't be like angels. It's not true.

You're in the middle of an argument. The perfect comeback is sitting on your tongue. It's a really good one, too. And you hold it back, even a drop. Our Sages teach that for every moment a person holds back from answering, the reward is more than the angels can fathom. The Gemara (Chullin 89a) says the world itself exists in the merit of one who restrains himself in a fight.

You leave a little food on the plate. That is greater than the greatest fast, because you went against the animal inside.

You guard your eyes and your thoughts. That is angelic too.

Three places: what goes into the mouth, what comes out of it, and what the heart desires. That's why Yaakov was tested in how he responds: to his brother, to his father, to his children.

Still think a human being can't be angelic? Go back one *parashah*. When Yaakov wakes from his dream of the ladder, he says: *Achen yesh Hashem bamakom hazeh, v'anochi lo yadati* (Bereshit 28:16).

*Achen* is *alef, kaf, nun*: *Aryeh, Keruv, Nesher*. The lion, king of the wild animals. The eagle, king of the birds (Chagigah 13b). The *keruv*, king of the angels. Yaakov looked up and saw three faces on the Heavenly Throne. And the fourth face, the face of a man! That one was his own face! The Gemara (Chullin 91b) says the angels went up the ladder to look at his image above, and came down to look at



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him below. A human being, asleep on the ground, and his face is under the *Kisei HaKavod*. King of mankind. Anochi, spells Aryeh, Keruv, Nesher, Yaakov... *v'anochi lo yadati* "I never knew my face was on the throne as well!"

I always wondered though about the ox, king of the domestic animals. Yechezkel sees the face of an ox on the Throne too (Yechezkel 1:10). The Jewish people saw it at Har Sinai, and that's where the calf came from. So why didn't Yaakov see it?

The answer is simple. The ox is Yosef: *bechor shoro hadar lo* (Devarim 33:17). The face of the ox is there in Yosef's merit, and that night there was no Yosef yet. This explains why they made a Golden Calf. Moshe was gone (Shemot 32:1) and the people panicked. Who will feed us out here? We only have Mannah in Moshe's merit! They wanted a Yosef, the provider who fed a whole land (Bereshit 42:6). So they reached for the ox.

So how do we become like Yaakov?

It's hard. We have a *yetzer hara*, and the Gemara (Kiddushin 30b) says that without Hashem's help, no one could overcome it. That's why the first blessing of Avot ends *Melech ozer u'moshia u'magen*: King, Helper, Savior, Shield. We're asking: help me, save me, so I can be like Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov.

Yaakov stands for three things that are really one: *tiferet*, balance and harmony; Torah; and *emet*, truth (*titen emet l'Yaakov*, Micha 7:20).

Avraham is kindness. Yitzchak is strength. Two extremes. Yaakov, *ish tam yoshev ohalim* (Bereshit 25:27), balanced them through his Torah. Tam is from the word Tiomet of the Lulav, which is the middle branch between the two extremes. That's why he is the highest of the Avot. Balance means finding the deeper truth of what's right, right now. When to give. When to hold. When to be honest, and when to trick. In our lexicon, middle of two extremes, between high and low, hot and cold, boils down to being normal and acting normal. What, exactly is normal?

Everyone wants to be normal. But normal usually means whatever my crowd does. What they drive, where they vacation, what they serve at a bar mitzvah. The Rambam says a person is naturally pulled after his friends and the people of his town (Hilchot De'ot 6:1). In Judaism there is only one normal: what the Torah calls normal.

In the Syrian community, people ask this all the time. Should we live in Deal? Brooklyn? Manhattan? Lakewood? Miami? The answer is always the same. Live where you can learn the most Torah and live by the Torah the most, and where your children can too. As Rabbi Yosi ben Kisma said, "I will live only in a place of Torah" (Avot 6:9).

That's what it means to build a home for the *Shechina*. When Yaakov came back toward Eretz Yisrael, angels met him, and he called the place *Machanayim*, two camps (Bereshit 32:2-3). The Ramban explains: his camp of his family on earth and the camp of angels above, parallel and in sync. Yaakov realized that everything he'd been through was building a people who live like angels, with Torah even in the most earthly parts of life.

There is one more secret, and it's hiding in that same *pasuk*.

*Vayikatz Yaakov mishnato vayomer*: Yaakov woke from his sleep and said. The Baal HaTurim points out that the last letters of those four words spell *tzibur*, a congregation.

*Kedushah* can only be said with ten (Megillah 23b), because when ten Jews pray together, the *Shechina* is with them (Berachot 6a). And the Gemara (Ta'anit 8a) teaches that when a person prays alone without *kavanah*, his prayer isn't always accepted. The prayer of a *tzibur* is accepted even without kavanah. In the Rambam's words, "the prayer of the congregation is always heard" (Hilchot Tefillah 8:1).

Now read the *pasuk* again. *Achen yesh Hashem bamakom hazeh*: Hashem is surely in this place, when there's a *tzibur*, a minyan. *V'anochi*: but



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when it's just me, by myself? *Lo yadati.* I don't know.

You want to live like an angel? Don't try to do it alone.

There's a reason we're called *Bnei Yisrael*. Yisrael is the name Yaakov earned the night he fought an angel and won: *ki sarita im Elokim v'im anashim vatuchal* (Bereshit 32:29). Our job is to live angelic lives down here, with a body, a family, a minyan, a job and a carpool.

So the next time you take three steps forward, remember what those three blessings ask of you.

Give like Avraham, because it's who you are.

Hold like Yitzchak, even when everything in you wants to answer back.

And live like Yaakov: a life of Torah and truth, with a minyan around you, in a home where the *Shechina* is welcome and a home where the Torah defines what's normal.

It's hard. Nobody can do it alone. That's why we say it three times a day: *Melech ozer u'moshia u'magen*.

## THE ART OF LISTENING TO YOUR MESSAGES

The Midrash Tanchuma tells a story that should make every one of us uncomfortable.

When Yaakov fled to Lavan in Aram Naharayim, he made a vow to G-d: "If You protect me and return me safely, I will give ma'aser, a tithe." G-d fulfilled every detail of Yaakov's request. Yaakov prospered immensely and began his journey home with great wealth. But he forgot to fulfill his vow.

What followed was not punishment, but a series of Divine reminders, each one meant to awaken Yaakov to his unfulfilled promise: Esav approached to kill him. Yaakov sent a massive gift , including two hundred goats , yet still failed to recognize the message. An angel wrestled with him. This was Esav's guardian angel, who tried to take Yaakov's life. Yaakov emerged limping, yet he still did not understand. The tragedy of Dinah. His daughter went out and was violated. The sorrow deepened, but the message remained unnoticed. Rachel, his beloved wife, died in childbirth. She was buried on the way. Still, clarity did not come.

Finally, G-d said: "How long will this righteous man suffer without understanding why? I must tell him directly." And G-d spoke explicitly: "Arise, go up to Beit El and dwell there, and make an altar there to G-d who appeared to you when you fled from Esav."

Rabbi Ibo explains that G-d's message was: "All these troubles came upon you because you delayed fulfilling your vow. If you want no further calamity, go to Beit El , to the very place where you made your promise." Rabbi Abba bar Kahana adds G-d's piercing words , words that G-d speaks to each of us: "When you were in distress, you made vows. Now that you are at ease, you have forgotten Me."

G-d does not desire punishment. He desires repentance, awareness, and connection. The sufferings were not retribution to Yaakov , they were invitations, consistent reminders of the promise he once made in a moment of need.

How can this be? How can it be that Yaakov , the Patriarch who saw angels ascending and descending a ladder to heaven, repeatedly misses what G-d is trying to tell him? How does it take multiple tragedies before he grasps a simple message?

Why does G-d seem to speak in riddles? And more importantly: What does it take for us to finally listen?



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This story isn't ancient history. It's a mirror held up to our own lives.

G-d repeatedly reminds us: We are in Galut. Every time we forget that, He sends another reminder.

People today look at rising antisemitism and ask: What does it all mean? Is this similar to pre-War Germany? Should we be reading the writing on the wall, should we run away? Historians, not conspiracy theorists, point out clear, academically documented parallels between America today and Germany in 1929–1938.

1. The sudden normalization of public antisemitism. In both eras: Jews became the socially acceptable target of hatred. Intellectual elites justified the hostility. Universities became the center of anti-Jewish ideology. Violent "isolated incidents" were excused by authorities. 2. The shift was rapid, not gradual. Pre-WWII Germany was not a slow decline. 1932: Most Jews felt safe. 1936: Most Jews still felt integrated. 1938: Many still believed, "It will blow over." Then the tipping point came , and it came fast. Today:2023–2025 saw the fastest rise of antisemitism in American history. Within months: Universities shifted tone. Media normalized hate. Politicians demonized Israel and Orthodox Jews openly. The speed is historically familiar. 3. Leadership matters. In Europe before WWII, once openly anti-Jewish politicians gained office, the culture shifted dramatically. No one is comparing Mamdani to Hitler , but symbolically, it matters. A mayor whose record includes: Accusing Israel of genocide. Supporting anti-Israel movements. Backing anti-Jewish campus groups. Co-sponsoring policies harming Jewish institutions.

This signals a new cultural norm. Historians teach: "The most dangerous moment is not when a dictator rises. It is when hatred becomes fashionable." "But 99.83% of Jews in NYC Are Safe!" That's true. But in pre-Holocaust Europe, the statistics were also overwhelmingly "safe", until they weren't. 1931: 94% of German Jews reported no antisemitic violence in their region. Jewish life was flourishing. Universities were hostile, but Jews still held major positions. Businesses thrived. Yet antisemitic rhetoric normalized…

Government tone shifted… Public humiliation spread… Jewish visibility became mocked… This is the exact pattern emerging in the U.S. today.

The four classic warning signs are all present in America today. Economic anxiety. Cultural identity crisis. Political polarization. Collapse of trust in government. When these combine, societies historically look for scapegoats. And right now: Universities delegitimize Jewish identity. Media excuses antisemitic violence. Courts under-prosecute attackers. Jews are blamed for foreign policy.

Post–October 7 was the revelation. The speed and shamelessness shocked historians: Universities responded with hostility toward Jews. Administrations failed to condemn hate mobs. Jewish students were barricaded. Jews were told: "Stay home." Mobs chanted openly: "Death to the Jews."

This level of acceptance never happened before in American history. Mamdani's victory represents a symbolic shift: In 1930s Germany, the first major change was: "It's acceptable to be publicly anti-Jewish, and people will still vote for you." That is exactly what just happened in NYC. "But NYC Has 1.5 Million Jews , they would never turn on us!" German Jews said: "Germany is the most enlightened country; it cannot turn on us." Vienna: "Our city is too Jewish to be dangerous." Hungary: "Our integration protects us." France: "Our institutions are strong." Size of the Jewish community has never protected Jews. History proves it again and again. And in truth: Germany looked safe until it didn't, and the collapse came fast.

Many people say, "The writing is on the wall. Time to leave America." So I asked my Rabbi.

He said: One cannot compare America to Germany, because the Holocaust was supernatural.



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מעל הטבע. Consider the facts: Germany had 52 major political parties and deep social fragmentation. The Nazi Party had only 2.6% of the vote in 1928 — a tiny fringe group. Hitler was appointed Chancellor because of a political blunder. His rise to power relied on a chain of historically improbable events. The Reichstag Fire in 1933 allowed him to suspend civil liberties, a stroke of political "luck" still debated today. The Nazi takeover required a nearly impossible alignment of events. Historians list: Great Depression timing, Weak Weimar coalition, Hindenburg's bad judgment, Rachstag Fire which enabled emergency powers, Fragmented left-wing vote, Elite conservatives who empowered Hitler accidentally. Any one of these not happening, meant no Hitler.

Hitler survived over 40 assassination attempts. Germany historically had the lowest antisemitism in Europe before 1933. Jews were integrated, wealthy, patriotic, and overrepresented in professions. It was the least likely place for genocide to occur. Even neighboring countries refused to believe what was happening.

The most supernatural part of the Holocaust, was that Hitler executed the Holocaust while losing a world war. Never in history had a government lost a war on two fronts. Faced starvation, bombings, invasion, yet still prioritized killing Jews above strategic military needs. This defies all natural military logic. Nazis diverted weapons, trains, and soldiers simply to continue killing Jews. They diverted trains needed for the Eastern Front. They used fuel reserves to ship Jews to camps. They emptied medical supplies for killing instead of treating soldiers. This is considered militarily insane.

