

been misled. Apparently, they believed that they were following the *emes* without observing that the name of the engine that was driving the *emes* was *sheker*.

ויהיו בני יעקב שנים עשר... בני רחל יוסף ובנימין... אלה בני יעקב אשר יולד לו בפדן ארם

The sons of Yaakov were twelve... the sons of Rachel were Yosef and Binyamin... these are the sons of Yaakov who were born to him in Paddan Aram. (35:23,24,26)

The *Rishonim*, early commentators, question the location of Binyamin's birth. The Torah states that he was born in Paddan Aram, when, in fact, he was born outside of Bais Lechem (Bethlehem) on the road to Efras. This is where Rachel *Imeinu* died and was buried. It was clearly not Paddan Aram. *Ibn Ezra* explains that the majority of Yaakov Avinu's sons (eleven) were born in Paddan Aram. *Chizkuni* offers a novel response to this question, which offers us a powerful insight into the concept of *tefillah*, prayer. Indeed, Binyamin was not born in Paddan Aram, but the precursors for his birth, the catalysts which served as the basis for his birth, were the prayers and supplications offered by Rachel in Paddan Aram. Thus, since the prayers that brought about his birth herald back to Paddan Aram, it is considered as if his actual birth took place in that place... not in Bais Lechem. The place where *Tefillah* is articulated is what generates the miraculous response; thus, it is considered to be the place where the response actually occurred.

This grants us a powerful understanding of *tefillah* and a deeper appreciation for its efficacy. *Horav Elyahu Baruch Finkel, zl*, offers the following source for this idea. The *Talmud Berachos* 54a teaches, "One who sees a place where the Jewish People had once experienced a Heavenly-ordained miracle, should recite – *Baruch she'asah nissim la'avoseinu b'makom hazeh*, "Blessed is He Who made miracles for our forefathers in this place. The *Talmud* adds: He who sees the stone upon which Moshe *Rabbeinu* sat during the war of Amalek. (That was the place that Moshe sat on a stone and raised his arms heavenward.) This is problematic, since Yehoshua fought Amalek outside of the protective barrier of the *Ananei Hakovod*, Pillars of Cloud. Moshe, however, was sitting on a hill – a place that was not within the cloud's demographic. In other words, *Klal Yisrael's* triumph over Amalek, which should have been the place where they *davened*, was not where they had recited the blessing of *ha'makom ha'zeh*.

We derive from the above that the *makom ha'neis* is not necessarily where we think it is. We have no question, however, that the *neis*, miracle, reverts back to where the person rendered his prayers to Hashem. Thus, if *bachurim*, *yeshivah* students, are studying Torah in a place not frequented by those who

are fighting to protect them – and they win – it is all because of the power of the prayers rendered by those who stayed home.

There is a well-known story that occurred concerning the *Brisker Rav, zl*, during the battle of 1948. The Zionists were winning – driving out the Arabs. He said, "Make no mistake; we are not winning because of the Zionists. Their "idea" of success was fighting and overpowering the enemy. Their soldier brandished a sword and bow and arrow. The "other" Jewish soldier studied Torah and fervently recited *Sefer Tehillim!* The *Rav* added that the war of 1948, like all ensuing wars, was not won on the battlefield. "The battle is fought in the *bais hamedrash*. The success of the young men in the study halls will determine the course of the war."

Va'ani Tefillah

Bareich Aleinu – בריך עלינו ד' אלקינו את השנה הזאת Hashem Elokeinu es ha'shanah ha'zos. Bless us Hashem, our G-d, this year.

A year is 365 days long. We say this prayer thrice daily all year. What about the end of the year? Is the prayer still as meaningful? Once, prior to *Minchah* on *Erev Rosh Hashanah*, the very last *tefillah*, prayer, of the year, the holy *Horav Sholom, zl, m'Belz*, was surrounded by his *chassidim*, as they prepared to conclude the past year. He said, "We are now about to recite the last *Minchah* of the year. Yet, we ask Hashem to bless 'this year.' What does this mean? In mere minutes this year will conclude. How can we ask Hashem for a blessed year?"

