



TIFERET HASHABBAT

תורת תפארת

A Difficult Dilemma **Rabbi Michael Bramson** **Parashat Vayishlach**

There is an anecdote that is told about a college professor who was preparing his class for the final exam. "This will be the one and only test for the semester; it will determine your whole grade. The test will start at 10:00 AM and end at 12:00 PM. After 12:00 PM I will take no more exams".

The day off the test comes and all 100 students are present. At 12:00 PM there are 99 papers on the professor's desk. One student approaches the professor's desk and at 12:05 PM and hands in his exam. "Too late" the professor says "I said 12:00 PM and I meant 12:00 PM." The student pleads and mentions that this is the only grade for the semester. "Sorry", the professor says "rules are rules". The student then asked, "Do you know who I am?" The professor responds "I don't know who you are and I don't care who you are" "Do you know my name?" the student then asks. "I don't know your name and I do not care what your name is". "Good" says the student and proceeds to take his paper and shoved it into the other 99 papers.

"And Yaakov remained alone" (32:25). The commentators point out that when one separates himself from the crowd there is greater chance for the yeitzer hara to move in and do its dirty work. Being with others can help turn away the yeitzer hara.

This seems to contradict another idea in our parasha. "Please save me from my brother, from Esav" (32:12). Yaakov asked Hashem to save him - but why does he have to say from my brother from Esav, isn't obvious who Yaakov's brother is?

The Beit Halevi says that Yaakov was afraid on two levels. If Esav comes as Esav, Yaakov is afraid of the war and its violent conclusion. If he comes as my brother, Yaakov is afraid that the closeness will cause a negative influence on himself and his children. We see that Yaakov does not crave to have a relationship with Esav, yet before we see that when Yaakov was alone he ends up in a crucial battle with the yeitzer hara.

We need to be in a group that is a positive influence on who we really want to be. When we are around friends who learn Torah, who do not speak lashon hara, who treat others nicely they serve as a positive influence on us and help us battle the yeitzer hara.

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"No Pain, No Gain" Paulette Franco

תורת תפארת (המשך)

But when we surround ourselves with the "brotherly love" of an Esav, whose influence will take us further away from the Torah and its values, we need to separate ourselves. It is not easy. The violent Esav we see as a danger but the loving brother is someone who we think wants what is best for us yet really is leading us on a different path.

Such difficult decisions and choices we must make. We want to have friends, we want to be part of group yet we also want to ensure that we surround ourselves with positive influences. I just recently received a call from someone in this exact dilemma. He was asked to go to a friend's house for Shabbat yet he was not sure if the most conducive Shabbat atmosphere for his spiritual growth.

We will face these questions many times during our college days and well into our careers. Let us try to surround ourselves with friends who will help keep away the yeitzer hara and will serve as positive role models for us to grow in our bein adam lamakoim and bein adam lachaveiro.

In this week's parsha, Yaakov is fighting with an angel. The angel realizes he can't win and says to Yaakov, "Please release me." Yaakov responds, "I won't release you until you give me a bracha." The Piazetchna Rebbe explains that it was not enough for Yaakov to just defend himself; he wanted to walk away with something. He was being put through this fight and he didn't want to come out the same. He wanted something more than just a tie or letting the angel go. It is not sufficient to walk out of a hard situation unharmed. From a hard situation one should come out with a new perspective on how to continue one's life.

Hashem told Avraham that his nation will be enslaved, but when redeemed they will leave Egypt with abundance of silver, gold, food, cattle etc. Hashem was placed the concept in Jewish history of gaining something positive from a hard situation. When the Jews have been oppressed or sent to Galut we have walked away with something positive, we did not have before. Avraham set this up as a recurring motif in Jewish history.

When Yaakov was sending sheep to his brother Eisav as a gift before meeting him, he sent them all spread out so it looked like there is more (The Hebrew word for more is "Rachav"). This represents that Yaakov was praying that all our Tzarot and hardships should not come at once but rather they should be spread out. Rachav also means profit, that every tzara and hardship we go through should come out with a profit. We should come back from exile with "r'chush gadol."

This does not only apply on a national level though. When we go through a test or a setback that Hashem sends us, we should have the mindset that this is going to pass and when it does, what positive thing can I walk away with from this struggle. Just like Yaakov wouldn't walk away from his setback without a bracha, something positive, so should we.

May we all have the strength to overcome all of the tests and struggles Hashem sends us. When we do, may we too find the positive that we can take away from it.