The Holocaust was not natural. It was Divinely orchestrated for reasons beyond our comprehension.

So I asked my Rabbi: What about running to New Jersey or Miami? My Rabbi said: Leaving New York because you're "running" misses the point. אִם־יְקֹוָק לֹא־יִשְׁמָר־עִיר שָׁוְא שָׁקַד שׁוֹמֵר "If Hashem does not guard the city, the watchman watches in vain." G-d is sending a message: You are in Galut. New York is not your home. New Jersey is not your refuge. Miami is not your solution. If it works out for you to move, fine. Consult your Rabbi what the right thing for you is. But don't make any rash decisions.

G-d has ways of waking us up anywhere, even in Israel, until Mashiach comes. If someone has a Rabbi, a community, schools, Torah infrastructure, leaving without a replacement causes tremendous harm. Community is what preserves religious life. After WWI, there was an unprecedented spiritual collapse across Europe. Why? Because the entire community system of Europe disintegrated during the First World War. A Jew cannot survive without a Rav, a kehilla, a support system. Even Shlomo HaMelech — the wisest of all men, made his greatest mistake of marrying Pharao's daughter, after his Rabbi, Shimi ben Gera, was no longer present.

So what does G-d want from us now? With all the antisemitism, upheaval, and fear , what is the message? G-d wants us to recognize that we are in Exile. He wants us to realize that we depend on Him, and only Him. And until we truly hear that message… He will keep reminding us.

## THE ART OF FIGHTING OUR INNER ESAV

The story of Yaakov battling Esav is not just ancient history. Inside each of us are Yaakov and Esav voices. Every test in life is a struggle between the two: The Esav voice focuses only on short-term gain, with no concept of long-term consequences, justice, or truth. The Yaakov voice counters this by fighting for truth, justice, and long-term perspective, recognizing that every action has a reaction.



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We can read the parasha as a story of the past, or we can view Yaakov's dealings with Esav as a battle plan to fight the Yetzer Hara in our own lives. Here are twelve key lessons:

1. Have a Plan. The Shaarei Teshuva teaches that regret without a concrete plan for change is incomplete. If one falls again but had a plan, the second failure does not combine with the first. Yaakov didn't just face Esav; he made a plan. To overcome your yetzer hara, identify your vulnerabilities and plan practical steps to address them.

2. Send Your Angels First. Yaakov sent angels ahead to prepare for Esav. How do we send "angels" to fight the yetzer hara? Judaism teaches that burning desires create angel—for good or bad. Build strong, positive desires for Torah learning, enjoying mitzvot, living modestly. These "angels" pave the way for victory.

3. Sometimes, Give the Yetzer Hara a Gift. Yaakov gave Esav gifts to pacify him. At times, you need to negotiate with your yetzer hara to gain control: Internet Use: If filters are blocking necessary access, consult a rabbi for a controlled alternative. For safety, have someone watch alongside you. News Obsession: Make a deal: "I'll check the news after I finish my Daf or Amud of learning." Addictions: Under guidance (e.g., an addiction counselor), some cases require gradual steps. Controlled gambling or substance intake may be a "gift to the inner Esav" to prevent sliding into worse habits while preparing for full recovery. Even Yom Kippur reflects this idea: we send a "gift"—the Azazel goat—to pacify negative forces so we can focus on prayer.

4. Pray for Success. Yaakov davened before meeting Esav, recognizing that he could not succeed alone. Fighting the yetzer hara requires Divine help. Pray for miracles, strength, and clarity to overcome temptations.

5. Be Ready for War—and Know When to Run. Yaakov prepared for battle and split his camp, ready to cut losses if necessary. Sometimes, this is the only way to defeat the yetzer hara: firm boundaries, say "No" with conviction. Run Away: When controlled measures fail, it's time to escape completely. If filters don't work, leave the internet, until you have a filter you can't get around. If controlled gambling isn't helping, drop it entirely. Cut your losses, don't chase them, if you want a chance to save your future. Sometimes, surrendering the failed past is necessary to build a successful future.

6. Bowing to Your Inner Esav – Recognize Your Limits. Yaakov humbled himself before Esav, saying, "I am your servant." This teaches us to recognize our limitations—a powerful tool against the yetzer hara. Sometimes, humility is the key to defeating the Inner Esav. Pride fuels the yetzer hara, but admitting weakness dismantles it. Say: "I'm not perfect, but I'll keep trying." A strong person knows when and where her is weak. Don't deny it: If alcohol, chocolate, drugs, social media, gambling, or overeating are stronger than you, don't pretend you can handle them. Instead, admit these things are dangerous for you and act accordingly. Only then can you take the proper steps to deal with them.

7. Don't Wake the Sleeping Dog- Yaakov sent angels to investigate Esav—a move our Rabbis criticize. By checking on Esav, Yaakov "woke up the sleeping dog." Don't test your limits. Don't see how strong your filters are by trying to bypass them. Don't experiment with things others have abused, thinking you'll be immune. You may awaken an "inner Esav" you're not prepared to fight. Hashem will give you the strength when the test comes—not before. There's no need to "check the coast" for dangers that haven't arrived yet.

8. Alone and in the Dark – Prime Moments for the Yetzer Hara: Yaakov was injured by Esav's angel during the night and when he was alone. The yetzer hara attacks strongest when we are alone, as isolation weakens us. Tiredness and exhaustion leave us vulnerable. If you know you will face a challenge, ensure you are well-rested and surrounded by people who support you. Don't face inner Esav when you are alone in the dark.



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9. Hitbodedut (Meditation) and Preparation Before the Fight. Before wrestling Esav's angel, Yaakov spent time alone. This solitude was not isolation alone—it was preparation. To overcome the yetzer hara, take time for Hitbodedut, or quiet reflection and meditation. Time alone means time for Mussar self-improvement through Torah teachings. Winning life's battles requires introspection and preparation before the fight begins.

10. Reject Labels: Esav called Yaakov a trickster: "ויעקבני זה פעמיים—This tricked me twice." Esav referenced the pot of lentils Yaakov used to acquire the firstborn rights, the same pot Yaakov later used to bring food to Yitzchak receive Yitzchak's blessings. This "label" stuck to Yaakov. Even Yaakov suggested to Rachel that he can overcome Lavan's trickery with his own. Even Leah justified tricking Yaakov on their wedding night, saying, that you Yaakov taught me to trick, since you told your father, "I am Esav, your firstborn."

When Yaakov defeated Esav's angel, he refused to let the angel go until he received a blessing. The angel didn't bless Yaakov directly—he renamed him Yisrael. How is changing Yaakov's name considered a blessing?

ישר means "straight" or "upright", and not עקב, which means a trickster or cheat. Esav's angel gave Yaakov the greatest blessing, an identity free from negative labels of the past! The inner Esav labels us—faker, loser, disgrace, and we suffer from Inner Esav labels for years!!! But when we pass life's tests, each victory over the inner Esavs, our weaknesses and past struggles become our strengths. The labels fade, and we are crowned with victory.

11. Torah Study – The Ultimate Weapon: Yaakov told Esav, "עם לבן גרתי"—I lived with Lavan. Our Rabbis explain that "גרתי" has the same letters as "תרי"ג" (613), symbolizing Yaakov's commitment to all 613 mitzvot throughout his stay by Uncle Lavan's house.

How could Yaakov claim to have kept 613 mitzvot while in Lavan's house? After all, he wasn't living in Eretz Yisrael and he married two sisters, which is prohibited by Torah law?!

The answer is profound: Torah study itself counts as fulfilling the mitzvot. When you learn about a mitzvah, Hashem considers it as if you performed it. Torah study is the ultimate defense against the yetzer hara. בראתי יצר הרע בראתי לו תורה תבלין But there's a condition—modesty. Yaakov didn't boast, saying "I kept the 613 mitzvot." Instead, he hinted at his dedication to Torah study, subtly. גרתי, which only hints to תריג. If you want Torah to fight your inner Esav, learn consistently, and don't flaunt it.

12. Trust Hashem, Not Over-Defense: Yaakov hid Dinah in a box so Esav wouldn't see her, fearing he might want her as a wife. The Rabbis teach that Yaakov was punished for this; Dinah later fell into Shechem's hands. Why was Yaakov punished? Aren't we taught to protect our children from bad influences? The answer is subtle: Yaakov wasn't punished for hiding Dinah but for over-defending. On his lofty level, he was expected to trust Hashem more and rely less on physical defenses. As we know, Yaakov himself criticized Shimon and Levi for their self-defense in Shechem, calling it "the tools of Esav—כלי חמס מכרתיהם." When dealing with the yetzer hara, excessive self-defense can backfire. The best defense is prayer, and trust in Hashem. Torah Study fills your life with spiritual strength. Sometimes, taking a passive approach—rather than over-fortifying—is the most powerful strategy. When you try too hard to protect yourself, your spiritual energy levels drop.

These 12 lessons teach us how to face our inner Esav, the yetzer hara. Yaakov's struggles remind us that we are stronger than we think, and with Hashem's help, we can win every battle. Confront the yetzer hara strategically—through planning, humility, introspection, Torah study, and prayer—and transform your challenges into opportunities for growth. Whether it's planning, sending "angels," negotiating, praying, or running away, we can learn how to fight our Inner Esav from this week's Parasha!



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## THE ART OF LIVING WITH AUTHENTICITY

The word of the year 2023 for the Miriam Webster dictionary is "authentic". People are searching for the truth on the internet, in the news, trying to see behind all the fake news. People are done with Artificial Intelligence, artificially made pictures in the news... People are living and posting artificial lives, and portray their best artificial self. The more we look for authenticity, and challenge the fake, the more we appreciate the real thing. And this brings us to the real question: When we say to G-d, three times a day, כי בך בטחנו ועל חסדך הגדול באמת נשענו, in You we trust, and we really rely and depend on Your great kindness! - do we really mean it? Are we authentic?

In the prayer of Amidah, we are not allowed to lean on anything, that, if taken away, we would fall. The same is true with our Bitachon: We are not allowed to rely on IDF, Biden, Bibi, police, FDA, our doctors, our parnassa, the people we love and trust or the justice of non-Jews of the world, acknowledging and knowing with complete clarity that if those elements would be removed, we would fall! The highest level of the ten levels of Bitachon, is to be a Ksil, a fool (see end of Shaar Habitachon in H' Halevovot). The Ksil is the one, who is relying on G-d, without anything that makes sense to rely on, because G-d is not limited to our lexicon of things that we rely on. When we take all of our intelligence and throw it away, as if we were an animal, then G-d saves us. אָדָם־וּבְהֵמָה תוֹשִׁיעַ יְקֹוָק׃ (Tehillim 36;7, see Hullin 5b) This is what the month of Kislev is about: to be that Ksil, that fool.

So, who is really מתיר אסורים? Who is freeing the hostages? G-d is fighting this war, because He is בעל מלחמות! Only He runs the wars! These are words that we say every day, and our heart doesn't even skip a beat when mentioning these words! We care about Musk's opinion, we held our breath until he sided with Israel, because his Twitter/X can change the perspective of the news. But are we holding our breath before we say עושה חדשות, that G-d is the One who Makes the actual news each morning??!

One of the signs of the generation before Mashiach is האמת נעדרת, the truth is concealed, hard to find, hard to know. Everyone wants to know the truth, the authentic news, what is really going on! Living in Israel, in my apartment in Bayit Vegan, I will tell you that these are the most unique times Israel ever had! We have never before had "*no politics"*! No one in the government is disagreeing now! They have all just proved to the entire country that they are powerless, and that as a nation, we can ***only rely on G-d***! That is the authentic news! That פוליטיקה, Politics, is the same numerical value as עמלק, Amalek! The way the politicians explain the news, with their personal versions on what's happening, only confuses us. Since the beginning of the war, no politicians are expressing their opinions, because no one cares what they think anymore! They are all just a bunch of clowns! Their wall at the border was the world's biggest joke! אִם־יְקֹוָק לֹא־יִשְׁמָר־עִיר שָׁוְא שָׁקַד שׁוֹמֵר *If YKVK does not watch over a city, the watchman who is working so hard to watch it is wasting his time!* (Tehillim 127;1) G-d blinded the strongest Cybercountry in the world, when Hamas was plotting this for a looonnnggg time, just a kilometer away! It is not that they are responsible or irresponsible; it is that *no one* can be responsible! Allow me to explain!