"Obviously, since we believe that *Yeshuas Hashem k'heref Ayin*, 'Hashem's salvation can come like the blink of an eyelash,' even at the very last moment of the year, Hashem can grant His blessing, so that the entire past year will have been a year of abundant blessing!"

We might add that when a person prays, he must believe in what he is praying. When we ask Hashem for a good year (or anything, for that matter), we must acutely believe that everything could immediately change. This is how a Jew should pray.

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פנינים על התורה

PENINIM ON THE TORAH

Parashas Vayishlach

תשע"ה

פרשת וישלח

כי ירא אנכי אותו פן יבוא והכני אם על בנים

For I fear him lest he come and strike me down, mother and children. (32:12)

Rashi explains that, while Hashem did ensure Yaakov *Avinu* that He would protect him and that all would be good, perhaps, as a result of his "sin," he might be compelled to fall into Eisav's hands. Our Patriarch feared the repercussions of his sin. This was his *madreigah*, spiritual plateau, with regard to *yiraas cheit*, fear of sin. We can only begin to imagine what Yaakov's criteria concerning sin were. Yaakov was concerned about the fact that he had made a *bris*, covenant/agreement, with the evil Lavan. Could this be a sin which would catalyze the loss of Hashem's protection? This is the type of sin that caused Yaakov anxiety. Yaakov did not sin, but he feared that he might have subtly acted in a manner that, on his level of spirituality, might be considered a deficiency. How far did our holy, righteous leaders go in their fear of sin? What, as far as they were concerned, constituted a sin? The following story which occurred concerning the holy advocate of the Jewish People, *Horav Levi Yitzchak Berditchever, zl*, gives us a glimpse into the concept of *yiraas cheit*.

Rav Levi Yitzchak would seek any form of interpretation to subdue the prosecuting angels who were bent on extracting punishment from *Klal Yisrael* for their shortcomings. The *Berditchever* always looked for some vindication by which to absolve his people. One year, prior to *Rosh Hashanah*, a letter arrived from his holy *Rebbe, Horav Baruch, zl, m'Mezritch*. The *Maggid* wrote a short, ominous note: "This *Rosh Hashanah* – be especially watchful." Reading these words penned by his *Rebbe* caused a shiver to go down *Rav Levi Yitzchak's* spine. He must now be especially vigilant. He must find some righteous deed, some vindication to exonerate the nation. Otherwise, they might fall prey to the prosecutor's complaints against them.

As was his custom prior to *Rosh Hashanah*, *Rav Levi Yitzchak* set out for the poor section of town. He began to wander through the streets and alleyways of this wretched section of town. Perhaps, here among the downtrodden, he might find some vindication. These people had suffered so much throughout the year; yet, they maintained their commitment to Hashem despite their deprivation. Maybe, maybe, here he would luck out.

Suddenly, he noticed a faint light burning in

the window of one of the old, dilapidated houses. He walked over and peered at the window. He saw a young woman sitting, her head bowed, as she sat at the table reading *techinot* (supplications, which was a common prayer selection for women). The *Rebbe* knocked on the door and was admitted into the "house." When the woman recognized who was standing before her, she became greatly agitated. She was well aware of another one of the *Rebbe's* practices: to walk through the street exhorting sinners to repent before *Rosh Hashanah*.

Before the *Rebbe* had the opportunity to say a word, the woman broke out in bitter weeping, "*Rebbe*, it is true – I have sinned, but I have repented and have done whatever has been within my ability to cleanse myself of my sin."

"Please do not be sad," the *Rebbe* began "You are not a sinner; on the contrary, you have earned great merit. This is why I was led to your home, but, please, tell me your story."

