

תורת אביגדור הגאון ר' אביגדור מיללער זצ"ל

Rav Avigdor Miller on the Parsha

Adapted from his Tapes, Sforim and Writings of Talmidim

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Rav Avigdor Miller ztz"l on

פרשת וישלח

NO PORTERHOUSE STEAKS FOR THE JEWS

In our *parsha* we are told of an ancient tradition of the Am Yisroel: על כן לא יאכלו בני ישראל את גיד הנשה - "Therefore the children of Yisroel don't eat the sinew in the leg of the animal" (Vayishlach 32:33). You know, there's a sinew in the thigh, it runs down from the thigh into the leg, and our nation from the earliest times doesn't eat it.

In Europe, in small towns where meat was very expensive and nothing was put to waste, the Jews ate the hindquarters. They had what they called a *treiberer*, a person who was an expert in excising the forbidden parts. Only that today it doesn't pay for us; there's a big gentile meat industry, a big market where we can sell it to the public, so every kosher slaughterhouse sells the hindquarters to the gentiles. Kosher porterhouse steaks you won't find. That's only for gentiles. These round steaks, the porterhouse steaks, they go to the gentile market. And that's because it costs a lot of money to hire a person who will be a *minakeir*, and *treiber*, so we just sell the hindquarters - we Jews have to be satisfied with just the front part; the part that's less expensive to prepare it for eating.

THE BIG MAN WITH HANDS OF STEEL

Now all this comes from a source, from an ancient incident, the wondrous encounter of Yaakov and the angel. When Yaakov Avinu set out with his family from the house of Lavan to return to Eretz Yisroel, so we're told in the Torah that he crossed the River Yabok. And then he remembered that he had left behind certain things so he went back to retrieve them. Standing alone on the other side - it was already night - he saw a big man approaching him in the darkness. And in the darkness that stranger attacked him and began to grapple with him. **וַיִּאבֶּק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ**, and Yaakov was left alone wrestling with this stranger.

Now this man took hold of Yaakov with hands of steel and he was wrenching his muscles apart. Yaakov himself was no weakling, by the way. If you recall, he was the one who was able to roll off the stone from the well that needed all the shepherds together to move it. You remember that story? It was told to us so that we should know something about Yaakov's muscles. Rashi says that: **להודיעך שכתו גדול** - "To let us know how strong he was."

So when Yaakov was grappling with that stranger he was able to uphold his end of the battle. But Yaakov was amazed that this man could endure so much. And the man not only endured - Yaakov was having a terrible time, he was hurting. And it didn't last for only half an hour. Hour after hour passed; and it went on all night long! **עַד עֲלוֹת הַשָּׁחַר**. A terribly long and tortuous night. Even standing on your feet all night long is something. But standing with an opponent, and you're in anguish for your life? There are no words to describe the agony.

WATERBOARDING DOES THE TRICK

Now we know that a man can take punishment only up to a certain limit; once that limit is breached, he yields. It's a principle; the human body can suffer, but only up to a point. It doesn't mean that you can't give your life for an ideal. People do give their lives for an ideal and they can even take torture. But if the torture is unlimited then it's extremely improbable that a man will persevere.

There were even great men who said, "If they would torture me slowly for a long time, I wouldn't be able to withstand the ordeal." We know that Chananya, Mishael and Azaryah

allowed themselves to be thrown into a burning fire in order not to worship an idol! But the *gemara* (Kesubos 33b) tells us that they were able to do that because it was a *momentary* sacrifice. To jump into the fire and have it over with, yes. But had they been whipped *without letup*; constant whipping, one hundred, two hundred, three hundred, it's torturous and they would have yielded. These three heroes, our classic heroes of sacrifice for Hashem, אֱלֹמֵלָא נִגְדוּהוּ, if they had been whipped without stop, פְּלַחוּהוּ לְצִלְמָא, they would have yielded! Because there's a limit!

THE LUXURY OF DEATH

Now, what Yaakov went through that night was much worse than that. He wasn't just being whipped, he was being torn apart. Now Yaakov could have said, "I give up." Of course it would have been more luxurious to just lean back and get killed. And the man would have strangled him and Yaakov would have had the peace of death. And the torture would be over with. In cases of excruciating torture, death is a pleasure. Victims sometimes give money, they offer money for a speedy death. To them it's a gift if they would be able to die.

