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# **Jacob's Confrontation With Esau**

## ***An Eternal Lesson How To Face And Conquer Evil***

### ***(Commentary to Parashat VaYishlah)***

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The confrontation is inevitable. Ya'aqov Avinu is returning home to what will become Eretz Yisrael. After twenty years of animosity and bitterness, his brother Esav is coming to meet him with 400 men. Esav's intent is clearly violent. Ya'aqov is only armed with his family, servants and livestock, not much resistance against an army. Yet, Ya'aqov is still true to his name. He can still match wits with the best and beat them all. His brother Esav might be guided by his hate driven emotions, but Ya'aqov is guided by his wisdom driven mind.

Learn from this a great lesson, a calm mind will always triumph over an emotional "hothead." This is why G-d designed human biology placing the head over the heart, for us to learn that emotions (midot) must always be subservient to mind (mohin). It is always best when the two work in perfect harmony. Yet, when in conflict, it is the mind that must dominate the heart. Ya'aqov, who embodies the aspect of the calm and cool mind, must now again subordination Esav, his "hotheaded" emotionally motivated brother, and to subdue his army. Ya'aqov Avinu prepares for war. Yet, this is not a war to be fought with arms, but rather a war to be fought with wits.

RaMBaN, in his commentary to this section, states that this encounter between Ya'aqov and Esav is to serve as the archetype as to how Jews are to interact with hostile Gentiles throughout our generations. Ya'aqov prepared for his meeting with Esav with three things: a bribe, a prayer and a weapon of combat.

Fully aware that he was outnumbered, Ya'aqov did not choose an initial military confrontation, knowing full well that there are better ways to win a war than to take up arms. Ya'aqov Avinu is here displaying a brilliant understanding of subtle military tactics, the likes of which would not be codified until many centuries later with the writing of the classic military manual of Swun Tzu.

Ya'aqov first sends a bribe to Esav long before Esav could be angered by seeing Ya'aqov's face. A bribe works to entice one emotionally thus releasing some pent-up inner anger. In other words, give an angry man a new toy and he becomes less angry. The more he is distracted the less angry he becomes. However, as a rule, the bribe must be given when the focus of anger, in this case Ya'aqov, is out of sight, for as the saying goes: "out of sight, out of mind." The bribe is an excellent tool of psychological

manipulation that will always have effect upon its target. This was Ya'aqov's first line of assault, to attack Esav's psychology.

The second assault Ya'aqov threw against Esav was spiritual. Ya'aqov attacked Esav using the power of prayer. Never let the power of prayer be underestimated in your eyes. Prayer is the focused power of one's essence, from both mind and heart. It is the union of focused mind (mohin), heart felt desire (midot) and directed speech (kli-vessel). Prayer is the language of communication between physical and spiritual forces. When done correctly, prayer enables us to communicate with G-d. Then in accordance to the power of our focus, G-d can reciprocate, manipulating the minds and wills of others before us (ref. Pirkei Avot 2:4).

Ya'aqov's prayers were most intense and powerful. He knew the secret of sefirotic yihudim (mystical unifications) centuries before the Mekubalim (Kabbalists) revealed them. We all seek G-d's blessings and protection. Yet, one must know how to solicit them and be worthy of them. Heaven extracts a high price from those who pray for a thing and receive it, even though they are not worthy of such. Bestowal of miracles is not an everyday occurrence. If one is so blessed, then Heaven has its reasons. The recipient of a miracle becomes indebted to Heaven and will have to pay Heaven back in some way or another. This, of course, Ya'aqov Avinu did countless times. As for us, who can say?

The spiritual assault does have its drawbacks. For as soon as one from the side of Kedusha (holiness) prays for something, the Sitra Ahra (Dark Side) also offers up its "prayers" in the form of accusations of unworthiness against the individual. Sometimes the Sitra Ahra (Dark Side) is not willing to be silenced by a prayer (especially if one is not worthy), so they strike back. The greater the prayer, the greater the resistance to its fulfillment. In the case of Ya'aqov, Esav's guardian angel himself took on physical form and attacked him. Esav's angel obviously hoped to subdue Ya'aqov, so that on the morrow Ya'aqov would be subdued by Esav instead of the opposite.