"As a young girl, I lived with my parents in a small village not far from *Berditchev*. My parents rented a milking station from the local *poritz*, gentile landlord. This is how they earned their livelihood. It all came to an end when I was seventeen years old, and my parents suddenly passed away. I needed to earn money to live, so I decided to ask the landlord if he would allow me to continue renting the milking station from him. When I entered his room, I could see that he looked at me in a strange manner. He began speaking to me in a lewd tone. Immediately, I saw that this gentile was up to no good. He came closer to me; I became frightened and pushed him away. Suddenly, he changed his attitude. 'Do not be frightened,' he said to me. 'I will not hurt you. I am taken away by the beauty of your hair. You can have the rental of the milking station for another three years – at half the price! I only want to kiss your hair.'

"And he took my locks in his hands and kissed them. I ran home feeling defiled by this course gentile. I went to bed, but was unable to sleep. I tossed and turned, but could find no rest for my soul. The thought that I had allowed that evil man to touch my hair was too much for me to bear. At dawn, I arose, cut my hair and left the house. I came to *Berditchev* and found work as a servant girl. Eventually, I met and married a fine man, who recently died. Now, I am once again left alone. This is my story."

Tears welled up in the *Rebbe's* eyes, as he listened to her tragic tale. Such a wondrous, righteous woman. Such sacrifice! Such utter commitment! "Did

you save any of that precious hair?" he asked. "Yes. I saved one small lock as a reminder of my ordeal. When times are bad, I look at that lock in order to validate Hashem's punishment of me," she replied. When Rav Levi heard these words, he did not speak; rather, he left the house without a word.

Rosh Hashanah arrived, and the *Rebbe* prepared himself for the holy day in his usual manner. He went to the *mikvah*, came home, dressed himself in white clothing, donned his *Tallis*, and proceeded to the *shul*. It was *Shacharis* and the *Rebbe*, as he was to be the *chazzan*, was about to go up to the lectern to recite *HaMelech!*; "The King!" The *Rebbe* was much more emotional than usual. The prayers were fervent, and, when he concluded, he left the *shul* to once again immerse himself in the *mikvah* prior to *Tekias Shofar*. The people waited for his return. Finally, he entered the *shul*, his face aglow, prepared for the *Mussaf* prayer.

His head was covered with his *Tallis* as he bent low over the lectern. Silence. The entire congregation stood in silent awe waiting for the *Rebbe* to raise his head and speak. Suddenly, he raised his eyes Heavenward and cried out: "*Ribbono Shel Olam*, if You were to take all of the sins of the Jewish People and place them on one side of your Heavenly scale and then place the lock of hair from that holy woman in our community on the other side, it would demonstrate and define the distinction between the purity and holiness of a Jewish maiden and the impurity of a depraved world: Hashem! For her sake, forgive Your children, *Klal Yisrael!*"

We now have somewhat of an idea of the *yiraas cheit* of Yaakov Avinu.

יאמר עשיו יש לי רב... וכי יש לי כני

Eisav said, "I have plenty... in as much as I have everything. (33:9,11)

In addition to differences in their chosen vocations, Yaakov and Eisav had completely different perspectives on life. Yaakov Avinu was totally immersed in spiritual pursuits. The life of Eisav *ha'rasha* was all about the physical and the material. Spirituality did not play a role of any sort in Eisav's world view. Satiating his physical desires, fulfilling his material needs, was what made life worth living. One powerful difference exists between the physical/material and the spiritual, with regard to satisfaction. One who is focused on the physical/material can never satisfy his physical/material hunger. One who is focused on spirituality, however, is satisfied with his physical/material lot in life.

We observe their disparate outlooks from the manner in which they spoke. We find Yaakov attempting to appease Eisav by sending him a generous gift prior to their subsequent encounter. At first, Eisav declined the gift, claiming, *Yeish li rav*, "I have plenty" (33:9). Yaakov, however, prevailed upon him when he said, *Yeish li kol*, "I have everything" (33:11). *Kol* – everything – *rav* – much; is there really a difference? Yes. One who feels he has it all – is

satisfied. He has amassed all that he needs, all that he wants. One who says, "I have plenty," is indicating that he does not have it all; he wants more. One who is immersed in spirituality requires very little materialism. To him, the purpose of material bounty is to help others. Thus, after allowing himself whatever he needs for sustenance, he views whatever is left as extra – something to be shared with those less fortunate than he. The Eisavs of the world [and most go by "other" names] are never happy, because they never have enough. *Mi she'yeish lo manah – rotzeh masaim*; "He who has one hundred (now) wants two-hundred."