A fundamental axiom of authentic faith is that nothing bad can happen to you, if G-d does not let it. As Yosef told his brothers, who threw him into a pit of snakes and scorpions, who sold him naked as a slave for the price of shoes, who took him away from learning Shas with his father. ("זקנים – זרעים קדשים נשים ישועות (נזיקין) מועד". Baal Haturim. He had not yet learned Taharot, for it was not appropriate to learn the laws of family purity, as he was not yet of marriageable age.) The brothers lied to their father while they actually sold him to Egypt, to a place of immorality, where he was going to either fail the test with the wife of Potiphar or go to jail for 12 years… But at the end of the story, when the brothers were afraid that Yosef, as ruler of Egypt, would kill them… Yosef



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said something that is UNBELIEVABLE! *YOU DID NOT DO ANYTHING TO ME*! וְאַתֶּם חְשַׁבְתֶּם עָלַי רָעָה אֱלֹהִים חְשָׁבָהּ לְטֹבָה (Bereshit 50;20) You did not mess up my life, because G-d did not allow you to hurt me, in the slightest!

The only thing that can really hurt you are the angels that you have created from the sins you've done, that you did not do Teshuva for. That is the authentic truth. What happens, for real, is that we all have bad angels we created from sin, surrounding us. יִפֹּל מִצִּדְּךָ֥ אֶ֝לֶף וּרְבָבָ֗ה מִימִינֶֽךָ (Psalms 91;7) *You have on your right side, 10,000 bad angels, and 1,000 bad angels on your left side!* The transgressions for negative commandments are 1/10th the amount of positive commandments that we did not keep, or did not do with our whole hearts! (The left side, is represented by Gevurah, which is Negative Commandments, and the right side, is represented by Hessed, which is Positive Commandments!) King David prayed that all these bad angels would have no impact on us, because an authentic Jew knows that G-d won't let something happen to me, that is not supposed to happen!

Yaakov told Esav, I am not afraid of you! עִם־לָבָן גַּרְתִּי I lived with Lavan, and I kept the Taryag, the 613 Commandments! You can't touch me! The passuk that says וַיִּירָא יַעֲקֹב מְאֹד וַיֵּצֶר לוֹ , that expresses the fears of Yaakov, the commentators explain that fear, on a different level: Yaakov was afraid not that Esav had the power to hurt him, but that maybe he was susceptible to getting hurt, because, 1. He did not respect his parents for 20 years 2. He might hurt Esav, and then Yitzhak would be upset with him, or he might hurt Esav's people 3. His children might get hurt 4. He might have been out of line by flattering Esav, calling him his master, and calling himself, Yaakov, "Your servant".

But then, Esav said to Yaakov, "If so, if you are not afraid, let us fight it out!" To that, Yaakov answered, וְאֵחָר עַד־עָתָּה *And I delay to fight you, until "Attah".* (Baal Haturim) The Baal Haturim explains that this word Attah, means its acronym: Yaakov said, I will fight you in the End of Time, after the ע- 70 years of Babylon, after the ת- 400 years of Egypt, and after the ה – at the end of the 5,000 years. In the days of Mashiach, Yaakov will fight Esav and win. Until then, we don't fight. All we do is three things. Prayer, Gifts, and Defense (which meant to Yaakov to run away and cut your losses).

The second meaning of the word Attah, is that עתה, also, is always a reference to Teshuva.(B' Rabba 21; 65) When the Jewish people will do teshuva at the end of days, only this will bring the Mashiach, and only then, Yaakov will be willing to fight Esav. (Rambam Teshuva 7;8) The pesukim are clear, that there will be two levels of the Redemption. First, the Jews will begin to have an awakening. בַּצַּר לְךָ֔ וּמְצָא֥וּךָ כֹּ֖ל הַדְּבָרִ֣ים הָאֵ֑לֶּה בְּאַחֲרִ֣ית הַיָּמִ֗ים וְשַׁבְתָּ֙ עַד־יְקֹוָ֣ק אֱלֹהֶ֔יךָ וְשָׁמַעְתָּ֖ בְּקֹלֽוֹ: (Devarim 4;30) And וְשַׁבְתָּ֙ עַד־יְקֹוָ֣ק אֱלֹהֶ֔יךָ וְשָׁמַעְתָּ֖ בְּקֹלֽוֹ כְּכֹ֣ל אֲשֶׁר־אָנֹכִ֥י מְצַוְּךָ֖ הַיּ֑וֹם אַתָּ֣ה וּבָנֶ֔יךָ בְּכָל־ לְבָבְךָ֖ וּבְכָל־נַפְשֶֽׁךָ. (Devarim 30; 2) And only then, G-d will bring us all together: (ג) וְשָׁ֞ב יְקֹוָ֣ק אֱלֹהֶ֗יךָ אֶת־שְׁבוּתְךָ֙ וְרִחֲמֶ֔ךָ וְשָׁ֗ב וְקִבֶּצְךָ֙ מִכָּל־ הָ֣עַמִּ֔ים אֲשֶׁ֥ר הֱפִיצְךָ֖ יְקֹוָ֣ק אֱלֹהֶ֑יךָ שָֽׁמָּה: And then finally, in the times of Mashiach, G-d will bring us to an entirely different level of Teshuva: (ו) וּמָ֨ל יְקֹוָ֤ק אֱלֹהֶ֙יךָ֙ אֶת־לְבָבְךָ֔ וְאֶת־לְבַ֖ב זַרְעֶ֑ךָ לְאַהֲבָ֗ה אֶת־יְקֹוָ֤ק אֱלֹהֶ֙יךָ֙ בְּכָל־לְבָבְךָ֔ וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁךָ֖ לְמַ֥עַן חַיֶּֽיךָ:

One of the signs of Mashiach is exactly that: he will make the whole world do Teshuva. ואם יעמוד מלך מבית דוד הוגה בתורה ועוסק במצוות כדוד אביו, כפי תורה שבכתב ושבעל פה, ויכוף כל ישראל לילך בה ולחזק בדקה, וילחם מלחמות ה', הרי זה בחזקת שהוא משיח, אם עשה והצליח ונצח כל האומות שסביביו ובנה מקדש במקומו וקבץ נדחי ישראל הרי זה משיח בודאי. ואם לא הצליח עד כה או נהרג בידוע שאינו זה שהבטיחה עליו תורה והרי הוא ככל מלכי בית דוד השלמים הכשרים שמתו (Rambam Melachim 11;4) Because the way we fight our enemies, is through Teshuva. This is a spiritual war, not a physical one.

Hamas first wanted this attack to be on the night of the Seder. When they saw that IDF was ready for them, they pushed it off till Simhat Torah. Both times, Nissan and Tishrei, are times of Redemption. (Rosh Hashana 11b) Everything that happened, on Oct. 7 was predetermined from way before, Oct. 7. The Shibolei Haleket writes, why, on Minha, of Shabbat we say וַאֲנִי תְפִלָּתִי־לְךָ֥ יְקֹוָ֗ק עֵת



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רְצוֹן אֱלֹקִים בְּרֹב־חַסְדֶּךָ עֲנֵנִי בֶּאֱמֶת יִשְׁעֶךָ: *And I, my prayer, to You YKVK, of a time of Will, Elokim, in Your great kindness, answer me, with Your genuine salvation!*" וכתב בשיבולי הלקט (ס' קכו') בשם רבי נתן ב"ר מכיר, למה אומרים במנחה של שבת "ואני תפילתי" בשביל שצרה אחרונה שלא נהייתה מעולם כמוה, תהיה בעקבי הקץ תשעה חדשים, שנאמר "לכן יתנם עד עת יולדה ילדה". והיום האחרון תכבד הצרה, מכל שלפניה, ויום שבת יהיה וכל יום תהיה הצרה. עד עת מנחה ואז יהיו ישראל נענין במנחה ומיד יבא משיח ויושיענו, הדא הוא דכתיב "בעת רצון עניתיך וביום ישועה עזרתיך" והיינו דכתיב "בשובה ונחת תושעון" כלומר ביום נחת ( שבת) תגאלו ותפילת מנחה קורא עת רצון (שהרי אליהו לא נענה אלא בתפילת מנחה שנאמר "ויהי בעלות המנחה"). *The beginning of the times of Mashiach, there will be a great attack on the Jews on Shabbat, one like there had never been before! This will be in the end of days, nine months before the end. The whole Shabbat day will be a day of sorrow, until Minha, and then at Minha, G-d will answer us! And after that, Mashiah will come!* This also explains, why after Shabbat we are to sing, Eliyahu Hanavi, that he will come and give us the good tidings that Mashiach is coming tomorrow! And this is also the reason why we say ובא לציון גואל, that the redeemer will come to Zion, on Minha of Shabbat. Because, since the Rabbis teach the laymen, in the class before Minha on Shabbat, and the Rabbis are supposed to infuse them with faith that Mashiach will come, at the end of their Shabbat pre-Minha class, each week! (Abudraham)

The more we talk about Mashiach, the faster he will come! The only reason why he is not here yet is because not enough people are asking, "Why isn't he here yet?!?

## THE ART OF BEING A FIGHTER

One of the strangest things that Yaakov ever did was to bow down to his brother Esav seven times. This was not just an ordinary meeting between two sibling rivals. This was symbolic of the meeting between the power of good, of light, of everything G-dly, and the power of bad, of darkness, of everything that was anti-Torah. The way Yaakov dealt with this situation would be a guideline for all future generations. The Baal Haturim tells us that Haman is hinted to in the first letters of the words, הַצִּילֵנִי נָא מִיַּד אָחִי מִיַּד עֵשָׂו . Yaakov knew that the way in which he would come out successfully from this meeting with his brothers would be the model for how all his future generations would be successful in dealing with all evil, antisemitism and evil inclinations. So, why did he bow down? And, why seven times?

The Midrash tells us that Yaakov was telling Esav that even if he would fall in front of him now, seven times, he trusted that G-d would stand him on his feet, again. As King Solomon wrote in Mishlei, *For seven times a Tzaddik will fall, and get up.* (B"R 78;8)

As I write this, playing in the background is the Yaakov Shwekey song, FIGHTER. *I've been through everything, and after all I've been through, nothing can push me down away from the life I choose! I know I am a FIGHTER! A life worth fighting for! This is what I am made for! This is what I came for!*

If you were born a Jew, you were born to fight. This is who you are, as a Yisrael. This is the root of the word Yisrael. Yaakov was given the name Yisrael by the angel of Esav, after Yaakov overcame him. וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יַעֲקֹב יֵאָמֵר עוֹד שִׁמְךָ כִּי אִם־יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי־שָׂרִיתָ עִם־אֱלֹקִים וְעִם־אֲנָשִׁים וַתּוּכָל: And he said, "Your name shall no longer be Yaacob, but Yisrael, because you have struggled with [an angel of] G-d and with men, and you have prevailed." The word *sarita* means you fought, you struggled. (See Onkelos, T. Yonatan, Radak, and others. Different than Rashi.)

The million-dollar question is, why did the angel call Yaakov Yisrael, which means that you are a fighter, and not Vatuchal, that you have prevailed, that you are a winner? Aren't we to commemorate



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the victory, not the battle? Why is Yaakov named Yisrael, a fighter, and not a winner?

The answer is that whether or not you win what you are fighting for in life, is not your business. Leave the winning up to G-d. The essence of the Jew is that he is a fighter, Yisrael. No matter if you are fighting Esav, Goliath, the Greeks, your Yetzer Hara, or an addiction, all you can hold yourself accountable for, is that you continue fighting.

The Yetzer Hara has seven names, for his job is to come at you from seven different angles. שטן, טמא, שונא, אבן, מכשול, ערל, רע, צפוני (See Sukkah 52b) He is an angel, and you are flesh and blood. Even if you think you have defeated him, he attacks from a new front and tests you again. The yetzer will provide endless tests. According to the Messilat Yesharim, every single thing in this world is a test. (Chapter 1) If you are poor, you will have the test of poverty. If you are rich, you will have the tests of wealth, which are more difficult than the tests of poverty.