But Yaakov didn't stop, he didn't falter for a moment. And make no mistake about it, it was *gehenim*. But he struggled and struggled and then struggled even more. And the *malach* couldn't do a thing to him. He couldn't dislocate Yaakov's arm. He couldn't even give Yaakov a stiff neck. The *malach* surely had great powers, and yet he couldn't do a thing. Because Yaakov strengthened himself and when the *malach* grabbed hold of him to twist his neck he found that it wouldn't twist. He tried but it was a very hard neck. He just couldn't do anything to him. He wrestled all night and the *malach* couldn't do a thing. And then in the morning the *malach* gave up. The *malach* said "It's enough; let me go, I give up," and Yaakov emerged as the champion.

But the Torah makes a point of letting us know that before Yaakov emerged victorious there was one small bump in the road to victory. The *malach* found a weak spot. The *malach* was feeling him, grasping him, trying to locate that weak spot, and there he gave a wrench. Once he found that spot he took hold of Yaakov with his steel claws and he gave a strong wrench, and when Yaakov walked away from that encounter in the morning he was

limping; a sinew was wrenched loose. על כן לא יאכלו בני ישראל את גיד הנשה, that's why from then on the Jewish people wouldn't eat the *gid hanashe*. That's what the Torah tells us.

JANITOR REPORT: THE UNDERDOG WINS!

Now the question is, if we are going to learn *chumash* like a story, OK, it's a story, so you want to tell me about a pulled muscle, so tell me. Stories have a lot of unimportant things. But now we're learning the Toras Hashem; that's the way Hashem thinks. What's so important about it that Yaakov's sinew was dislocated? Why tell us that? And it's a good question because actually *Yaakov* is the one who won that wrestling match.

Suppose somebody won a wrestling match. And he came out of it with one sinew wrenched. Would that detail be reported in the newspapers? Of course not. Unless some silly reporter had some extra space to write something in. Just say "So and so won the wrestling match," and finished. Especially if it's some little fellow, a dark horse who wasn't known beforehand to be a good wrestler. And he comes along and challenges the champion to a wrestling match. And the champion takes him up on the challenge and now they're wrestling all night. Imagine such a thing - an all night match and the champion just can't overcome this challenger, he can't do a thing. And now all the spectators go home; the whole arena is already dark, but they keep on wrestling. The janitor comes in early in the morning to clean up and they're still wrestling! And so the champion sees now that morning is coming - the janitor is already putting on the lights - he sees that he's losing out, and so in frustration he gives a wrench, a last minute jerk just to cause some damage. So he gave a wrench, who cares?!

And so when the janitor went right away to the Associated Press, the wire services, and reported to them, "The champion gave up; he lost. I saw it with my own eyes; he was crying for mercy", that would be the biggest news of the day! Who cares what happened? He gave him a wrench in his thigh?! Why mention that?

And not only that, but to make it such an important event that our forefathers began immediately to commemorate it by not eating the *gid hanasheh*. What's the big tumult already? Was it such

a significant event when he wrenched his thigh loose that we have to commemorate it by not eating it? It's a puzzle.

RAV MILLER'S WRESTLING SKILLS

I'll tell you another question. Really the whole story is one big puzzle. Did you ever wrestle? I did. When I was a boy I used to wrestle; I wrestled a lot and I considered myself a good wrestler. I wrestled in a lot of matches. But how long did a match last already? Either I got on top of him and with a half-Nelson; I spread-eagled him so he couldn't move, or he got on top of me with a hook and it was all over. But it would never last all night. So what was going on over here?

And the answer is that this wrestling match between Yaakov and the malach was no ordinary struggle. You know why it is that when I wrestled it never lasted too long? Because although we were always matched up to our opponents, at the end of the day it was a random event. Sometimes my friend was stronger than me, more agile. And sometimes I had the better move and was able to put him down. Whatever it was, it was random.

HE COULD HAVE MADE MINCE MEAT OUT OF YAAKOV

But this story of Yaakov and the angel was something different altogether. This was no random opponent. It was a *malach* sent by Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Now you know that anyone who starts up with an angel won't last too long. You'd have a better chance walking through Bed-Stuy at three in the morning with wads of cash in your hand! What human being is able to wrestle with an angel? You could be Yaakov Avinu, you could be Shimshon Hagibor, it won't help. A *malach* could squash you in no time. He could have made "mince meat" out of Yaakov in a few seconds!

And yet in this case, the bout lasted all night. Of course the *malach* had the power to crush him immediately, but Hakodosh Boruch Hu gave him instructions, "Always push him to his limit. Ramp up the pressure, struggle with him and push him to his breaking point. But *never* test him beyond his abilities." So Yaakov was never tested with more than he could endure - that was an order to the *malach* from "on high."