Horav Shlomo Wolbe, zl, teaches that every positive trait is dependent upon another positive quality. Positive traits are not free-standing attributes. They require support. In order for an individual to acquire the *middah*, attribute, of *emunah*, faith, in Hashem, he must work on his *bitachon*, trust. Likewise, for one to acquire *bitachon*, he must rid himself of "himself." There is no room for arrogance if one is to trust in Hashem. To purify oneself of the destructive character trait of anger, he must first develop a sense of humility. One who is humble realizes that he has nothing to get angry about. After all, who is he? The ascent towards spirituality brings an individual to the point that he acquires the *kol* perspective. He has it "all," because he has achieved *sheleimus*, completeness, perfection.

We all have dreams which reflect our personal aspirations. Some of us dream because we do not have the tools for realizing our dreams; we lack self-confidence, determination and resolve, strength of character, to bring fruition to our dreams. Thus, the dreams remain mere fantasies – leaving the dreamer an unhappy, sometimes bitter person. First, one must transform his dream into a vision, concretizing his dream to a certain extent. A vision is more structured and rooted in daily living. A dream is usually wishful thinking. A dream does not impose anything on the dreamer, while a vision, having gone to the next step, makes subtle demands on the dreamer to stop dreaming and do something about realizing the dream!

Rav Wolbe suggests that often our dreams remain mere fantasies because we do not know how to begin. A man once came to *Horav Abba Grossbard, zl*, and asked for the *Mashgiach's* guidance concerning the proper focus in Torah study. He had so much to learn. He wanted to set priorities, so that his limited time would be put to good use. Was *Daf Yomi* a good idea, or was that asking too much? Perhaps more focused learning that covered less ground, but delved deeper into the topic's profundities, would be appropriate? Should he learn *Kodoshim*, a section of the *Talmud* which deals with sacrifices and the *Bais Hamikdash*, or should he devote time to *mussar*, works of the Ethicists, which deals with character refinement? They discussed the issues; *Rav Grossbard* offered his advice, and they each went his own way. Twenty years later, the two met up again, and the questioner expressed his previous dilemma. On what should he focus his Torah study?

Focus is what success is all about. When one is unfocused and thus unable to clearly delineate and define his ambitions – he will have nothing! In order to achieve success, one must have concrete aspirations and goals, and he must designate time for realizing these ambitions. All too often, the individual gets bogged down in wavering about what he should focus on, rather than determining the area in which he seeks to advance and allotting time to this objective. In other words, some people just want to spend time talking – but not doing. Once the designated time has been determined, it should be adhered to – without fail, with no room for excuses. Otherwise, one will not pass the first rung of the ladder. Furthermore, one should stick to doing one thing at a time – not five. When one accepts on himself to do many things, he will do nothing.

ענתם אותי להבישני בישב הארץ

You have decomposed me, making me odious among the inhabitants of the land. (34:30)

Although the men of Shechem were collectively guilty of Dinah's violation, either for harboring the perpetrator or for not preventing the outrage, Yaakov Avinu felt that the actions of his two sons had disgraced him. To the average unlearned student of the "Bible," this would be another "example" of Jewish obsequisness, fear of retaliation, of taking a stand for what is right. *Baruch Hashem*, there are those who understand the depth of Yaakov's shame as being related to his position as the *b'chir ha'Avos*, chosen of the Patriarchs. *Horav Mordechai Ilan, zl*, observes that Yaakov's *middah*, attribute, was *emes*, truth. Thus, *Titein emes l'Yaakov*, "Grant truth to Yaakov" (*Michah* 7:20), the attribute of truth in its pure and unembellished form is endemic mostly to Yaakov. Avraham Avinu personified the *middah* of *chesed*, lovingkindness. *Yitzchak Avinu* exemplified *gevurah*, strength. *Emes*, however, achieved its epitome through Yaakov. Thus, even if it was permitted and proper that the people of Shechem receive their due – if it had the slightest taint, the most minor vestige of impropriety, if it was not one hundred percent truth – it was not up to Yaakov's standard. To Yaakov, this was disgraceful.