You can never score a victory over your Yetzer Hara without G-d. אלמלא הקב"ה עוזרו אין יכול לו (see Kiddushin 30b) And the greatest battle the Yetzer Hara will fight against you is preventing you from learning the amount of Torah on your level. Only Yaakov needed to fight the angel, and not Avraham or Yitzhak. Because Yaakov stood for Torah study, while Avraham stood for Kindness, and Yitzhak stood for Self-control. The hardest thing to collect Tzeddaka for is for Torah of Yeshivot and the modesty taught in Bet Yaakov schools. Because the Yetzer Hara knows that the only way to fight him, is through the Torah of men and the modesty of the women. (Vilna Gaon)

When we thank G-d on Hanuka and Purim in our Al Hanissim prayer, there is but a small difference between the Al Hanissim prayer of the Sephardi and Ashkenazi custom. The Sephardi reads, ועל הנחמות, "…and on the consolations." We thank G-d for consoling us, after we have won the war. The Ashkenazi version reads, instead, ועל המלחמות, "…and on the wars." They thank G-d for the war, itself.

How could that make any sense? I could understand thanking G-d for winning the war, but for the war itself??

The answer is that we thank G-d for the very fact that we are able to fight the war of truth, even if we can't win. We thank G-d, for the very fact that we are fighters, even if we are losing. The Rambam wrote, in a letter, that the Jewish people are compared to the dust of the earth, for good reason. Just like the dust of the earth that everyone tramples on it, and everyone considers it worthless. But, in the end, when a man dies, dust covers him. So, too, Yisrael: all the nations will enslave, abuse and accuse them. But in the end, the Jews will get the honor they deserve. They will come out on top. (Torat Moshe Bereshit 13;16)

Antisemitism reached new heights in 2021. One of the greatest wonders of antisemitism is that when a Jew does something "wrong", the whole Jewish nation is blamed! No other nationality is blamed for the actions of just one of its members. If a black man, a Mexican, a Chinese, or Russian does something immoral, no one would say that the whole people are the same. The pretext for Kristallnacht, November 9, and the pretext to the mass murder of 6 million Jews, was the shooting in Paris, on November 7, of the German diplomat Ernst vom Rath by a Polish-Jewish student, Herschel Grynszpan. Only one Jew! One Jew kills one Nazi in Paris, and this sparks the killing of 6 million Jews! Why are all the Jews responsible for the actions of one Jew?

When the angel blessed Yaakov that he would be called Yisrael, he was telling him the following: A Jew is never a lone individual. You are not just Yaakov. You are Yisrael. All Jews are fighting the same fight: the fight for G-d, for morality, for G-dliness, connecting Heaven and Earth. You are all part of the same team. And in the end, the Jewish team will come out on top. After 2000 years, we got back the Land of Israel, just three years after the Holocaust: 1945- 1948.

The battle will never be over, until the time of Mashiach, when G-d will slaughter the Yetzer Hara



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in front of the whole world. (Sukkah 52b) But, until then, the way that the Yetzer Hara brings down the Jew is by making the Jew feel that he has won a victory over his Yetzer Hara, forever. This is an impossibility. How many times do people get angry at themselves for giving in to their temptations? They say to themselves, "How could it be that I fell so low? I thought I was above that! I thought I was a Tzaddik!" Our Rabbis tell us to look at ourselves as Benoni, and that every single day, before you wake up each morning, the Yetzer Hara makes himself stronger than you . יצרו של אדם מתגבר עליו בכל יום ומבקש המיתו The fact that you fell is expected. People succumb to their inclinations. The question is just, do you know how to take a punch? Are you getting up again to fight?

## THE ART OF SOCIAL DISTANCING (2020)

Mental health in Covidland is essential. Even if the Covid numbers are fake news, the emotional damage is not. People have fallen into problematic behaviors such as drinking, smoking, overeating, hyper-focusing on the news, poor sleeping patterns, helplessness, hopelessness, lack of motivation to tend to personal hygiene or care, or to return calls and messages from family and friends. If you are having trouble with any of these, you are more normal than you think. Covidland is home to the world's greatest emotional rollercoasters.

Social distancing, being alone, is more challenging for some than others. As we enter the "December to Remember," if you are feeling lonely, or if you know someone who is feeling lonely, PICK UP THE PHONE!!! The reason why the Shamash is the highest of all the candles, even though it is not even a holy candle, is because it lights up the rest of the candles. It could be that you are not that important, that G-dly. But if you figure out a way to light up the night for other lonely people, you are both important and G-dly.

A close friend was very sick and alone in the hospital. He did not want anyone asking him how he is doing anymore, as he fell deeper and deeper into depression. The hospital was not allowing people to visit because of Covid regulations, so I asked for a virtual call. I knew that if I could make him smile in the few minutes he would give me, I would deserve my Olam Haba medal. The second he saw me, I smiled at the camera and said, "I miss you!! (Pause) It is harder to reach you than it is to reach President Trump! (Pause. Cracked a smile.) He said, "Yosef! I miss you too!" (Pause) I told him that a Rabbi is going around the hospital visiting the sick. He was asked by one of the elderly patients to sit at his bedside. The Rabbi noticed that there was a plate of peanuts on the table next to the older man. During his visit, the Rabbi started noshing from the nuts. The nuts tasted pretty good, and the Rabbi, slowly but surely, finished the plate. Before leaving, he apologized for finishing the peanuts. The man said not to worry. He could not eat the peanuts anyway. He had no teeth. Those were chocolate-covered peanuts that his granddaughter sent him to suck off the chocolate! (Endless laughter) I said, "You don't have to be hesitant to answer my virtual calls. I won't eat your peanuts." (Endless laughter) I witnessed, with my own eyes, how laughter is truly the best medicine. My friend edged out of depression from that point on, and before I could say "Corona," he was released from the hospital. I felt like a shamash; I felt on top of the world, the World to Come, of course. I would not sell the merit of that virtual call for all the money in the world.

The year 2020 will be recorded in history as one massive, extended, global disruption: A global pandemic, prolonged economic uncertainty, political confusion, distrust of the news, riots, and protests. But most of all, 2020 will be remembered as a time that forced people to spend time alone and disrupted the way people think.

Being alone, a person gets a lot of time to think. Your mind can be your greatest friend, but for some, it can also be the greatest enemy. In 11 studies, people chose to do mundane activities or



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even administer electric shocks to themselves instead of being left alone in a room for 6 to 15 minutes with their thoughts and do nothing but think. People would rather do something than nothing, even if that something is negative or harmful. We are so busy constantly running, maybe, because psychologically, we don't want to stop and think. The smartphone is probably the most powerful tool ever created to prevent a person from having time alone or time with family. And so are the other addictions mentioned above.

What are we supposed to think about, anyway, when we have so much time alone? Divorced, *baalei teshuvas*, people who are struggling to find a spouse, the elderly - the list of the lonely goes on. How can a person make time spent alone a beautiful time? One successful, normal, extremely lonely person told me that he hears the walls screaming silence when he is home alone! How can one cope with that?

After Yaakov crossed over *Maavar Yabok*, he came back for some lost jugs. וַיִּוָּתֵר יַעֲקֹב לְבַדּוֹ *and Yaakov remained alone*. The Midrash here says something hard for me to even write. Although G-d is incomparable, some Tzaddikim can be likened to Him in certain ways and perform, on a small scale, the miracles that He will perform at the End of days. Eliyahu Hanavi revived the dead and stopped the rain; Elisha the prophet revived the dead, helped a barren woman get pregnant, etc. Yaakov is compared to G-d in the sense that he was alone, just like G-d will be alone at the End of Days, as all evil will dissipate. וְנִשְׂגָּב יְקֹוָק לְבַדּוֹ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא. *And YKVK will remain alone on that day.*

What is the meaning of this comparison between Yaakov's being alone and G-d's being alone? And why does the Midrash single out Eliyahu and Elisha as the Tzaddikim likened to G-d on a small scale? It seems that there is greatness in being alone, and great things happen when great people are alone. When a person is alone, he can connect to his *neshama*, connect to G-d. A lonely woman told me she could not stand being alone at home with her husband anymore. She could not stand the sound of his breathing. "But who is deciding that he should breathe? G-d! אתה נפחת בי ואתה משמרה בקרבי. *You blew (my neshama) into me, and You are guarding my soul and breath in me.* Every time you hear him breathing, you are observing G-d with you, in the room, breathing your husband!"

When Yaakov overcame the Angel and was alone again at sunrise, the passuk says, וַיִּזְרַח־לוֹ הַשָּׁמֶשׁ *and the sun rose for him*. The commentators ask, what does that mean, the sun rose for Yaakov? The sun rises for everyone! The answer is that only through being alone can you realize that when G-d brings up the sun, He brings it up for you! When you are alone, you realize on a deeper level that G-d is so close, so personal, so real, and so easy to relate to!

Of course, the point here is not about turning into an isolated monk. It is about being comfortable with the time you choose or have to be alone. People who have healthy and successful marriages and relationships know that you need to split your time into three. Time together, time with others, and time alone. Avraham, Yaakov, the 12 tribes, Moshe, Shaul, and David all chose to be shepherds because shepherding gives you a lot of time to be with yourself, with your *neshama*, with G-d. And there is nothing more empowering than that. This is why the Midrash mentioned earlier, singles out Eliyahu and Elisha. They were masters of meditation and *hitbodedut*. From them we learn how important it is to be alone, with G-d. (See Rabenu Bachye Bereshit 46;32)

When Yaakov was alone on *Har Hamoriah*, he said, אָכֵן יֵשׁ יְקֹוָק בַּמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה וְאָנֹכִי לֹא יָדָעְתִּי.

R' Shimshon from Astripoli (1600-1648) explains this with a Kabalistic twist. Four חיות הקודש, Angels called *Hayot*, carry the Holy Throne of G-d. The shapes of the faces of these four Angels are אריה *Lion*, כרוב *Cherub*, נשר *Eagle or vulture*, אדם *Face of Man*. (Yehezkel 10;14) The Talmud tells us that the face of Man is Yaakov's face. (Hulin 91b) Until Yaakov's dream, Yaakov only knew of the three other faces, א'ריה, כ'רוב, נ'שר. That is why he said, אכן I know that G-d is here and that the faces of the angels are of a Lion, Cherub, and Eagle, the acronym of them all being אכן. But I



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never knew that my face appears upon the Holy Throne, ואנכי לא ידעתי, א'ריה, נ'שר, כ'רוב, י'עקב Alone with G-d, Yaakov had the most empowering experience.

When you have time alone, you get to know yourself. As you discover your purpose and what you are truly passionate about, you recharge as your purpose becomes greater than your fears. You become empowered to do what you need to do in life without the need for validation or approval. You begin to understand where you should invest your time, money, effort. You find out what you are good at and what you are not good at. It builds your confidence and empowers you to make a bigger impact on your world.

Selfie steps for time spent being alone:

1. Count your blessings. Ask yourself what you have to be grateful about, in the greatest detail. Include gratitude of past, present, and future. Ask how your blessings obligate you and to whom they obligate you.

2. Challenge yourself to uncover your beliefs and thinking which have been inaccurate, regarding past, present, and future. Examples: Inaccurate Fears. Frustrations. Failures.

3. What negative experiences did you inaccurately perceive as Permanent, Personal, Pervasive.

3. What are just some of the endless choices and options that G-d gives you to make a better future for yourself, your family, your world?

4. What is in your control, and what is not; how can you accept what is not in your control? What are some of the infinite options for G-d to make things better?

5. Do NOT think negative thoughts when you are alone, like: 1. Blaming others. 2. Guilt. 3. How stuck you are. 4. What you want and can't have. Just as you would distance yourself from negative friends, it is equally important to distance yourself from your own negative inner voice.

## THE ART OF RESILIENCE

People that can keep their calm have what psychologists call resilience, or an ability to cope with problems and setbacks. A loss of a job, a breakup of a relationship, health issues, difficulties raising children... We can't prevent such things from happening, but we can improve the way we react to them. When facing adversity, there are only two options: grow or suffer. You can fall into depression, or come out much stronger. It is all a question of attitude. Successful people, with their positive attitude, choose to grow. They choose to bounce back, find calm in crisis and chaos, and reinvent hope, options and solutions. Resilience is a trait clearly found in our Patriarchs, Avraham and Yaakov.

After Rachel died and was buried in Beth Lechem, the passuk tells us, וַיִּסַּע יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֵּט אָהֳלָה מֵהָלְאָה לְמִגְדַּל־עֵדֶר: (Bereshit 35, 21) *And Yisrael traveled, and he pitched his tent past Migdal Eder.* Yaakov did not sulk in sorrow after losing his dearest wife Rachel, the woman he gave up so much for. He did not consider his mourning a long or a last "stop", but continued traveling on in life.

