

When Yaakov Ovinu left Be'er Sheva and stopped to daven at Har Hamoriah, Hashem came to him in a dream and promised Yaakov that he will return and receive this land.

Yaakov awakens from the dream and promises that when Hashem will fulfill His promise and be an 'Elokim' to me, I will give Him ma'aser. What does it mean to be an "Elokim" to Yaakov? It means that Yaakov will succeed in his quest to father Klal Yisroel and produce 12 sons who will be free of any impurity.

Yaakov is coming down to Eretz Canaan with a large family from Choron. When he departs from Lovon, he is greeted by camps of malochim who are going to escort him back to Yitzchok's house in Chevron. But Yaakov is aware that now he will be confronting Eisov. Yaakov knows full well that Eisov has been hating and resenting him all these years, and he will continue to hate him for all time.

Where is Eisov located right now? He is centered in Seir but has holdings all over the place. He is marching to Yaakov with 400 fighting men, and Yaakov is afraid. Why is he afraid if Hashem promised that he will return safely to Yitzchok? Isn't this a lack of bitochon?

The truth is that everything in this world is built on a cheshbon of s'char and onesh. Hashem is running everything with a deep calculation. Yaakov is afraid that perhaps he does not have enough zechuyos left after Hashem has given him so much for these past 20 years. Perhaps he has made aveiros which reduce his protection from Eisov? There are all kinds of factors that go into Hashem's promises and nothing is guaranteed. This concern of lacking on one's level is not a lack of bitochon at all.

In Shaar Alef in Nefesh HaChaim, Rav Chaim gives an example of bitochon from Kriyas Yam Suf. Klal Yisroel have just been through ten makkos culminating in an amazing gilui Shechinoh. But this doesn't mean the sea will split for them automatically.

Klal Yisroel are first gathered at Ramses at the north-eastern corner of Egypt, and the most logical thing is to keep going north up the Mediterranean coast straight into Eretz Canaan. But Hashem tells them no – go the other direction south towards the eastern coast of the Gulf of Suez. But it is the wrong direction! Still, Klal Yisroel follow Hashem's directions without question. This is one of the biggest displays of complete bitochon Klal Yisroel show in Hashem's guidance. Then He tells them to go north and then west and then south to the western coast of the Gulf of Suez. They follow, despite that this is in contradiction to any logic. They have no clue that this path is how they will eventually emerge with enormous riches beyond description. Hashem said this is the way to go – and they go. Straight into a desert going the wrong way.

Now they are stuck between the sea and Pharaoh's army and Klal Yisroel cry to Hashem to be saved. Hashem tells Moshe to instruct Klal Yisroel to march into the sea, and they march!

The Nefesh HaChaim says it was Klal Yisroel's bitochon which forced the waters of the Yam Suf to split. But this was only after Hashem told Moshe the yam will in fact split for them. Otherwise, there is no guarantee.

So Yaakov is justifiably nervous because you have to be on a spiritual level and get a direct instruction from Hashem before you can rely on a miracle. Yaakov decides he needs to try to raise his spiritual level, and make hishtadlus – by saying tefillos, sending presents to Eisov,

and preparing for war.

After Yaakov sends off his presents to Eisov, he finds himself alone. This is a critical moment in Yaakov's life – confronting the Sar of Eisov – and no-one is around to witness it but Hashem. People have different nisyonos at different points in their lives. The most important nisyonos come when we are making a critical decision and nobody else knows about it but Hashem. There is no audience, there is no media recording it and posting it. It is just between myself and Hashem.

When Avrohom and Yitzchok go to the akeidoh, they are initially accompanied by Eliezer and Yishmoel. But at the last part of their journey, Avrohom tells Eliezer and Yishmoel to remain behind with the donkeys while Avrohom and Yitzchok go up to Har Hamoriah alone. When Avrohom and Yitzchok faced the most difficult nisayon of their lives, no-one was watching. When Yaakov has his fight with the Sar of Eisov, it is the defining struggle of his life – and no-one is there to watch it.

What is the Sar of Eisov?

There is a fundamental idea from the Nefesh HaChaim that everything that happens in the physical world, has a parallel in the spiritual world. As the war between Russia and Ukraine here on Earth is raging, there is a spiritual force representing Russia and a spiritual force representing Ukraine that are locked in a spiritual battle in Shomayim as well. The outcome of the spiritual battle in Shomayim will determine the winner of the physical battle between these two countries on Earth. Everything in the physical world has a spiritual force in Shomayim which gives it power.

There is a spiritual battle between Yaakov and the Sar of Eisov. Eisov is out to kill Yaakov – he wants to kill Yaakov and will always hate him. But there are deeper roots to this hatred. Yaakov represents the 'Ish tom yosheiv ohalim'. If Yaakov succeeded in preserving this ideal level, then he has nothing to fear from Eisov. But Yaakov isn't so sure. He spent 20 years living in the house of a master swindler. So Yaakov needs zechuyos to prevail over the spiritual force of Eisov.

The battle begins, and the Sar of Eisov realizes that Yaakov is in fact on a high level, but Yaakov came out of this battle wounded. Chazal say this refers to those who support Torah. There is a deep idea being conveyed here. People think they can be dishonest in business and cheat and steal, and then "make up for it" by making donations to religious causes.