HASHEM IS THE MALACH'S COACH

So we understand that this was an especial event, it was an ordeal, it was a test of being pushed to the limit. This was no ordinary wrestling match. It was a match that was being manipulated by Hakodosh Boruch Hu at every moment. Every move that Yaakov made, so Hashem commanded the *malach* to respond, to maintain the equilibrium. And upon the command of Hashem the *malach* would go on the attack, bitter attacks that Yaakov had to fend off with all of his strength. And this measured tit for tat, this see-saw of a wrestling match went on all night. It was brutal. And for Yaakov it was excruciating, because he was fighting a being that knew all of his weaknesses and all of his strengths, a being that could supernaturally push Yaakov to the extremes of his endurance without making it impossible.

The *malach* was squeezing every muscle he could in Yaakov's body. And it hurt; I cannot even describe to you how much it hurt. It was torture! But when Yaakov felt the *malach's* fingers closing around his arm, he summoned his willpower and he tightened those muscles to resist the pressure. Yaakov was subject to a great ordeal that required him to summon all of his strength, all of his power.

And so instead of yielding to the desire for respite from pain, instead of giving up - no he didn't. Because Yaakov's battle with the *malach* was the personification of the battle that every Jew would fight against the *yetzer harah* all his life, Yaakov knew that there was no giving up. And so he fought back all night. And whenever he felt those claws ripping him and beginning to close in on his muscles, so Yaakov strengthened himself. He made himself tense to resist. And all night he was able to withstand the pressure of the *malach*.

YAAKOV WEAKENS FOR A SECOND

There was only one instance in that long terrible night, where Yaakov faltered for one moment. First the *malach* grabbed him by the neck, but Yaakov didn't budge. עם קשי עורף. He grabbed him by the ears, and Yaakov resisted with all his strength. He grabbed him by his hair, whatever it was, but Yaakov wouldn't falter. Finally he grabbed him by the thigh; the thigh is a big limb, and the *malach* got a good hold on it. And Yaakov

weakened for a second. And in that second the *malach* did him dirty and gave him a twist, and that's all he was able to accomplish with him.

Now, immediately Yaakov regained his equilibrium and self-control and he stiffened. He fought back and extricated himself from the tight grip of the *malach*, and he continued wrestling for the rest of the night, resisting every move the *malach* made. Certainly Yaakov passed the test, he came away the winner. But in one minute of weakness, he faltered and that's when his thigh was ripped loose.

IT WAS A COSTLY FIGHT

And so that wrenched sinew was a demonstration of a little bit of weakness in the battle. And it's such an important lesson that the Bnei Yisroel always commemorated that, not to eat the sinew על כן לא יאכלו בני ישראל את גיד הנשה - therefore his children never ate it. They ate everything else from the animal, because everything else resisted. But not the *gid hanashe*. Because it's a sign of weakness, of letting up. And that one place of weakness they refused to eat so that we would remember in all the generations that we can't afford to yield. We can't afford to be weak.

It costs us a lot of money, by the way, because it raises the price of kosher meat, it's more expensive because of that. But it's worth it to remind us that it doesn't pay for us to relax even a little bit in the battle. To relax and falter is *even more* "expensive."

Now just before the day came, Yaakov was already at his end and he no longer had an ounce of energy left. And despite all of his determination he would have dropped dead anyhow. Just at that moment the daylight began to come over the horizon and this being let go of him. Yaakov had passed the test, and he passed it gloriously. That's when he gained the name Yisroel, "the one who conquers."

STAND STRONG

Now this whole incident was a prophecy. It was a *nevuah* that foretold the great struggle of every Jew against the *yetzer harah* that would use any means against him. And it would seem to you impossible to hold out any longer. And this prophecy tells

us that you should never yield. Because just when things will seem the worst, that's when the day will break.

Because that's the purpose of every Jew in this world, to fight valiantly against the *yetzer harah* attacking from all sides. And the victory of Yaakov that night symbolizes the potential that each one of us has to stand strong against the *yetzer harah* till the end of time. מעשה אבות סימן לבנים - What Yaakov did that night, is what we're doing in this world until we take our last breath, until the light of the World to Come breaks and the sun of *Olam Habah* rises!

HASHEM GIVING SHIUR

Now the secret of Yaakov's success against this *yetzer harah* was already revealed to us in the beginning of the world's history. Many years before, Hakodosh Boruch Hu had given Kayin, the third person to ever walk upon the earth, a lecture about the *yetzer harah*, with lessons that contained the fundamental principles of this struggle. And it's *kidai* for us to review a little bit of that lecture because from who better to learn about the *yetzer harah* than from the One who made it?