The Alshich asks, what is the importance in mentioning that after Rachel's death, Yaakov moved his tent *past Migdal Eder*? And what is special about Migdal Eder that the Torah finds it important to mention the place by name, especially if Yaakov did not pitch his tent there, but just passed there?



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The Mei Shiloach learns from this that when faced by adversity, Yaakov took it as an opportunity to grow. "Migdal" is a tower fortress; Yaakov grew on a personal level by making an emotional fortress of acceptance and faith. The Torah praised Yaakov for this superhuman feat of having overcome his emotions by according him here the angelic title of "Yisrael," and not Yaakov.

Yaakov emerged stronger from the depths of his sorrow: Rachel was only 36 when she passed away! For seven years, Yaakov had worked for her deceitful father in order to marry her - from the time she was fourteen until their marriage, when she was twenty-one. Rachel was barren for seven years. Then, tragically, when Yosef was only eight years old, Rachel died in childbirth, with Binyamin.

What makes people great is not how they deal with success, but how they deal with difficulties. Yaakov's life did not get better after losing Rachel. Before Yaakov got back home, his mother Rivka died. Rivka was buried at night, with no one from the family there to be at her burial. Yitzchak was blind, Yaakov was forced to leave home at the age 63, and 40 years later, he had not yet returned home. Rivka's passing is not mentioned in the Torah for her burial was done in secrecy. They buried Rivka at night to prevent Esav from knowing about it and attending the funeral, so that people would not curse the wicked man's mother. How sad! Yaakov did not even have a chance to see his mother before she died. He was still on his way back home. And then, within a short time after Rivka died, Leah died, at the age 45. All this did not break Yaakov. Instead, it made Yaakov more resilient.

How does one become more resilient? How do people go through hard times? Viktor Frankl wrote, in his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, *"Man can be taken away from everything except one: the last of the human liberties, the choice of the personal attitude he must adopt towards his destiny in order to develop his own path."* No one can take your choice of attitude away from you. Choice of attitude was the only thing Holocaust survivors had to hold onto to go through the Holocaust.

Choosing a positive attitude when everything else is taken away is no easy task. Yaakov needed to travel past Migdal Eder; he needed to meditate on accepting G-d's Will with love, and to pass this hard time by becoming a *fortress* against frustration, and *towering* above it all. This is the power of Migdal Eder. And in the merit of Yaakov's faith while in this place, something amazing will happen there. Migdal Eder, which is near Beth Lechem and Efrat, will be the place where Mashiach will reveal himself!!! (See Targum Yonatan) Because salvation always comes from the place of resilience.

The path to greatness is paved with resilience. Resilience made Yaakov great, winning him the title Yisrael. And only resilience is what won Avraham the title of Chief, נָשִׂיא אֱלֹקִים אַתָּה בְּתוֹכֵנוּ (Bereshit 23;6). The last of the ten tests of Avraham Avinu was that he bought a grave at a high price for his wife Sarah from Efron. (Ramban; Rabenu Yonah) What exactly was this test? And how can this test even be classified a test, after Avraham had proven himself by a much greater test, the *Akedat Yitzhak*?

The passuk says, וַיָּקָם אַבְרָהָם מֵעַל פְּנֵי מֵתוֹ וַיְדַבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי חֵת לֵאמֹר: *Avraham got up from upon his dead, and talked to the sons of Chet, saying.* What is the purpose in the passuk telling us that Avraham "got up" from his dead wife Sarah? What else? Did he speak to the *Bnei Chet* while he was still on the floor, crying?

R Yerucham from Mir answered that the purpose of this passuk is to stress that Avraham did not get stuck on this sad time, but got up. He wiped his tears away, and he spoke to them as he would speak as if nothing had happened. This moment, was one of the most emotionally intense moments in Avraham's life. He just aced the test of *Akedat Yitzhak*, and now, he faced the sudden, tragic death of his *Eshet Chayil*! And to top all this, Avraham needs to purchase land to bury his wife, land that was promised to him by G-d to begin with! But after Avraham eulogizes Sarah with the *Eshet Chayil* and weeps over her death, he gets up and goes on. ויקם אברהם.

Avraham's tenth test was not to see if he would buy a grave or not. The test was not to see if

Avraham could purchase a Land that was promised to him by G-d, without questioning G-d's promise. Avraham was being tested on his choice of attitude, to see if he could stay positive despite the loss he had suffered. Avraham's final test, the only test after *Akeidat Yitzhak*, was the test of resilience. Read the pesukim of how Avraham talked to the people of Chet. You will be surprised to notice how he addresses them in a very respectful, thoughtful and calm manner! Avraham does not say, *Look at what I am going through; have pity on me! This land is promised to me, so stop being so difficult about it!*

Why was this test of Avraham's resilience such an important test? How can this be a test after Avraham had passed the unthinkable challenge of *Akedat Yitzhak*? Because the way you deal with life under duress, the way you deal with people when you are under stress, is the biggest test of who you really are! Our Rabbis teach that there are three things that reveal who a person really is. אדם ניכר בכיסו *the real person is revealed when one gets a trial concerning money*. אדם ניכר בכעסו, *the real person is revealed by the type of response he gives when being slighted.* And אדם ניכר בכוסו, a person is revealed through his "cup," when he is going through a hard time, through mourning כוס של תנחומים. The Man you really are, is revealed via three Mediums. When you are Mad, when you are in Mourning, and when you are going through Monetary stress. (Eruvin 65b) This last test of Avraham, was the test that would reveal who he really was, by testing his resilience. After all, a man is not judged by his successes, but by how many times he falls and gets up again.

One of the greatest skills you can learn in life is how to survive and deal with life's changes, which you did not ask for. We have Patriarchs to learn from the importance of being in total control of our emotions. We can learn from them the art of overcoming feelings of regret, denial and hopelessness. And we can learn from them the importance in preventing negative emotions from stopping us from moving ahead.

Here are the Torah based Selfie- Steps. The self-help steps to master the art of resilience.

1. Accepting and embracing your new reality is the only way to adapt to it. Everything is orchestrated by G-d, and everything is only for our good. Try to find purpose in it all.
2. Thoroughly explore all the options available. G-d opens other doors before He closes the ones you are used to using.
3. Pray with passion. Set reasonable goals and take actions to solve the problem.
4. Eat well. Sleep well. Exercise. Pay attention to your needs, and nurture your *nefesh*. Turn to others for help, support and to share your feelings.
5. Believe in yourself - that G-d put inside you some G-dliness, and that you can deal with and overcome the impossible. "Whether you think you can go on, or you think you can't – you're right."

## UNENTITLEMENT

An interesting question occurred to Rav Yitzhak Zilberstien. A certain philanthropist made a speech about how he made his money. "All my advisors told me not to lose (a certain amount of) money because of Shabbat, but I lost the money anyway. In that merit, I am rich today."

Was this appropriate? Or maybe, a person is not supposed to attribute any success to his/her merit. After all, the passuk tells us אַל־תֹּאמַר בִּלְבָבְךָ בַּהֲדָף יְקֹוָק אֱלֹקיךָ אֹתָם מִלְפָנֶיךָ לֵאמֹר בְּצִדְקָתִי הֱבִיאַנִי יְקֹוָק לָרֶשֶׁת אֶת־הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת: *Do not say in your heart (to yourself), when G-d, your G-d, has driven them (the seven Nations of Canaan) away from before*

*you, saying, in my merit Hashem brought me to inherit the Land…*(Devarim 9;4). From these words, Rabbenu Yonah in his *Shaarei Teshuva* derives the golden rule – (Shaar 3; 9) *A person should not accredit any successes to his/her own merit. But rather, everything that we have is a kindness from G-d…* So, was the speech appropriate, or not?

Rav Zilberstein points out that there is a difference between the between the philanthropists citing his merit and the passuk telling us not to attribute success to our merit. It could be that the problem lies in "saying to yourself." But in public, to inspire other people spiritually, to motivate… that is a different story. (Chashukei Chemed Ketubot 68a)

One of our most difficult challenges is to be truly humble. Humility means that you are not entitled to anything; it is all a kindness from G-d. And what you don't have is also a gift from G-d. So, this week, I was the guinea pig for trying to undo all my feelings of entitlement. I tried to think about all the resentments I have been holding on to. I tried undoing the underlying mistake, and in that way, getting rid of all the negative repercussions resulting from it. The plan was to mentally *unentitle* myself from honor, respect, dignity, rights, smiles, and expectations of a returned favor… And I must say, it was very rough to accept that all I have is kindness from G-d, and that I do not ***deserve*** anything from Him; and to simply let go of all that I thought I was entitled to.

קָטֹנְתִּי מִכֹּל הַחֲסָדִים וּמִכָּל־הָאֱמֶת אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֶת־עַבְדֶּךָ כִּי בְמַקְלִי עָבַרְתִּי אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה וְעַתָּה הָיִיתִי לִשְׁנֵי מַחֲנוֹת: *I am smaller than (unworthy of) all the acts of kindnesses (things I don't deserve) and from all of the truth (things that I deserve) that You have done for Your servant, because I passed over this Jordan river with my Staff alone, and now I am two camps…* (Bereshit 32;11) What do those words mean? According to Rashi, the passuk means, "I received so much from G-d, so much blessing, that I have become small." When one realizes how G-d saves him from danger, or when he realizes how he is blessed by G-d, this makes one feel how truly undeserving he is.

But there is a Hassidic twist to these words. As the Sfat Emet teaches in the name of the Chozeh of Lublin, *even humility is something to be humble about, for it, too, is a kindness from G-d.* And of all the kindnesses of G-d, the greatest is to stop feeling entitled. As the passuk says, קָטֹנְתִּי מִכֹּל הַחֲסָדִים.

At the outset, I was not successful because the feeling of being entitled for so many years built up a lot of muscle. I just got stuck on things from my past. It takes time to free ourselves from resentment and entitlement. If I'd be able to uproot only one thing from my having been brought up in America, it is the feeling of entitlement that infiltrated into my mind/heart/psyche from Western culture. And if there is one thing that I want to preserve from my American upbringing, it is that *other* people *are* entitled to respect, dignity, space, and their spot on line…

So, what is the solution? How do we undo entitlement, before it undoes us? Judaism, of course, has the ancient and eternal solution,-with an emotional/psychological exercise, done three times a day. You see, not only do we learn to pray three times a day from our Patriarchs, we also learn *how* to pray from our Patriarchs. According to Rabbenu Bachye, it is appropriate, befitting, and correct that a person meditate, while praying, on his total dependency on G-d, and how G-d is the Master to whom he is a servant. This is learned from Yaakov's prayer, קָטֹנְתִּי מִכֹּל הַחֲסָדִים: Only after Ya'akov's confession of his utter dependence upon G-d, does he ask Him to be saved from his brother Esav. ONLY AFTER THIS MEDITATION CAN WE OFFER A REQUEST! So many people complain that G-d has not answered their prayers. But real prayer is changing yourself, undoing all of your supposed entitlement. (Sefer HaIkrim 4;18)

The Rabbenu Bachye continues to advise us: Even in times of plenty, to meditate on the periods when we realize how we were totally dependent on G-d, as Yaakov said, that he remembers clearly how he



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started off at the age of 77, with nothing more than his walking staff. Everything was taken by his nephew and student, Elifaz, son of Esav, in order to spare his life. (Nedarim 64; Rashi 29;11) As one of the wealthy first generation Syrian American Jews told me, "They used to call me Banana Boat (a derogatory term for Syrian immigrants and foreigners - Banana is a term for an Asian person living in a Western country, e.g., an Asian American). Now they call me Luxury Liner! But I will never forget that I was once a Banana Boat!"

