

# DIVREI TORAH FROM YESHIVOT AND SEMINARIES



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## Tools for Turmoil

Yaakov Avinu had a rough life. He grew up with an evil twin brother, was forced to run away from his parents and home, had to work for seven years to marry Rachel only to then be tricked by his evil father-in-law Lavan resulting in him having to

work for an additional seven years. He had to confront his arch enemy Esav and he experienced the tragic events related to his daughter Dina. This week's *parsha* begins with the words “*vayeishev Yaakov – Yaakov settled,*” which Rashi explains to mean “Yaakov sought to dwell in tranquility.” After all he suffered, Yaakov was more than ready to have a peaceful and simple lifestyle. But Hashem had a different plan, and Yaakov’s dream was short lived. The very next *passuk* begins describing the ordeal leading up to Yosef’s

disappearance. Yaakov was now going to confront perhaps the most difficult period of his life.

While many of us can relate to Yaakov's desire to take it easy, we would not have expected this from the great Yaakov Avinu. Did he really think that he completely perfected himself spiritually and had no further need to grow and develop through life's challenges? Isn't life about working on ourselves and always trying to achieve more? If so, what does it mean "Yaakov sought to dwell in tranquility?"

Rabbi Jacob Joseph (1840-1902) was the only Chief Rabbi, ever, of New York City (the Yeshiva RJJ was subsequently named after him). In a sermon delivered in 1888, on *parshas Vayeshev*, he suggested a magnificent explanation of Yaakov's desire and Hashem's response.

Yaakov saw that the twelve *shevatim*, and hence the future of Klal Yisrael, was to emerge from him. He was their father and mentor. To invest in them properly and teach them Torah and *derech erez* with his full energy, he needed to live with *shalva* – tranquility. Yaakov wasn't looking to chill out, he was looking to educate his children in the greatest and most efficient way. He felt that to have the maximum impact on them, he needed peace of mind.

This actually makes sense. Why then didn't Hashem grant Yaakov his request? Hashem saw an important value that Yaakov still needed to impart to the *shevatim* - how a parent or mentor responds to difficulties. Everyone

confronts challenges in life. If a child sees his parents navigate their own tragedy, loss, or disappointment with *emunah*, inner strength, and resilience, he gains the necessary tools to successfully handle any difficulties he is faced with. This was the important educational message the *shevatim*, the foundation of Klal Yisrael, needed to imbibe. (Rabbi Joseph's entire sermon can be found in the biography "The Rav Hakolel," pg. 577).

The *Al Hanisim* prayer of Chanukah is introduced with the words "*Beyemei Matisyahu ben Yochanan Kohen Gadol ubanav* – during the days of Matisyahu the son of Yochanan, the Kohen Gadol, and his sons." The Siddur Siach Sifsoseinu notes that on Chanukah, as opposed to Purim, we highlight the strong connection between grandparent, son, and grandson. Where did the "*banav*" get the strength to fight for what they believed in, despite the difficulties of the situation? Because in their youth, they observed their father and grandfather, Matisyahu and Yochanan, both kohanim gedolim, devoting their lives to the holiness of the Beis Hamikdash; a position which was not easy and required tremendous sacrifice.

Even with all the pain and confusion that surrounds us, we have the opportunity to be like Yaakov Avinu, Yochanan, and Matisyahu and give over this very important message to the next generation. Whether it's within our own family unit or with our students, we can teach, by example, the positive ways in which we are dealing with our personal and communal struggles. ■