Now Hakodosh Boruch Hu taught Kayin three big principles. He said, "First of all, you have to know that לפתח חטאת ריבץ, at the door *chatas* is crouching (Bereishis 4:7). He's lying in wait for you. Remember that! It means that as soon as you walk out into the street you have to know you're being eyed by a prospective attacker, you're being stalked. Suppose you know that as you walk into your yard, behind the bushes is crouching a big lion; so you'd watch your step! You have to know that there's something much worse that's lying in wait, in ambush for you. The *yetzer harah* is waiting to pounce upon you! Now it's not merely a figure of speech. No, Hakodosh Boruch Hu is teaching us something here. He said, ריבץ, he is waiting, crouching at the gate.

WHO WAS ALREADY AWAKE BEFORE THE CHOFETZ CHAIM?

And if you want to be more exact, the gate doesn't mean the gate of your house. As soon as you get off of your bed, he's waiting there for you. I told you this story once. The Chofetz Chaim was lying in bed; it was a cold winter morning and it was

still dark outside. And so he said to himself, "Yisroel Meir, it's time to get up." So the *yetzer harah* said to him, "Look, you're an old man and it's still dark. It's too early for you; remain in bed a little longer." So he said to the *yetzer harah*, "Look here; you're much older than I am and you're up even earlier than me; you're on the job already, so what are you trying to fool me with your slyness?" The Chofetz Chaim knew that. He understood that the *yetzer harah* was waiting for him at the at the foot of his bed.

And therefore, it's so important to know that he's always waiting to pounce. And he's pouncing! He doesn't just lie in wait; he pounces too! And so whatever stratagems we employ, even when we're using the best of our abilities, we have to know that we're facing a master tactician who's more experienced and lying in wait.

THERE'S A LION NEAR YOUR BED

Sometimes a man gets off his bed and right away there's a scrap in the house, a fight. He wasn't prepared; his wife said something and he was caught off guard and he ruined the day. And that's *לפתח הטאת רובץ*, that's a lion waiting to make you a failure. The *yetzer harah* is worse than a wild beast. It's a great peril.

So *לפתח הטאת רובץ*, that's number one, the first lesson Hashem taught Kayin. We have to know that we are constantly being eyed by an adversary who is looking for opportunities to pounce on us. Now I know that when I say these words, it could be they're not finding their target. And I cannot speak too much about this, because you don't see it, you don't feel it and therefore you don't believe it. But if it's the first lesson Hashem taught Kayin about the *yetzer harah*, it's worth making note of it.

YOUR WORST ENEMY

And therefore our job is to understand what is our great battle in this world. You know some people think that their battle is with their neighbors. He's arguing with his neighbors over something. Or maybe the battle of your group of *chassidim* with another group of *chassidim*, from a different *rebbeh*. So you're battling with them. *They're* your enemy in this world. Or maybe it's your mother-in-law or your daughter-in-law.

So along comes Shlomo Hamelech and he teaches us that all these people are *not* your enemies. Even the anti-semites are not your enemies. The one enemy you should be most worried about is the *yetzer harah*. Shlomo Hamelech called him אָנִי, the enemy; he's your number one foe that you have to contend with and he's much more dangerous than your mother-in-law. Of all the *sakanos*, the biggest is the *yetzer harah*.

ANCIENT WISDOM FROM SUN TZU

And yet the world is ignoring him! And he loves that! He *doesn't* want to be known because that makes him most effective. He's scheming *all the time* how to trip us up only that we don't think about him at all, we're not aware; and that's why he's so successful. You see what's happening in the world. The *yetzer harah* is succeeding again and again. The vast majority of Jews today - the frum Jews - have fallen prey to the wiles of the *yetzer harah*. And that's because people have stopped talking about him. People don't think about the *yetzer harah* anymore. In the times of the *gemara* it was constantly spoken about because they knew it was an actual force - a reality that must be confronted.

But in this place we *do* talk about him. And if you want to know how to battle your number one enemy, how to deal with this very great and difficult opponent, the first step is to know him. Sun Tzu, an ancient military strategist said that. You can't overcome your enemy unless you recognize him.

THE YETZER HARAH IS CAMOUFLAGED

Now, everyone knows that the *nachash* was chosen as the prototype *yetzer harah* for all time. And that was purposefully intended to be used as lessons by us; so that we should speak about it here tonight. We note that the word *nachash* is the same as *n'choshes*, copper. The copper color, the tint of beige, blends with the background most readily and thus renders the *nachash* invisible. It appears to be invisible and that is one of the great difficulties because we so often don't recognize it. It's coming to you in many, many disguises, in many forms, so many that you don't even begin to realize.