In the world of American psychology, undoing entitlement is to say that I am not *more* entitled than the other. Here are some signs of entitlement psychologists look for… 1. You expect the same rules that apply to others shouldn't apply to you. For example, other people might need to start at the bottom and work their way up, but you shouldn't have to. 2. You feel massively put upon when other people ask you for small favors, but expect that when you ask people for favors, it requires no big effort, on their part. 3. You expect other people to be more interested in you and what's on your agenda than you're interested in them and what's on their agenda. You see your own interests as more interesting than other people's, and see your goals/dreams as more valid or important than theirs. 4. You disregard rules that are intended for everyone's comfort. For example, you ignore signs to "please do not put your feet on the chairs in public places." 5. You use programs to download music rather than pay for it. Or, you benefit from free services, *shiurim*, content, etc., on public platforms all the time, but never donate during donation drives. 6. You inconvenience others, without thinking. For example, you cancel appointments or reservations repeatedly. Or, you make plans with friends and then cancel without considering that your friend may have organized other plans specially to accommodate you. Or, you run into a store 1 minute before closing, without thinking about the fact you'll be delaying the shop assistant from getting home on time. You think "it's only 5 minutes," without considering that the assistant may have somewhere they need to be. 7. You think it's okay to upset or offend other people. 8. You cheat in environments that are based on reciprocity. For example, you use all the *gemachs* you can, but you don't spend the same amount of time trying to give back. 9. When working in groups, you think you should be the leader or get the most credit. And you don't recognize the contributions of others or the balance of the team. (adapted from Psychology Today – Dr. Alice Boyes)

But the real solution, the only solution is to think out of your box. Not only are we not more entitled than others, but we are not entitled at all! To recognize that whatever we have, even our ability to pray, is a gift, gratis, from Hashem. As we remind ourselves before each prayer, אֲדֹנָי שְׂפָתַי תִּפְתָּח וּפִי יַגִּיד תְּהִלָּתֶךָ: *My Master! Open my lips, and my mouth will say Your prayers!* Without You G-d, I can't even open my lips to praise You!

Of course, it is much easier to say this with our mouths than with our hearts. But we can't afford entitlement beliefs. Entitlement is from the worst traits one can be suffering from. The antonym of entitlement is gratitude – people who feel entitled do not feel grateful. And people who are not grateful are miserable people. And people who are miserable people become bad people.

If only we could meditate in our hearts on what we say with our lips, our social problems would be solved. We would be happier and better people. And all of our prayers would be answered.

## WORK SMARTER / PRAY HARDER

How does a person know if he is doing the right amount of *hishtadlut*, or if he is overdoing it? This is the million-dollar question, and one of the most common dilemmas of every-day life. It has ramifications in all areas of performance: in dating, in business, in academic achievement – in almost anything in life that is stress related. How many *shadchanim* to call? How many hours to work?



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How long to study for the test, or prepare the lesson for the class? Mastering this balance is one of the keys to happiness (see Orchot Tzaddikim Simcha, שביעית). It is something that may be worthwhile praying for. This is the underlying message of the serenity prayer, "Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can and wisdom to know the difference."

Yaakov was faced with fear. His brother Esav was after him. What does Yaakov do? Three things. He splits up *klal Yisrael*, his family, into two. He prays that he won't get hurt, and that he won't hurt others. And he sends presents to Esav. Yaakov was afraid that he would be vulnerable because it could be that he had sinned. And that is why he did not want to rely on a miracle. But, don't we know that if Hashem wants something to happen, it will happen anyway? Why was Yaakov even trying, even doing *hishtadlut*? Also, we know that Yosef was punished with two additional years of jail for doing *hishtadlut*, when he asked the *Sar Hamashkim* to remember him. What is the difference between the two scenarios?

The answer is that "G-d does His Thing" through a person's *hishtadlut* (שער הביטחון פ"ג התנאי השביעית). Whenever a person is faced with confronting an Esav, or worldly matters which Esav represents, he needs to do some type of *hishtadlut*, to bring about Hashem's will. For most people of the religious world today, it is not as hard to have *emunah* and *bitachon* as it is to balance *hishtadlut* with *emunah*. Even though we learn from Yaakov's splitting the family - that a person should do what needs to be done to make things work, we see that Yaakov was punished for bowing down to Esav and for calling him "Adoni," my master. So, was it right or wrong that Yaakov tried to do his best?

The answer is that there is a golden rule at the base of *hishtadlut*. The rule is the knowledge that whatever G-d wants is going to happen, when and how He wants it to happen. G-d does not need this specific *hishtadlut* from our part to do what He wants to do. Any *hishtadlut* can do the job. *Hishtadlut* brings G-d's blessings, without our having to rely on an open miracle. As R' Ben Tzion Abba Shaul z'tzl taught: *Hishtadlut* is like buying the ticket to get on the train. The train is going from point A to point B, not moving from its track, even one centimeter. You just need the ticket to get onto that train. But you are not doing anything more than buying the ticket. The only *hishtadlut* that can change a decree is prayer and spiritual service. And even prayer does not change the will of G-d. Prayer just changes the person; he becomes more humble, more accepting. And when he becomes a different person, he deserves different decrees (Sefer HaIkrim 4;18).

This underlying rule of *hishtadlut* has three conditions, which are based in a question format. 1. Am I reacting to a problem or taking control of it? Am I acting out of fear, doubt, insecurity, lack of patience? If so, it is a sign that my *emunah* is off, or am I able to respond in a way that is most productive? 2. Are my efforts crossing over the boundaries of the spiritual commitments and standard that I believe I could reach? 3. Am I praying as hard as I am trying?

The first rule is based on the Chazon Ish's answer to what Yosef did wrong. Yosef's asking the *Sar Hamashkim* was not proper *hishtadlut*. Why was he asking this low-grade person to remember him? The chance that this type of *hishtadlut* would work is nil! Yosef's belief in G-d was not off, but his *hishtadlut* was not appropriate. It was rooted in despair; such *hishtadlut* is not *emunah*-based *hishtadlut*. Another point here, made by Rav B. D. Povarski, is that Yosef asked for the favor 3 days before the *Sar Hamashkim* was taken out of jail. At that point, Yosef did not have to ask for help from this *Sar Hamashkim*. It could have been that Yosef would be freed from prison before the three days were up. This shows that Yosef's response was one of despair, not of *emunah* and proper *hishtadlut* (Adapted from the Mashgiach, zt''l, Rav Dov Yaffeh, לעבדך באמת).

This is a great lesson. Proper *hishtadlut* is only when someone acts with intent, not as a reaction to emotions or external situations. Proper *hishtadlut* has to be planned ahead, thought out, its degree,



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timing and manner carefully considered. What makes the most sense? How much do I have to do in order for it not to be an open miracle that G-d helps me? This is such an important rule in all areas of life; to think ahead, before letting *hishtadlut* take over your headspace, your schedule, and your spirituality.

I recently saw a piece of sound business advice from Dale Carnegie, one that can knock down 50% of your worries at work and in so many other areas of *hishtadlut*. It can quadruple your productivity. It is a solution to having mindfulness, instead of losing it. You see, usually, the question that people ask themselves in business management or any other management is, what do I do next? This question is ineffective. The best *hishtadlut* to approach a business problem, or any problem in life is with the four questions. 1. What, exactly, is the problem? 2. What is the core of the problem, why does it exist and why is it still here? 3. What are all the possible solutions to the problem? 4. What is the best solution? … and then choosing that solution as your *hishtadlut*.

The second rule is based on the fact that Yaakov was punished for bowing down to Esav seven times, and from calling him my master eight times. This was improper, because if *hishtadlut* in anyway crosses tracks with *emunah* or *bitachon*, it is inappropriate. I remember what Rav Yehuda Ades, Shlita, said in a class to some working people from the Syrian community in New York. He said that if you set up time for prayer, time for Torah, and you are giving up from your service of G-d for the sake of your *hishtadlut*, you are overstepping the boundaries of proper *hishtadlut*, as if G-d can't bring your salvation while doing His will.

And the third lesson is, that if you are not putting your *hishtadlut* in prayer, but in physical work alone, that means that your *hishtadlut* is not *emunah*-based. These three laws of *hishtadlut* are so applicable, so measurable, so real. They are all life changers.

## I DON'T CARE ANYMORE

I coached someone who once had a lot of money. We had a heart-to-heart discussion about those years when EVERYONE was his best friend. He would take guys out to restaurants, on trips, and pay for all of his "friends'" expenses. He told me, "Yosef, none of the guys knew this, but I could not sleep at nights. I used to lie in bed for endless hours, wondering who really cares for me and who cares about my money. More than once, I concluded that no one cared for me. I wanted to commit suicide." I was shocked! Lack of being cared for can cause suicidal thoughts?

I finally got around to reading a great book, The Charge, by Brendon Burchard, and this is what he writes. "Babies who are not cared for die. Suicide notes ring with the haunting assumptions that no one cared and no one will care. People without a caring environment demonstrate erratic behavior, lack positive emotional range, get divorced, cheat, and abruptly quit jobs. The number-one reason people quit jobs across all industries is lack of appreciation - no one demonstrated that they cared about or were grateful for the person's hard work and contributions. Caring is serious business."

People have asked me what sparked me to want to become a coach. Well, it happened one day when a long-lost friend came over to me and said he wanted to thank me for something. He said that our first winter semester in Yeshiva together, due to his serious case of acne, no one was interested in talking to him. I met him one time, as we crossed the street together, and I asked how he was doing. He said, "Ah, okay, I guess." I asked him, "Are your acne creams working? Are you seeing results?"

He said, "Not really." And then, he said I told him something that saved his life. "People don't care what type of a person you are on the outside as much as they care about what type of person you



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are on the inside." "From that day on," he said, "I started opening up to the guys, and I saw that people actually did care about me. I never told anyone, but I was planning suicide. You saved my life. I owe you one."

There was never a generation like ours, where people don't show genuine care for others, just for the sake of genuinely caring, or carrying on a conversation just for the sake of giving the other person a feeling of being cared for. We do *chessed*, but unfortunately, too much of our *chessed* is political *chessed*. What do I mean by political *chessed*? What are politics? That's when people do or say things with an ulterior motive, not because they really believe in what they are saying or doing. Political *chessed* is *chessed* with an ulterior motive.

When we ponder over the ulterior motives of ourselves and those around us, we will see a different world than the world we see. Have men become rabbis because they care to pass on the word of G-d, or because that is ~~a~~ the job they found themselves in? " כי שפתי כהן ישמרו דעת ותורה יבקשו מפיהו כי מלאך ה' צבאות הוא, אם דומה הרב למלאך ה' יבקשו תורה מפיו ואם לאו אל יבקש תורה מפיו." (Moed Kattan 17a) If you want to know who to choose as a Rabbi, make sure that he is a messenger totally dedicated to G-d, that he has no ulterior motives, and that his only wish is to pass on G-d's word. Just like an angel, whose only agenda is G-d's agenda. In *chinuch*, are our mentors there for the sake of *chinuch*, or is their prime concern to keep a job, to control others, or a need for honor and respect? Do we, as parents, care about the modesty of our daughters with their best interest in mind, or because we are afraid about the family image? Do we stay frum because we have become comfortable doing so, or because we love and fear G-d and want to serve Him? This political caring is Esav's way.

When Yaakov was coming home, after 34 years of missing out on the mitzvah of *Kibud Av Va-em*, he planned how to deal with Esav. Esav now lived in the Land of Seir, in the Field of Edom. Yaakov knew that Esav still harbored hatred in his heart, because the names that Esav gave the places where he lived, showed that he had not forgotten the episode of the *Berachot*. Se-ir means hair. Esav was known as איש שעיר, a person with a hairy body, and Yaakov's mother Rivka, placed goat skins on Yaakov's arms and neck to trick his father into thinking that he was the hairy son, Esav. He called his field *Edom*, Red, to remember forever the red lentils that Yaakov used to buy the rights of the firstborn son from him.

R Yonasan Eibeshits comments that we know that Esav's behavior was the epitome of *Kibud Av Va-em.* When he would serve his father, he would don royal clothing. He would say, "It does not accord honor to my father, if I serve him with any other clothes." (BR 65, 16) If so, why did Esav leave his father, in his father's old age, when his father was blind, and move to Edom, Seir? Why was Esav in Edom, not home taking care of his father Yitzchak? He answers that it was because Esav saw that Yaakov left Eretz Yisrael and married two sisters, even though marrying two sisters is forbidden by the Torah; but outside of Eretz Yisrael, before the Torah was given, the forefathers did not keep certain parts of the Torah. So Esav decided to leave Eretz Yisrael, so he could sin as much as his heart desired, without looking bad in his father's eyes.

R Shlomo Levenstein, answers in a different way. Esav only respected his father for the sake of getting the *Berachot* from him. Esav was so good at this political *Kibud Av Va-em* that he reached the highest level of *Kibud Av Va-em* while putting on his show! Once the *Berachot* had been given to Yaakov, Esav left his father.

