



DIVREI MENACHEM

BY MENACHEM PERSOFF

Special Projects Consultant, OU Israel Center
mpersoff@ou.org

Expending Effort to Overcome Evil

How many times have we asked ourselves, how do we purge our sullied thoughts from our consciousness? How often do we rationalize and subscribe those thoughts, utterances, and wayward actions to environmental circumstances or “inherited” personality traits?

We seem to struggle eternally with the question of good and evil. Perhaps we are unable or unwilling to draw the line. What constitutes “good,” and what do we portray as evil? For what might be appropriate in one context might be totally malevolent in another.

Moreover, what do we make of Rivka’s quest of Hashem why the children in her womb agitated? Following the Midrash, the unborn Yaakov struggled to come forth when Rivka passed by the Yeshivot of Shem and Ever. The unborn infant Esav, on the other hand, similarly writhed when Rivka traversed a temple of idol worship.

Because unborn babies have no will, Gur Aryeh posits that the embryonic Yaakov and Esav represent cosmic forces that transcend the regular course of personality development. Indeed, Hashem told Rivka

that the two unborn babies symbolized two opposing ideologies (later ascribed to Israel and Edom). However, the inevitable rivalries would invariably end with the younger son, Yaakov, prevailing over Esav.

The ongoing conflict between the two worldviews – Yaakov representing good and Esav, evil – has accompanied us throughout the generations. Sometimes Esav prevails; sometimes Yaakov. On a personal level, we struggle within ourselves daily. Often, our *Yetzer Hara* gets the better of us, and, at other times, our Nefesh is warmed by the *Yetzer Hatov*, serving Hashem with free will and Simcha, joy.

For now, however, good and evil are here to stay. It seems, however, that our cosmic role is to vanquish the sources of evil and make a correction, a *Tikun*, in this world. In that context, notably, the Baal Hatanya teaches that even our evil impulse is for our good.

How so? – Because our rabbis tell us that the effort expended to oust evil’s influence and direct ourselves to bathe in Hashem’s Presence is what, ultimately, shapes our essence *and* our destiny. Thus, in their unique fashion, each of our strivings in that direction adds to the totality of the *Tikun* that will, speedily in our time, bring about the long-awaited Final Redemption and *Yemot Hamashiach*. ■

Shabbat Shalom!

Menachem Persoff