



SIMCHAT SHMUEL

BY RABBI SAM SHOR

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Parshat Vayishlach finds Yaakov Avinu as he is about to re-encounter his twin brother Eisav, and he is quite worried about that meeting. Before he goes to sleep that evening, he utters a *tefila*, using language that should seem familiar to each of us.

וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֱלֹקֵי אֲבִי אַבְרָהָם וְאֱלֹקֵי יִצְחָק ה'
הַאֲמֵר אֵלַי שׁוּב לְאֶרֶצְךָ וְלִמְוֹלַדְתְּךָ וְאִיטִיבָה עִמָּךְ
Then Yaakov said, "G-d of my father Abraham and G-d of my father Yitzchak, Hashem, who said to me, 'Return to your native land and I will deal bountifully with you.'

Yaakov Avinu, at this moment of great personal crisis, employs very similar language as we, his descendants, do when we *daven* to this very day, invoking the merit of his father Avraham and grandfather Yitzchak before him (we of course add Yaakov's name as well).

Subsequently the Torah tells us:

וַיֹּתֵר יַעֲקֹב לְבָדּוֹ וַיֵּאָבֶק אִישׁ עַד עֲלוֹת הַשָּׁחַר
And Yaakov was left **alone**. And a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn.

The *meforshim* offer various interpretations of this incident, where Yaakov is left alone, and then engages in some sort of struggle with a mysterious individual. My distinguished teacher and colleague, Rabbi Ari Kahn, in his beautiful work *Explorations* offers a rather unique interpretation of our verse:

If Yaakov is truly alone, who can he be wrestling with? The most straightforward answer is that he was, in fact, alone; no one else was there to wrestle with him. Yaakov was wrestling with himself.

Rabbi Kahn's insight, perhaps, can help us to uncover a fundamental message that is alluded to in these *pesukim*.

Seemingly, Yaakov has uttered his *tefila*, entering into a deep contemplative state and internal struggle. He emerges from this dream-like experience, and he has received a new name- *Yisrael*, he has been injured and impaired in his leg, and this experience has an impact for his descendants for all eternity..

Yaakov himself is physically changed, his identity is transformed, and there is an implication for all subsequent generations to refrain from eating from the *gid hanasheh*.

How might this entire episode come to

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teach us about the goals of *tefila* and its impact and implication in each of our lives? **What is the experience of *tefila* really meant to be for each of us?**

Rav Kook zt'l (as cited in the Sefer Mishnat HaRav, edited by Rav Moshe Zvi Nerya zt'l) explained the transformative capacity inherent within the experience of tefila.

The difference between one who davens and one who does not do so, is not simply that one individual sets aside time each day for tefila while the other one does not, rather there is an existential difference. The worldview of these two individuals are completely different-those moments spent each day in tefila leave a lasting imprint on the entire day...

Yehi Ratzon, may each of us merit to grasp the great gift of transformation and growth that is inherent within each and every tefila. ■



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