But this is not the Jewish way. Yaakov was the exact opposite: he was the epitome of the trait of *Tiferet*, congruent, consistent in his behavior, always honoring his parents. תתן אמת ליעקב. Even after Yaakov had four wives, twelve Tribes and considerable wealth, and he needed nothing more from his father, he came home to perform the mitzvah of *Kibud Av Va-em*. Until today, we do not eat the *Gid Hanasheh,* the sciatic nerve, to remind the Jewish People for all generations, that our ancestors, the Twelve Tribes, did not join their



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father Yaakov when he went back to get the small jugs, which resulted in Yaakov fighting the angel alone, and having the *Gid Hanasheh* knocked out of place. (See Chizkuni) This is so we always remember that the Tribes did not care for their father enough, when he needed them.

The Jewish way is to care for our parents, our spouses, our children, the people in our lives, even when we don't feel that *we* "need" them. To show them we care for them, even when it costs us money, time and effort.

## THE HAPPIEST MAN I KNOW

There is an old Swedish saying, "Those who wish to sing always find a song." Happiness is like wanting to sing. Once you wish to be happy, you will find something to be happy about. Happiness is more an active decision than a state of being. You do not need to wait for times to get better to bring you happiness. *You need to make happiness happen*. The way to find it is through ideas taught to us in the Torah; some of them are mentioned below. After reading the coming concepts, you can apply them and remain happy, no matter in what difficult circumstances you may find yourself. It all boils down to adopting the four core elements that comprise the basis for happiness and the fundamentals that stem from them. The four core elements are mentioned in the Orchot Tzaddikim. Faith in G-d, Trust in G-d, Histapkut(-contentment), and Intelligence. Bear with me.

Picture for a moment the happiest person you know. The person you got to know who somehow stays happy, even when the going gets tough. Can you think of such a person? (Just picturing a truly happy person in your mind for five min. can bring you to happiness. Try it.) Go back in your memory to when you remember how that person was going through a rough time and did not complain. Not even a kvetch. They just passed it by, staying calm and collected, keeping their head low, waiting patiently for the high tide to pass.

How did they do it? Simple. Go into *their* belief system and find out. See how they perceive the world, and pick up their perspective. Tune in on their outlook, and you will produce the same results as they do. If you cannot figure out the elements of their belief system , fear not. The four elements of the Orchot Tzaddikim *is their belief system.*

One way for you to find out another person's basic elements of perspective is by *listening closely to their choice of words*. After the dream of the ladder where Yaakov was blessed by G-d with tremendous blessings, Yaakov vowed that he would tithe his wealth to build a House for G-d and bring a sacrifice on Har Hamoriah. His words were, "If G-d watches over me, and ***gives me bread to eat and clothes to wear***…." Why did Yaakov ask for bread **to eat** and clothing **to wear**? What else would one do with bread and clothing? In these words, Yaakov revealed to us what the secret of happiness is. He did not want clothing for any purpose other than *to have something to wear.* Yaakov was not looking for fancy clothing that makes a person appear successful or important. He was not concerned with making impressions on people. All he wanted from food was nutrition. He was not interested in the taste, nor did he regard eating as a pastime. This is one of the core pillars of ***contentment.*** Knowing very clearly ***how to get along with a minimum and make the maximum from what you do have.*** It means a deep understanding of the *essence, purpose and function of each worldly item you need or want*. The difference between ***needs and wants*** was very clear to Yaakov**.** Yaakov went back over the river for some small jugs, as Rashi explains. (33;25) He valued all his possessions, even if they were inexpensive, because he bought them from his hard earned money. (Chullin 91) He valued his money not because it gave him a sense of power or a bigger balance in the bank. In Yaakov's eyes, physical objects are simply a means by which one



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can serve G-d. When we are healthy and well clothed, we can serve G-d in a better manner. That's what he wanted from clothes and food. Without cups or small jugs, you might have to drink from your hands, something which is certainly looked down upon. Ya'akov was able to see the true value of everything he had. He went back over the river just to bring these physical items, things that he needed for **כבוד האדם**,basic self respect.

Listen closely to Yaakov's choice of words in his conversation with his brother, Esav, and note the contrast between his and his brother's style of speech. When Yaakov tried to convince his brother to take the present he was offering, at first, Esav refused, saying **יש לי רב אחי**, *I have a lot, my brother.* Yaakov, on the other hand, pleaded with his brother to accept his gift, using the words, **יש לי כל***I have everything*. Why the switch?

Yaakov had contentment in life. Therefore, *he had everything he wanted.* Happiness is feeling that you have what you want. When you do not feel that you are missing some coveted desire. What was is that Yaakov had more the Esav? Did Esav have less physical possessions than Yaakov, such that he felt he could not say *he had everything*, but that he just had a lot? Some people feel that if they do not have money now to pay for what the future may bring, that they are short of cash. A type of worry of what tomorrow may bring. Yaakov was never worried about such things, because he had trust in G-d. *Just as He has taken care of me until now, so will He take care of me in the future.* ***Yaakov lived in the Now***,(another fundamental for happiness that stems from Bitachon) and was not "*stuck"* in worries of the future. Also, Yaakov did not look for extras; he ran a "low maintenance" budget. So, he had everything. But an Esav could always want more, more money, more gadgets in life, more power… in a never-ending list.

And it gets worse. Without feeling content, a person who is forever going after extras will never be able to be or feel ***grateful,*** making ***appreciation*** *a foreign language.* These are two are the cornerstones of happiness: they stem from contentment and trust in G-d. *(The Vilna Gaon, in Even Shlema, writes that a person who cannot find contentment will never pray to G-d or learn Torah properly, for he will never feel genuine, inner appreciation for all that G-d does for him!)* Another major facet of happiness that stems from contentment is ***giving to others***, without expecting anything in return. You can't give if you do not have enough for yourself. Giving brings happiness, and Yaakov said that he would give a tenth of his gain.

There is another important basic requisite for happiness. Having a clear ***purpose*** in life. Even if one is content, if there is no purpose in life, there is no happiness. Life can just *drag on*. For Yaakov, there was great purpose in life. Faith. To serve G-d. To bring into being the **שבטי י-ה**. One of the clear contrasts between Yaakov and Esav was their disagreement about the World to Come. Esav believed that this world was an end in itself. *So, live it up.* Ya'akov's opinion was that the purpose of this world was serving G-d, with the reward reserved for the World to Come.

My rabbi once taught me a great lesson. The greatest gift you can give your children is the skill of being happy without the extra "wants". "You will give them a life of happiness". The Vilna Gaon, in Even Shlemah, writes that the last of the Ten Commandments, **לא תחמד** , Do not covet, is the basic law of the whole Torah. And, expressed as a positive commandment would be Histapkut-contentment. Observing the mitzvah of contentment is like keeping the entire Torah. And, after writing this article, I had a new insight into the famous Mishna in Avot **איזה עשיר השמח בחלקו***Who is rich? One who is happy with his lot.* This is telling us that in order to be rich, you need to be content. If you always want more, you always need to spend, and you will never have "extra" in the bank account, because you will always need it ***for something that you might want tomorrow.***

The only way for a person to have real contentment when times are rough is with Bitachon, trust in G-d. (It is not about how you look at the cup, half full



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or half empty. It is ***about accepting things*** the way G-d gives them, even if the cup is really almost empty.) Trust that G-d knows exactly how much I need, when I will need it, and that He loves me much more than any human is capable of loving me.

## PROBLEMATIC PERSUASION

Despite Dina's high spiritual level, Shechem succeeded in persuading her to stay. Of course, Shechem's home was definitely no place for the daughter of Yaakov. How, then, could Dina have agreed that this is where she belonged?!

Rav Yerucham Levovitz, *zt"l*, notes that we can see from this episode just how strong the power of persuasion can be. Even someone of Dina's high caliber was able to be persuaded to do something not at all in keeping with her stature. Indeed, it is shocking to us when we witness the greatest of men fall – through persuasion – into the clutches of sin. For some strange reason, however, we are not taken aback at our own being drawn into a sin not befitting our stature that we were somehow persuaded to commit. We find silly justification for things we did wrong and foolish things we said. *If we only would stop and think*, we might be amazed at how we slipped.

We have to be on guard against two different types of harmful persuasion: external and internal. We are more aware, perhaps, of the first type, in the form of people who try to get us to do or buy all sorts of things we really have no interest in. But there is also "persuasion from within," where our feelings overpower our good sense. Persuasion usually speaks to the heart or emotion, not to the intelligence. Thus, Shechem persuaded Dina to stay by *talking to her heart.* Now, if power, money and wealth could seduce even a Dina, they can certainly seduce people of our much lower caliber. When the heart is influenced, even a spiritual or intellectual giant is handicapped. Even Adam, whose wisdom was on a tremendously high level before eating from the Tree of Knowledge, was not immune to persuasion.

Let me ask you: Were you ever persuaded to buy something that you did not really need? If so, perhaps you bought it because it was on sale. For many people, to pass up a sale is to feel that they are losing money. Even though they do not necessarily need the item, the fear of missing the opportunity can easily get the better of them. This is really a combination of the fear of losing money together with the materialistic drive of having more. Of course, these feelings are nonsensical, since the person did not need the item to begin with.

Through associations with successful people, the advertising industry tries to persuade us that we need a specific item in order to be successful. Indeed, marketing professionals have persuaded the world to spend oceans of money, time, and effort for the latest cell phone or cell phone app. After purchasing the phone we thought we needed, we find that we rarely, if ever, use the application for which we purchased it. The marketing professionals look for what the heart desires, and how to get people to feel that they can connect to that very coveted something – and before you know it, they have made a customer of us.

These are just a few examples of external forces of persuasion. Persuasion from within, of course, can come in a variety of different forms. For example, a man might be persuaded to believe that if he made more money, his wife would respect him more. A father might be persuaded to think that if he would take on an additional job, he would have the extra money he "needs" to be a better parent. Ironically, though, since this often comes at the expense of family time, the children may end up feeling that they barely have a father at all. But the busy father fails to see this, so convinced is he that this is the only way to be a good father. These conclusions are, of course, usually not true, but the great human desire for wealth, fame, and materialistic pleasure can easily cloud our vision.



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The best solution to avoid being persuaded to act against our own best interests is to stay away from the people or things that get us to act in ways we will later regret. Each person knows from personal experience whom and what to avoid. By keeping these experiences in mind and noticing our weak spots, we will be better equipped to face the challenges of "problematic persuasion" in the future.

## SELF HELP AND TORAH

A cup can that is filled half way can be looked at as either half full or half empty. The difference is perspective. From which way are you looking at the cup, from the bottom to the top or from the top to the bottom? We can look at many things in life positively or negatively. At times, however, it is important not only to change how we look at things, but to understand what it is that is causing us to have a certain perspective, and then to change that, as well.

In this weeks parasha, our rabbis tell us to take note of the specific wording that Yaakov used – יש לי כל *I have everything* and the wording of Esav יש לי רב – *I have a lot*. This was the way each one thought. We find Yaakov saying something else that is in line with this. כי במקלי עברתי את הירדן הזה ועתה הייתי לשני מחנות Yaakov praised G-d , that *when I crossed the Yarden, I was with my staff, alone, and now I have expanded to become two camps*. This is quite strange. The reason why Yaakov now had two camps was because he split up his family and put them a day's journey apart from one another. (Yaakov reasoned that if Esav would attack half of his family, the other part would be able to escape. Although Esav's four hundred men were faster than Yaakov's children, even if they were a day apart, they might catch up with the second camp in no time; but Yaakov remembered the words of his mother, Rivka, ,"Why should I lose both of you in one day?" She was prophesying that Yaakov and Esav would die on the same day. So, Yaakov split his family into two, and separated them by a day's journey, so that even if Esav were to kill one camp, it would take him an additional day to reach the other. By then, Esav would die before he had overtaken the second group.) Even though the reason why Yaakov now had two camps and not one was due to a state of emergency, this was still enough for Yaakov to feel grateful that he had enough children to warrant splitting them into two camps.

It is amazing that Yaakov was able to be moved to a feeling of gratitude from a situation like that. And this is because of the way he looked at things, יש לי כל . How was he able to feel this way, while his brother looked at things so differently? The answer is because they had different world views. Yaakov looked at this world as temporary, and therefore, as long as he could manage to pass through this world and merit the World to Come, he was content. Esav, on the other hand, looked at this world as being all there is. That is why Esav always looked for more.

The concept that perspectives can be changed only if the belief behind the perspective is changed as well can be approached from diverse angles. For example, the self help of many psychologists and coaches and the self help of the Torah stem from two entirely different roots. These psychologists and coaches are interested in making a person successful. The Torah is interested in making a person into a better person. A mentsch. The reason behind the divergence is also in the same vein. Belief in life after death is central to our religion. Our goals extend past this world to the World to Come. Being a mentch is the goal of the Jew in this world, with an eye to the importance of ethical behavior in life in the Next World. This is the goal that the Torah puts in front of us. In contrast, the way success is viewed in this world is not the success of eternity. And this is the difference between Yaakov and Esav.