Sometimes it's in the form of a snake as it was then; sometimes it comes in the form of a modern orthodox rabbi,

sometimes it might be in the form of a women's liberation movement, or new and "innocent" ideals that entice the simpleton. It could be some new invention or a scientific discovery. The cunning persuader exists in every generation, in the life of every individual, but it constantly alters its garb in order to succeed in deceiving men. Every form is utilized by the *yetzer harah*; he's not particular. Sometimes he even puts on a *shtreimel* with long *peyos*.

YOUR "BUSINESS PARTNER"

Now the second lesson that Hashem taught Kayin was **וְאֵלֶיךָ תְּשׁוּקָתוֹ** - "Towards you is his desire" (ibid.) The *yetzer harah* has one ambition in this world and that's *you*! The gemara in Kiddushin (30b) says that: "What does it mean **וְאֵלֶיךָ תְּשׁוּקָתוֹ**? That **כָּל מְשָׁאוֹ וּמְתֵנוּ בְךָ**, that all of the *yetzer harah's* business, all of his give and take, is only about you." The evil inclination is devoting all of his efforts to overcome you!

I'll explain that. The *yetzer harah* is not only inside you like people think. It's a great force that conducts the affairs of this world. He's manipulating the conduct of great nations. All of literature, all of the forms of music, all the styles of clothing; it's all being purposefully manipulated. Even the yeshivos, and the Beis Yaakovs - the English Departments as well. Everything is being done in this world at the behest of the *yetzer harah* and it's all to test you.

DIOR IS WORKING FOR YOU IN PARIS

Now we think that since these things are being done on such a big scale so it's surely not because of little me. Poor little me, am I the object of what's going on all over the world? Naturally, I could be affected, but is it being done because of *me*? Let's say Dior in Paris will manufacture a short skirt, it'll affect everybody, so it might affect me too. But he's doing it only because he'll sell more skirts that way, that's all; that's what the world thinks.

But now we're learning **וְאֵלֶיךָ תְּשׁוּקָתוֹ**, it's being done for *you*, **אֵלֶיךָ**, to trip you up. Don't deceive yourself that it's just the style, it "so happens to be." No, Dior is sitting there and thinking about you! This frum pious boy in Brooklyn who has to walk the

streets, or this frum Beis Yaakov girl in Boro Park who has to go shopping, you're the object of all that planning, of all that designing. Dior has *you* in mind. Now, he's not *actually* thinking about you. But there's somebody bigger than him who's "using him."

THE YETZER SENDS NEIL ARMSTRONG

Now you're beginning to see how important you are, because Mr. Dior is working in Paris just for you. And it's not only him. When they're shooting a spacecraft out to the moon, it's because of you. Now you'll have to think a little bit. How is this to test you? Well, let's say a yeshiva man takes off an hour to follow the progress of the space vehicle; it happens like that all the time! That's one hour less of his life! One full hour in the garbage! Because what good will that do him? What will he gain if they finally land on the moon? Nothing. And what does he lose? He loses one hour, an hour of life! People throw away hours upon hours on these foolish things; and they're throwing away life itself.

It's happening all the time, to all of us. And because we're a generation of fools, we find ourselves being fooled by the most stupid things, things that our ancestors wouldn't even dream about. So many people are busy with shopping. This store in the city and that store on the corner, and sales and discounts. And sports?! Can you imagine a bigger *meshugas*?! The *yetzer harah* has created a whole array of various sports and leagues and teams. And for what? **אליך תשוקתו**. It's all to test *you*. Don't think that baseball was made for the Italian bums, and that you just got caught up in it by accident. No, it was made to test you, and it's the Italians who got caught up *agav urcha*.

The *yetzer harah* is so powerful that he's manipulating all the affairs of the universe for you. And that's why the Mesillas Yesharim explains that **כל עניני העולם נסיונות הם לאדם** - all the affairs of this world - "all" means Dior and the Knicks and the elections - they're all tests for mankind. And who is mankind? **אליך!** You!

SOMETHING IS GOING TO TRY TO STOP YOU

The *yetzer harah* has his eyes set on you all the time. Don't think that once you choose to do something good, you're done

with him. You must know that there is a force that attempts to make obstacles in the path of righteousness. Rav Yisroel Salanter says in Ohr Yisroel that as soon as something good begins to be achieved, some good organization or some good movement, then you must expect immediately that some opposition is going to arise. From some unexpected corner there is going to be some form of counter offensive against the virtuous undertaking.