What was untruthful about their actions? If the people of Shechem deserved punishment and Yaakov's sons executed it, they were doing what was proper. Why was Yaakov cross with them? What about their actions lacked in propriety? *Rav Ilan* explains that, while they may have been correct in their objectives, violence is not a Jewish concept. For a Jew to take a sword and kill – even if the person is guilty – indicates a lack of *emes*, truth. Yaakov represents unembellished, unmitigated truth. Thus, his sons' actions constituted a breach of truth, because, as an absolute, truth may not be fractured. It must be complete and pure.

We derive from here a new understanding of truth. There is speaking the truth, which for the most part, we attempt to discharge to the best of our knowledge. There is also living the truth. This means

not portraying oneself as someone that he is not, or not implementing false media to execute the truth. Jews are non-violent. When we employ violence to carry out the truth, then we are acting falsely. When a Jew's demeanor does not reflect the highest standard of integrity – *achartem osi* – we have disgraced Hashem. We are His agents in this temporal world. By acting in any manner less than the highest level of rectitude, we defame Hashem.

In *Horav Shimon Schwab's* "Selected Essays," the *Rav* cites an insightful *Midrash*. In *Parashas Vayishlach*, the Torah relates the incident during which Yaakov Avinu was left alone. At this time, a "man" appeared, who fought with our Patriarch throughout the night. *Rashi* quotes the *Midrash* that identifies this "man" as Eisav's archangel, his prince in Heaven. His name is given as Samael, none other than the *Satan*. *Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer* states that, when the angel asked Yaakov to permit him to leave, Yaakov insisted on inquiring into his name. The angel gave a strange response: His name was the same as Yaakov's; Yisrael was his name. What does this mean?

Rav Schwab explains that Yaakov's visage, his image, is engraved upon the *Kisei HaKadosh*, the Heavenly Throne. The Almighty's Throne is synonymous with the *middah* of *emes*, truth – which also happens to be Yaakov's *middah*. On the other hand, Samael represents *sheker*, falsehood. As the master of deceit, Samael is identified with subterfuge, duplicity and disingenuousness. In fact, *Chazal* (*Chullin* 91a) teach that when Samael appeared to Yaakov in the guise of a human, he came disguised as a saintly sage, a *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar. Why? Because he sought to use his guile to deceive. This, explains *Rav Schwab*, is why Samael calls himself "Yisrael," specifically because his essence is falsehood.

Having said this, both Yaakov – the exposition and personification of integrity – and Samael, the guardian of falsehood, both go by this name. This is because Samael must live a life of falsehood. What greater lie can there be than Samael cloaking himself in the guise of Yaakov, falsehood cloaked in veracity. This is the greatest lie!

This is what confronts us today: *sheker* cloaked in the guise of *emes*. *Rav Schwab* offers a number of examples. In summation, when *sheker* disguises and presents itself as *emes*, it not only represents the greatest *sheker*, it also creates the greatest obstacle and challenge for the unknowing and uninitiated, who think that as long as one dresses the part and "talks the talk," then "walking the walk" is not mandatory.

Rav Schwab concludes by reminding us that the world of *emes* is personified in the *pasuk*, *Atah hareisa ladaas ki Hashem Hu haElokim – ein od milvado*; "You have shown us to know Hashem, He is the G-d – there is none beside Him" (*Devarim* 4:35). This means that there is one *Ribono Shel Olam*, one Torah *miSinai*, and He alone dictates and guides the world. Sadly, there are those who do not follow this criterion for determining *emes*. They have followers who one day will wake up and realize that they have