This angelic attack on Ya'aqov is not as unique as we all might think. Although none of us has had to physically wrestle with an angel in human form, this does not mean we have not been involved in such combat on the spiritual plane. Throughout the Zohar HaKadosh (ref. Vayishlah, 165b) the Yetzer HaRa (evil inclination) is identified as being an independent angelic entity as opposed to merely being a psychological tendency within one's mind. While we do not see a physical corporealization of this angel, its attacks are nonetheless, quite real and damaging.

As multidimensional entities, we human beings live simultaneously in both the physical and spiritual dimensions. Our minds are appropriately divided to live in both worlds. Our conscience mind deals with our physical dimension. Our unconscious mind deals with the spiritual dimension. Thus spiritual beings commune with us through our human unconscious. When such communion is with the forces of Kedusha (holiness), an individual receives strong resolve and focused intent. When such communion is with the forces of the Sitra Ahra (Dark Side), the result can be a spiritual attack. Under such circumstances, the individual becomes confused of mind, scattered in thinking and open

to all types of psychological and mental illness, most especially schizophrenia and depression. Indeed, most psychological illness today contains a spiritual component unseen by the untrained secular eye of the psychologist.

This was the danger faced by Ya'aqov Avinu when he met Esav's angel, who our holy Rabbis tell us was not other than Sama..., the angel we call the Satan. Ya'aqov could defeat Esav's conscious mind with a bribe, but he knew the secret of success lay even deeper. Unless one conquers an enemy's unconscious, removing from him any buried element of resistance that can later resurface, victory is not complete. Indeed, dangerous reversals can pop up with devastating consequences.

Ya'aqov therefore wrestled with Esav's angel but he did not defeat him. He only battled the Satan to a draw. Ya'aqov was partially victorious in that he was able to draw out of the angel the knowledge of his new name Yisrael, which would be given to him shortly by G-d. The angel however was partially victorious in that he was strong enough to permanently damage Ya'aqov, weakening his right thigh (Gid HaNasheh). While this wound was most physical, it also had profound spiritual significance in that it also harmed the collective Jewish soul. This led to the suffering that all of Ya'aqov's descendants have experienced from the children of Esav throughout history.

This then is the lesson of prayer. When we pray to G-d to redeem us, and indeed He does, we might not come through the tribulation unscathed if we are lacking in proper Kedusha (holiness). In Egypt, not all Jews merited leaving the country with Moshe Rabbeynu. During the plague of darkness many Jews died, all those who were not fit to leave. During the wilderness, many others died. Everyone prayed, but not everyone's prayers were answered. Praying for Divine intervention and support is a necessary thing, yet one must do serious teshuva (repentance) in order for one's prayers to be accepted.

The third and final step in facing an enemy is military action. If a bribe does not appease the enemy and for whatever reasons our prayers are not answered to our satisfaction, then we must be prepared to do whatever is necessary to survive. Violence, however, is never the first option of the Jewish people. This is why Ya'aqov Avinu sought a peaceful ending to the episode of the rape of his daughter Dinah by Hamor the Prince of Shekhem. As we know, Shimon and Levi had intentions other than their father's. Using Ya'aqovian deception, these two young sons of Yisrael took advantage of the recovering Shekhemites and executed righteous judgement on them all. Indeed, RaMBaM (and RaMBaN) write that according to Benei Noah law, the entire town of Shekhem became liable to the death penalty because they knew what their Prince Hamor had done and no one arose to judge him for his crime. Shimon and Levi acted entirely according to the Law. What they did not do was to obey their father Ya'aqov who might have dealt with the Shekhemites in a different manner.