Let's say you're starting now some yeshiva, or you want to make an orthodox camp, or a charitable organization - whatever it is, be prepared for a jolt, and it will usually be unexpected. Either the Buildings Department will come in and make difficulties for you when you want to get a Certificate of Occupancy for your new yeshiva. Or one of your directors will muster opposition and try to make a revolution against you to throw you out. Or sometimes your wife will suddenly declare it's either your organization or me! Something is going to happen! It's a *klal gadol* in any good thing. And you have to expect it. Something, somebody will get in your way.

Because whatever good thing you intend to do, whether it's learning a *mesichta*, or finishing *shas*; maybe you want to break a bad *middah*, or change the way you live altogether. Maybe you intend to change your entire family's ways. It's some undertaking! Maybe you want to found some good institution - whatever you want to do, you're going to face obstacles, unexpected obstacles. And if you're a weakling, then you'll back down and nothing will come of it. Whatever good thing you want to do, you'll have to fight for it in life.

THE STRONGER YOU GET, THE STRONGER WILL BE YOUR OPPONENT

And we are constantly being tested. And these tests will increase in quality as we increase in quality. And as we grow and make more and more progress in life, the things that once seemed to us as difficult are now no longer a test.

But don't despair. They'll come at you even bigger and stronger than before. And that's the famous principle that the gemara says in *Mesichta Sukkah* (52a): כל הגדול מחבירו יצרו גדול ממנו - The bigger a man is, the bigger is his Evil Inclination. Now here is something new that we haven't discussed until now. The *yetzer*

harah exerts himself more against those who are making progress. And so, you'll be an old sage, with a long white flowing beard, with great-grandchildren all around you, and many disciples sitting at your feet, and you're teaching the Torah to the world. And you must know that the tests will continue to come until the last minute of your life. That's the great principle that our lives are built with the purpose of testing us each one of us according to his abilities.

WHAT'S YOUR GOAL IN LIFE?

And that's because being tested is your purpose in this world. Don't think that you're here to raise a family, to make a living, or even to learn Torah. Of course you have to do all those things, but those are all merely details of the test that this world is. What's your goal in life? To eat and to sleep?! No, your goal is *to be tested*. That's your achievement and good fortune in this world.

And it's only the man who has failed the tests and who's not making any progress, that man will be left alone. He'll live like a log. One day will flow into another, the years will pass by, he won't be tested. He'll just be standing in his store selling merchandise, putting money in the bank, eating supper every night. He'll just live his life in vain. All his days become one great tragedy. And it's the Jew who is going through tests, that's the man who is living for a purpose.

DON'T LOSE HEART

Now don't lose any sleep over this, because that's one of the tricks of the *yetzer harah*. He wants you to lose sleep; you should get nervous and run down. And he wants you to be sad. But don't become dejected because of this. Sadness, *yei'ush*, is exactly what he wants to achieve. Be cheerful, be confident, and know that if you'll try, then Hakodosh Boruch Hu is on your side.

And that's the third lesson that Hashem taught Kayin; and it's also what we learn from Yaakov's wrestling match. And that is: **וְאַתָּה תִּמְשָׁל בּוֹ**, and you will rule over it. Because a man will say, "If that's the case, that I'm up against such an opponent, an enemy who has so much power, then there's no use trying. I can't compete with Mr. Dior in Paris or Mr. Steinbrenner in New York. Poor little me should stand up against a global threat, a universal

power?!" "No," says Hakodosh Boruch Hu. "Don't lose heart; you must never lose heart even though you're standing against an opponent who's far superior to you."

And the reason is because we have the promise of Hakodosh Boruch Hu, ואתה תמשול בו - And you will overcome it. Hashem guarantees us that as long as you are struggling, pushing ahead, as long as you recognize the *yetzer harah* for what it is, and you're fighting him with everything you have, then ואתה תמשול בו. You know why? Because I, Hashem, am bigger than he is. And if you attempt, if you try, I'll be with you. Hakodosh Boruch Hu promised that we will be aided, we will get *siyata dishmaya* if we decide to tackle him.

RABBI BEAN!

And you should also learn this from a bean! You're hearing a *chiddush* now, that a *bean* can be your rebbi. In *Mesichta Beitzah* (25b) it tells us that there is a certain bean, the *turmos*, that teaches us a lesson. It says there that the *turmos* bean is bitter, it's inedible. So what do they do to prepare it? They boil it in water, and then they spill out the water because now the water is bitter. And then they boil it again. And again. Seven times they change the water to get rid of the bitterness. After seven times being boiled, the bitter *turmos* becomes a delicacy. And it's used for desert. So you see that no matter how bitter it was at the beginning, if you don't give up, if you keep on trying it becomes something that's delicious.