There was a wealthy Jew who was not acting properly, but he thought he could buy off Hashem's displeasure by writing a check to the religious institutions of the town. My great-grandfather said to him Hashem doesn't take bribes. But the sad fact is that this is a mentality many people have.

This is the wound Yaakov endures because Yaakov needs support from within his own family – Eisov was rejected as a partner in gashmiyus – and not every Jew is on the level to support Torah with the proper intentions.

The spiritual level of Klal Yisroel is always the decisive factor in every situation. In the long, two-year war we just went through, you would be mistaken if you thought it was a war between the IDF and Hamas. The truth is that it was a serious test of the spiritual level of Klal Yisroel. That is the major issue we have to confront whenever Klal Yisroel faces a crisis.

People say the IDF is short on manpower and we have to enlist 12,000 soldiers from the yeshivah community. I responded that it's simply not true. If we had half a million chilonim become shomer Torah and mitzvos in this country, I guarantee there wouldn't be any manpower shortage in the army. I actually believe what I say in davening that when Klal Yisroel does their part and lives up to their proper level, our enemies will instantly become much easier to manage.

Yaakov is fighting a spiritual battle for survival. Is his level of ruchniyus strong enough to defeat Eisov or not? Onkelos translates the word "Yisroel" to mean Yaakov is fighting in the presence of Hashem alone. He emerges victorious, but limping. Many supporters of Torah are deficient in their spiritual level because they think they can buy Hashem's favor with donations. We are forbidden to eat the gid hanosheh till this day to remember that fight, and to remember it was an internal spiritual struggle to determine Yaakov's true level in ruchniyus which could allow him to overcome Eisov.

At the end of U'voh L'tzion there are two pesukim that some people add. One is וְעַתָּה יִגְדַּל נָא כַחַד ה' Hashem fights our battles, but he needs 'weaponry'. Hashem's 'weapons' are Klal Yisroel's zechuyos.

The next section of the parsha says Yaakov arrived at Shechem, 'sholeim'. Rashi explains that Yaakov is whole because he isn't limping anymore. Why was he cured?

This is the result of the pesukim before.

וַיַּעֲקֹב נֹסַע סֻכֹּתָה וַיָּבֵן לּוֹ בָּיִת וַלְמִקְנֵהוּ עֲשָׂה סֻכֹּת עַל כֵּן קָרָא שֵׁם הַמָּקוֹם סֻכֹּת: וַיָּבֵא יַעֲקֹב שָׁלֹם עִיר נְשָׁם אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן בָּלְאוּ מִפְּדֹן אָרֶם וַיַּחַן אֶת פְּנֵי הָעִיר:

We read that Yaakov made a house – presumably for his family – and sheds ('succos') for his flocks, and this is why he named the place Succos. But this makes no sense! Why name a place after the temporary huts he built for his animals? The Tur even says this posuk is the remez to the Yom Tov of Succos! Very puzzling! And why is he building a permanent structure at all if he is still making his way down from Choron to return to his father Yitzchok in Chevron, further south?

Targum Yonason gives the answer:

וַיַּעֲקֹב נָטַל לְסוּכּוֹת וְאִיתְעַבְבַּ תַּמָּן תְּרִיסַר יָרְחֵי שְׁתָּא וּבְנָא לֵיהּ בֵּי מְדֻרָּשָׁא וּלְגִיתוּי עָבַד מִסְּלֵן בְּגִין כֵּן קָרָא שְׁמָא דְאַתְרָא סוּכּוֹת:

Yaakov isn't building a house, a palace for his family to live in. He is building a Beis Midrash to learn in!

Yaakov is unbelievably wealthy, Eisov is overwhelmed by Yaakov's wealth even though he just sits and learns all day. Yaakov's 'keviyus' – his main occupation – is his Torah, and his 'arai' – his side, peripheral involvement – is the flocks and parnossoh. Yaakov shows us what is the ikkar in life and what is supposed to be tofel. This is also the message of Succos. Leave your secure, safe comfortable home and change your priorities in life. This is why Yaakov was cured from his limping. Being perfect in his Torah and prioritizing ruchniyus over gashmiyus produced the result of being sholeim b'gufo.

Yaakov became wealthy because he was brutally honest. Even though he worked incredibly hard. Not everyone who works hard is blessed with success. He had to give Eisov a tremendous present and you would think his wealth would take a serious hit as a result. But since Yaakov became sholeim b'Torasos and he knew his wealth came from his honesty and the money was secondary, Hashem made up all his losses.

This tells us a lot about our own lives.

There is a final lesson here. Shimon and Levi kill everyone in Shechem for the rape of Dinah, and Yaakov is very upset with them. Hashem tells Yaakov that he has been delayed for too long and must come to Beis El to fulfill his promise. So Yaakov sends out the order for everyone to divest themselves of all the avodo zoro they accumulated before they arrive at Beis El. But why on earth would Yaakov assume his children have avodo zoro in their possession?

The answer is that if his camp had been pure, the rape of Dinah would never have happened. If Klal Yisroel are on the proper spiritual level, no-one can touch them.

It turns out Yaakov was right! There was avodo zoro that the shevotim had to get rid of and bury. Only then could they move on and be protected from attack as they travelled. Yaakov realized that they were in immediate danger and they needed to raise their spiritual level in order to survive.

This is the lesson that goes through the entire parsha. Our mitzvos and aveiros determine what happens to us and what happens in the Torah. Hashem runs the world and He acts in response to Klal Yisroel's mitzvos and aveiros.