We learn from this episode that the sons of Yisrael were a formidable fighting force. Indeed, the Midrash (Sefer HaYashar, referenced in RaMBaN) is replete with stories of the ensuing wars that occurred between them and the surrounding Caananites. The deeds of valor attributed to the sons of Yisrael describe each one as being an equal to

Shimshon. When it came to war, they were the avengers of righteousness. Years later in the days of Moshe Rabbeynu, who as we know was a Levite, the tribe of Levi was sanctified to G-d specifically because of their willingness to act with violent zeal against the enemies of G-d. The act of the sons of Levi against the idol worshippers of the Golden Calf is recorded as a glorious and righteous deed. When Pinhas, the grandson of Aharon the Kohen (a Levite) killed Zimri for his sin with the Midianite woman, G-d Himself declared him to be the maker of peace and awarded him with the high priesthood. The tribe of Levi distinguished itself again centuries later when the Maccabee clan rose up to rid Israel of the evil, unclean Greeks.

We have learned previously that “the voice is the voice of Ya’aqov and the hands are the hands of Esav.” This is to signify that the way of the Jewish people is not the path of violence. Yet, we also see that there are very precise and good exceptions to this rule. Violence is never the first choice for the Jew. Yet it is reserved as our final option. If there is a need for Jews to perpetuate acts of violence for the sake of Jewish survival or for the sake of sanctifying the holy Name of G-d, then these acts are to be absolute, to completely and permanently remove an enemies existence in this and all other dimensional planes. We are commanded not only to wipe out the physical existence of our enemies, we are commanded to wipe out even their spiritual existence (blotting out their names from under Heaven). Unfortunately, this resolve of Jewish vengeance is today not followed by anyone.

In the encounter with evil one great lesson must never be forgotten – evil is like a cancer, unless it is completely removed, it will grow back, again and again, until it finally causes death. Therefore, we must learn a lesson from our fathers; we must pursue evil and wipe it out from under the Heavens. Our quest must be deliberate and absolute. We must not be afraid of the opinions of others that deem us “politically incorrect” because we stand up to condemn certain behaviors and lifestyles that others who are morally bankrupt call acceptable and good. We must stand up and fight for morality, honesty, religion and righteousness; all the things that are held in disdain by the modern world.

We must fight to defend our holy Land. We must not allow its name to be blotted out from under Heaven. We must not allow Eretz Yisrael to become Palestine. We must not allow the holy Ma’arat Makhpelah to become a Moslem shrine. We must fight the good battle against the enemies of G-d, the enemies of the Torah and of the Jewish people. For whoever acts with anti-semitism against the Jewish people, is in essence attacking G-d. We must serve as the Hand of G-d to wreck vengeance upon our enemies, those who seek to serve evil or to remain quiet in face of its growth.

Yet, our method of battle must not be like what the fools and hotheads dictate. If necessary, we will rise up with arms to defend our cause. Yet, this is not our first line of offense. Our first line of offense must be to attack the minds and souls of our enemies. We must endeavor to be victorious in battle without ever having to lift up a sword or gun. We must advertise the words of Torah. We must show the world how proper are the ways of HaShem. We must correct their wanton way and challenge the indecency of the immoral. We must rise up as pillars of virtue to be examples of G-d’s light. Granted,

those doing so will become targets of slander, insult and possible assassination. Nonetheless, what the world today needs is for the return of the sons of Ya'aqov, those who with wisdom were silent against Esav, yet days later destroyed all of Shekhem. Jewish war is fought with wisdom, with silence and with sound, with stillness and with movement. Only the truly wise in the ways of Torah will know and understand the subtleties in our ways of battle.

We first conquer our enemy's minds, only then do their bodies fall with the least resistance. Torah Judaism must now take on the evil hostile world of Esav's descendants. We first offer the bribe of the sweet Torah way of life. At the same time, our holy Mekubalim are busy in their secret places around the world (and not just in Aretz) formulating holy prayers and performing mystical rites, slowly but surely neutralizing the spiritual angelic powers of our enemies. When these two deeds are complete, then our physical victory against our enemies will be a foregone conclusion.