So one day, Hakodosh Boruch Hu will say to you, "Why didn't you change your ways?" So you'll tell Him, "Oh Ribono Shel Olam, don't punish me; I tried." And He'll say, "Oh no! You didn't try *enough!* Did you try as much as the *turmos* bean tried?" Once, and again and again and again. And it seems like it'll never become sweet! And then at the end, at the seventh time it becomes קינוח סעודה, a delicacy. And so, don't give up. You have no right to give up. And you'll be held accountable and punished by this humble bean that could have been "your teacher" but you refused to learn from it.

EIN SHUM YEI'USH BAOLAM KLAL

Now, there's a certain Rebbe, the Breslover. So, in one of his seforim he writes as follows. He himself writes this - *about himself*. He says, "When I was younger, I tried to serve Hashem. I tried and fell, and sometimes I fell down a hundred times. And each time, I got up again and tried again."

That was his stubbornness. He got up and he fell down. He didn't succeed. He was נכשל. But he got up again. A hundred times! "I got up," he says. "And in the end, I remained standing!" That's the lesson. It's a *nisayon*, a test, and you have the *bechira* to pass that *nisayon*. You keep on trying and the end is that you will surely succeed. There's no such thing as not succeeding. You keep on trying and הבא לטהר מסעיין לו. If you are actually coming to succeed, if you *really want* to succeed - that's what הבא לטהר means - then you will remain standing in the end. The first times, the first ninety-nine times, are just a test to see if you are a weakling. That's what they're there for! To see if you're a weakling or if you're serious about it. And if you overcome the first ninety-nine times, then you're on the way. Then you're on the road to greatness.

GETTING BACK UP IS THE GREATNESS

And actually it's not the road *to* greatness, it's *the road of greatness*. The road itself is the most important achievement. It's the struggles, the falling down and getting up again to persevere; it's when the *gid hanashe* is pulled and you regain your equilibrium like Yaakov did, that's what makes you perfect in the eyes of Hashem.

Of course it's not easy. It wasn't easy for Yaakov either. But those difficulties are your greatest opportunity. There is a statement in Pirkei Avos which is one of the most important in the entire corpus of Torah ideology. Everything there is important but this stands out as one of the greatest. לפום צערא אגרא. According to the *tzaar*, the difficulty, so is the *agra*, the reward.

Only that we say these words of the *mishna* but we don't believe them, we don't *live with them*. I'll tell you an example. When young people are married, usually they're poor, so they're looking forward to when they'll be settled. They'll be able to buy

their own home, they'll have a lot of money in the bank, and their children will be grown up and married. Right now they're just starting but there's a great future to look forward to.

STRUGGLING IN MESIVTA

Or a yeshiva man who is sitting and sweating it out over the gemara. The words are difficult, the ideas are abstract. He's struggling late into the night trying to understand just one *teirutz* in the Tosfos. There are many allusions to ideas which he never learnt before, references that are new to him. And in general the gemara's argumentation is difficult. It's very difficult to learn gemara, especially in the younger years. So he looks forward to when he'll be a big *lamdan*, and everything will come easy to him. He'll be a *buki* in the idiom of the gemara and he'll sense what they're arguing about. He'll be able to grasp the fine points in a Rashi and Tosfos. That's when he'll finally be successful.

But what we learn from here is - yes, it's true - there are great days ahead of you. You'll have *nachas* from your children. Excellent families from your children. And you yourself will someday be a *talmid chacham*, a big *buki*, why not? But you have to know that the time of accomplishment, the opportunity for the biggest merit is right now.

CHILDREN DRIVE THEIR MOTHER CRAZY

And that's because when it's hard, when it's overwhelming, that's when you're achieving the most. The greatest reward is right now. The mother is going crazy - there are four babies, and they're crying at night, the husband tries to help a little bit, but she's going crazy from her children. She looks forward to when they'll all be older and married off.

So Hakodosh Boruch Hu is actually telling her, "You have to know that this is the best time in you life, this is the biggest achievement in life. Not when you're an old grandmother, and you'll visit your grandchildren and see what's going on, and then you go home and sleep a nice peaceful sleep in your quiet home. No, it's now when the children are still in the house and they're up all night with colds. And with this and with that, and they're fighting amongst themselves, and all day long your mind is distracted. You feel you're losing your mind, and you're going

crazy." All mothers say they're going crazy! And it's a miracle that they don't.

So Hakodosh Boruch Hu says to this mother, "I know it's hard. I know you're struggling all night long! Don't let up! It's *fighting* the battle that counts. Because that is the greatness of life; this is the achievement of life. This is how you're becoming perfect in My eyes."

A mother, all she does is give and give and give. It's a greatness, a perfection that is almost impossible for a man to achieve. And that greatness is coming from those long nights that never seem to end, the same long night of Yaakov Avinu.