We must be careful about this distinction. When many people talk about being successful, it has nothing to do with the concept of success held by



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our Relgion . We are on a different wave-length, a different frequency. And, as we know, although we know Esav as a man of the fields and a man who was a Rasha, it does not mean that he was not a self help genius. Esav's head was buried in the Maarat Hamachpela because he thought like a mentch. But that was it: because in this world, to achieve success, sometimes you have to act like a mentch. Or at least talk like a mentch. But that was Esav's behavior only when he wanted to have his way, only when it helped him achieve one of his goals. But he was not really a mentch , and this is why his body was left out of the Maarat Hamachpela.

## THE ESSENCE OF EVIL

Many people have a simplistic view of evil. They assume that *evil is bad. Period!* But the Torah asks us to look deeper and realize that that evil is not what it seems to be. Indeed, not even death is intrinsically bad. It is a fact, a reality. But what *can* be considered intrinsically evil are human decisions, perspectives, and behavior. If we consider how our Patriarchs dealt with apparent evil when confronted with it, I think you will see what I mean.

Avraham, for example, was born into a family of idolaters and a society of evil-doers. Indeed, his father's business was manufacturing idols. How did he handle this when he became aware of G-d's existence and realized that the people all around him were living a lie – and had been for ten generations? He did not sink into depression or cave in to social pressure! Avraham was able to see them as negative examples – examples of what not to be – and to convert their power of evil into the power of good. He used the technique of transforming bad into good by seeing the bad as a "wake-up" call. Indeed, the Hebrew word for *evil* – רע – has the same letters as the word *awake* or *conscious* –ער . Hence the Mishnah in *Pirkei Avot* teaches us that Avraham acquired all the merits the previous ten generations should have amassed had they acted righteously. He found purpose in their evil.

G-d is pure good, and thus His creations are never evil. Even the Satan is not "bad" in an absolute sense. We find that every creature G-d creates sings his *shirah* (praise) to its Maker upon finishing its mission in this world. That is why when Yaakov overpowered the Guardian Angel of Esav – also known as the Satan – the angel made the following request: *Let me leave, for dawn is breaking…* (*Bereishit* 32:27). The Talmud provides the reason given by the angel for the request: *From the day I was created, never once did my time come to sing my shirah* (*Chulin* 91b). Rav Dessler explains that the angel had never sung *shirah* because he had never fulfilled his mission, had never assumed his intended role, until that moment. When Yaakov bested the Satan, the latter finally assumed the role for which G-d created him: to be overpowered by the tzaddik.

With that in mind, let us zero in on the end of the exchange that Yaakov had with the satanic angel after he overpowered him. Yaakov asked: *Tell me what* your *name is*. The angel answered: *Why do you ask my name?*

The Mussar masters call our attention to the angel's refusal to answer Yaakov's question and reveal his name. They contrast it with the willingness of the angel who announced the conception and birth of Shimshon (Samson) to provide his name. This is how they explain the stonewalling:

In Hebrew, the name of something or someone reflects its essence. The answer given by the satanic angel *was actually his name*. Satan's most useful technique is presenting the glamour of nothingness, and making it look real and enticing. This is all that evil really is. Although it is nothing, the Satan markets it as everything. In contrast, real evil is created by the decisions of humanity to fall prey to the lust for pleasure, honor, power, and the like. The worldly means to attain them are not evil



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in and of themselves. But they give rise to evil when they are misused or misdirected. If we pose Yaakov's question to our own *yetzer ha'ra* (evil inclination) – What is your name, what is your essence? – we will get the same non-answer*: Why do you ask?* There is no answer, just a switch from defense to offense.

If we shine the flashlight of our intellect on the allurements of the *yetzer ha'ra* and the glamorous world it spreads before us, we will see that there is really almost nothing to it. This is what the angel was communicating to Yaakov: Why do you ask my name? I do not have a name. I do not have an essence. I am here to serve you if you learn from evil what to reject and what to fight – like your Grandfather Avraham – and create good in the world.

## MARRIED TO A MATERIALISTIC MAN

We are judged for everything we do. But, that judging is so complex, because it means taking into consideration each individual person in his own, particular life, factoring in where they came from and in what given circumstances they find themselves. The same action can be a merit in one set of circumstances and a minus in another. This is why only G-d can judge, because only He knows.

Yaakov arranged his *11 children* for the meeting with Esav. *Where was Dina? He put her in a closed box, so that Esav would not be able to see her, and for doing so, for holding her back from meeting Esav, Yaakov was punished, for she may have been able to influence him to mend his ways. Because of this, she fell in the hands of Shechem.* (Rashi)

This is hard to understand. The Talmud tells us (Pesachim 49) that *"Anyone who marries off his daughter to a materialistic fellow, it is as if he is tying her up and placing her in front of a lion."* We do not say that a father should give his daughter to a materialistic fellow to be a positive influence and make him spiritual. So, how do we understand that Yaakov was held accountable for keeping his daughter from Esav?

The Hazon Ish answers that G-d knew that Dinah could have helped Esav repent. Only a Yaakov, on his high level of Ruach Hakodesh, could have been accountable for not taking this into consideration. Anyone else would not have been punished for such a thing at all. Quite the contrary. It is irresponsible to give your daughter to a man who is so materialistic.

You need to know who you are. You need to know what level you are on. It could be that what the person next to you is doing is, for him, a noteworthy deed; but in your case, that same act is looked down upon in Heaven. It could be that what is inappropriate for your neighbor is what is expected of you. The problem is that people do not have their identity straight; they do not know who they are and what the Torah expects from them on their level. Or, even worse, they do not have a Rabbi.

There is a rule in life. We don't see things as they are. We see things as ***we*** are. We project our identity on the world we see, viewing it through our own, very subjective perspective. But that is not the world we live in. The world we see is just our map of the territory, not the territory itself. When we look over our shoulder to see what the next person is up to, our perception of what is going on with him is the product of our own "take" on his situation, and it has nothing to do with objective reality.

In coaching, it is the easiest thing to tell a person what you think is the solution to his problem. But that is the worst thing that a coach can do. Because your map that you are using to give him directions is not the same map that the person is reading. At best, it is your map of his map. Coaching is about discovering the "lies", the discrepancies between the map and the territory of your client. Once the



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coach achieves this, the client can figure out how to figure things out on his own. He doesn't and didn't need anyone to "tell him" where to go and what to do. He just needed to find the "lie" in his story.

This is why you need a Rabbi. He can tell you the truth, the absolute Torah truth. A rabbi can see through the eyes of the Torah and tell you, precisely, what the territory is.

## LOSING CHESS

In Sipurim Mehachaim (and Anashim Mesaprim Al Atzmam 6) Chaim Walder tells an amazing story. By shortening it, I am doing it a great injustice. Forgive me.

Miriam was an 8 year old girl, an only child, who lived in Poland. Her father owned a factory, and she lived in a big, fancy house with a half a dozen maids. The Nazis invaded Poland and confiscated all of her parents' possessions. All Jews needed to wear the yellow star, with the inscription "Jude." One day, in middle of supper, they were surprised by S.S. officers, who came to take Miriam's father. Before leaving forever, he whispered in Miriam's mother's ear … "If the Germans want to send you and Miriam away to labor camps, don't be seduced by their offers. Go to the house of our trusted maidservant, Anna, and ask her to hide you two in her home, for good pay." With that, he left, never to be seen again. When the Nazi officers made the announcements ordering all the Jews to gather at the main square, to be sent to the labor camps, Miriam and her mother ran to Anna's house. With them, taking an attaché case of clothes, and all the cash that was saved up in hiding.

Anna's 1.5 room apartment was in a simple neighborhood, in a five story building, on the top floor. Anna was shocked when she opened her door to the knocking of Miriam and her mother. Miriam's mother begged and pleaded to be allowed in, saying that she would pay a hefty rent for each month Anna would hide them. Anna let them board in a bedroom that was more like a closet, with one bed for both. They stayed for a few weeks at Anna's. The Germans announced that any gentile who was found hiding a Jew would be shot, but Miriam's mother promised Anna that the moment the Nazis would come to search the building, both she and Miriam would jump out the window, onto the porch off the second floor, so the Germans won't find them at Anna's. Anna calmed down a bit.

During the time that they stayed with Anna, Miriam was not allowed to make any noise. She was allowed to play chess with Julia, Anna's 8 year old daughter. Miriam, a smart girl, an ace at chess, had no problem winning each game that she played with Julia. They played a lot, Miriam winning each game. Miriam's mother told her, "It's not good that you are winning each time. I want you to let her win; give her the feeling of victory. Anna and Julia are being so kind to us by letting us hide here. We need to be good to them, too. Jealousy is a very dangerous thing."

It was hard, but Miriam allowed Julia to win. Julia was so excited! She ran to Anna to tell about her first victory. The next day, Miriam let her win some more. After a few more days, Miriam let Julia win all the games except one, so that Julia would not suspect that she was being allowed to win.

Early one morning, the Nazis arrived at Anna's street, preparing to make a thorough search. White as a ghost, Anna woke up Miriam and her mother, and sternly directed them to the window. They packed their bag with whatever they might be able to use, if either one of them would survive the jump and then survive dealing with the Nazis downstairs. Too frightened to cry, they headed for the window.

Suddenly, Julia stood in their way. Julia was a big, rough girl. She told her mother Anna, "I don't care what, I am not letting Miriam go. She is my only friend." Anna tried pushing Julia out of the way,



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but Julia went to the window to scream loudly, bringing lots of attention to that fifth floor apartment. Anna pleaded with her daughter, "So, Julia, what is your alternative option? We will all be killed?" Julia replied, " Miriam and I built a clubhouse on the roof of the building. Let them climb up the trap window and pull up the ladders after themselves. They can hide in the clubhouse." Anna directed them to follow Julia's plan. While hiding up on the roof, they heard the Nazis search room after room. After the stamping of boots stopped, Miriam heard, through the roof, Julia singing her song. "I won Miriam, I beat Hitler! I won Miriam, I beat Hitler!"

One lesson we can learn from this story is that losing is sometimes winning. But in this week's parasha, we are taught how Jews are to behave with Esav in Exile. When Yaakov headed for Eretz Yisrael, he sent messengers, angels, to Esav to see how he was doing, to see if he was still angry with him for taking the blessings. The response from the angels was that Esav was coming to fight Yaakov, with 400 generals of war. The Midrash tells us, that if Yaakov would have tiptoed back home, not sending a message to Esav, Esav would have never come out to fight. Now that he "pulled the lion by his ear", he woke up the lion.

Upon hearing the news that his brother was coming to fight, Yaakov was overcome with fear. He was not afraid of Esav's strength, but of the two mitzvoth that Esav had to his credit and that he, Yaakov, did not. For the last 22 years, Esav had been honoring Yitzhak , and had been living in Eretz Yisrael. The Midrashim also tell us that Yaakov's angels were mighty, and that Esav 's men were being badly beaten on their way. If Yaakov had such might on his side of the battle, beating Esav seems to be a cinch. Why, exactly, was he afraid that he was going to get hurt?

The answer is that Yaakov knew the score. This world is given to Esav, for his having honored Yitzhak. Yaakov's mitzvoth can't be cashed in in this world, for that would be like buying half a gumball with a million dollar check. In this world, Esav has power, as long as our spiritual level is not high enough to be our saving grace. Esav was given his whole reward in this world, for all the generations, for that one mitzvah! Yaakov's only way to survive is to tiptoe safely through the Exile. Not to show off our money, not to show off our achievements. But to stay low key… Losing is sometimes winning.

At his death bed, Yaakov bowed to his son, King Yosef. (Breshit 47; 31.Rashi. ) About this there is a famous Talmudic quote. "There is one month a year that the fox is king of the animals. In that month, bow to the fox." (Megillah 16b) Certain people are put on positions in our lives that we just have to accept the fact that they are in that position, and make the best of the situation. Even if it is not fair. One can get much further in life by accepting this. Miriam's mother knew this secret of success in life, and passed it on to Miriam. Miriam hopes that we all learn it as well.

(Breishit R. 75;2, Pnei Yehoshua Kiddushin 31b, Tehillim 73, Ramban 32; 4 – 9)

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