And you, the yeshiva man, you're struggling and you're biting your lips. It's so hard, you don't understand what Tosfos is driving at. You have to know that's this is the success of life, not later when it gets easy. It's when it's hard that you're becoming great.

BEWARE OF POTHoles AHEAD

And therefore any person who feels that he's not struggling in his service of Hashem, if he feels that his way in this world is smooth, without many bumps and potholes, that's a sure sign that this person is failing in his purpose. It's impossible that a man should be in a life-long wrestling match with the *yetzer harah*, a match being managed from on high, and not feel that he's struggling, unless he has willfully closed his eyes to his purpose in life.

Our great enemy lies in wait at every step of our lives, pouncing at every opportunity, dangerous yet almost invisible. And therefore the single most important lesson of our talk tonight is that you must open your eyes and become aware of the danger around you.

Yaakov struggled all night because we must do the same in the night of this world. תשת חושך ויהי לילה - זה העולם הזה הדומה ללילה. This world is compared to the darkness of nighttime, and we struggle through the darkness all the time, wrestling with the same force that Yaakov encountered. And we know that the morning of Olam Habah will one day come, the place where all of our struggles and all of our efforts will be requited.

WRESTLING OUTSIDE THE PALACE DOORS

This whole life that we're living is merely a preparation for the World to Come. העולם הזה דומה לפרוודור לפני העולם הבא - This world is only the hallway leading into the palace of the Next World. And certainly *there* you'll lean back and enjoy the ride. Certainly it'll be nothing but happiness there. But you'll look back with regret that this period of struggle is over. *Ay yah yay!* My opportunity is gone forever! יפה שעה אחת בעולם הזה, better one moment of struggle in this life, than all the happiness in the World to Come. Because that's the purpose of existence, to achieve by means of difficulty. The bigger the difficulty, the greater should be your happiness because your greatest achievements come from your struggles. And even the slightest lack of focus on our part means that the *yetzer* is pouncing and grabbing hold of the sinew, and wrenching it loose. And we then have to walk away limping, *chas v'shalom*, and make our way into the Next World as permanently damaged goods.

Now, don't think for a moment that Yaakov didn't walk away as the champion. It's true that in one detail he yielded for a moment but that for us became the greatest lesson. And we continue to this day to not eat the *gid hanashe* as a memorial by which we remind ourselves to maintain the struggle for Hashem's service and to not yield even momentarily to the *yetzer harah*.

And although Yaakov became slightly disabled because of a momentary lapse, a momentary weakness, he soon recovered, and we therefore learn the lesson of unfaltering persistence in the battle for truth in this world. And at the end, this *malach* gave Yaakov Avinu a blessing. And he said to him, "From now on your name will not be Yaakov, but Yisroel." Yisroel means, "You shall conquer over all. You shall win out." כי שרית, You will win out over everyone. And we the children of Yisroel, continue to reenact in our own lives the long and torturous struggle of our forefather, in preparation for the day when we will enter into the palace of the World to Come having conquered the *yetzer harah* in this world.

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Q&A With Rav Avigdor Miller Ztz"l

Q:

Why do we wear a black hat more than any other type of hat? What's the big deal with a black hat?

A:

Very good question. And the answer is that if all the בני תורה would wear yellow hats, then we should all wear yellow hats. Color is not important. The main thing is to identify with the בני תורה, with the frumme. A black hat is a tremendous זכות.

You know that a boy approaching מצוה בר gets a pair of תפילין that costs five, six, seven hundred dollars – even more than that – and he also gets a black hat. To me, the black hat is no less than the תפילין. No less. The black hat shows that, "ושים חלקינו עמהם" – "I want my portion, my lot, in life to be together with the frumme, together with the צדיקים." It's so important!! ושים חלקינו עמהם. "I want to be together with them!" It's so important to demonstrate that you identify with the בני תורה, with the frumme. And therefore, wearing a black hat is an extremely great achievement. When a boy in our shul puts on a black hat, I give him a mazel tov as if he's putting on תפילין. That's how important it is.

And therefore, you shouldn't waste that opportunity. Every time you put on your hat, you should think, you should say out loud, "ושים חלקינו עמהם." Don't let your mother or your wife hear you, though. She might think something happened to you. But say out loud, "Thank you Hashem for placing my lot with the frumme." And a wife or a mother or a sister is no less. Whenever she sees her husband, her son, or her brother wearing a black hat, she should say to herself, "Boruch Hashem, my lot is with the frumme, the צדיקים of ישראל." Yes, wearing a black hat is a tremendous achievement.

TAPE #E-166

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