

Vayishlach – Rabbi David Mahler

The *Torah* tells us that the night before he planned to confront his brother *Eisav* and his army of four hundred soldiers, “*Yaakov* was left alone and a man struggled with him until dawn” (*Bereishis* 32:25).

There is a fascinating dispute in the *gemara* (*Chullin* 91a) regarding the appearance of this man with whom *Yaakov* wrestled, who we know was the ministering angel of a self and represents the evil inclination. What did he look like? How did he present himself and how did *Yaakov* see him? One opinion is that angel appeared to *Yaakov* as an idol worshiper while the other opinion in the *gemara* is that he appeared to him like a *Torah* scholar.

Many explain this *gemara* in the same vein. The deeper meaning of this *gemara* is that the *yetzer hara* constantly changes its approach and its tactics depending on the situation. A *gemara* (*Sukkah* 52a) elsewhere states that the *yetzer hara* goes by seven different names since it takes on a different approach depending on the person and the circumstance.

To this end, the *Ramchal*, Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzato, in his *Mesillas Yesharim*, writes that the tests of this world are always changing. From rights that the tests of this world are always changing. All aspects of our world, whether good or seemingly bad, are tests for a person - poverty on one hand and wealth on the other.

One example of this idea was seen earlier in *Sefer Bereishis*. When it comes to *Lot*, *Avraham*'s nephew, he passed his test of poverty with flying colors. After descending with *Avraham* to Egypt because of a famine, *Lot* went into exile and stayed strong. However, while in Egypt, both *Avraham* and *Lot* amassed great wealth (13:2), and the test of wealth was a more difficult one for *Lot*. He chose *S'dom* and the enticement of indulgence over a life living with *Avraham*.

Yaakov Avinu's wrestling match with the angel was the paradigmatic struggle of each and every one of us and that is why the angel appeared as both a *tzaddik* and a *rasha*. Our struggles always change. They are fluid and ever-present.

Interestingly, earlier today I began studying the *sefer*, *Olam HaAvodah*, by Rav Moshe Don Kestenbaum. In his introduction, he writes that in our own lives, we all go through times of great *Aliyah*, when we experience special moments of elevation and inspiration, while other times we fall and succumb to our *yetzer hara* or simply feel blasé and uninspired. Often, when we are learning and davening well, we feel great about ourselves. We sometimes create a stir that there's no limit to how much we can grow and develop.

However, he writes that the *yetzer hara* is crafty, and may use these moments to trick us into thinking that though we're growing there is still so much farther to still climb. Sometimes the *yetzer hara* tells us we're no good and at other times whispers to us that we're so good which can potentially cause us to feel arrogant.

The most important takeaway of this idea is that we must always be on guard to potential pitfalls and trappings of our evil inclination.

When discussing the *yetzer hara*, it is always crucial to note that the rabbis teach that there is one way to combat it – learning *Torah*. The *gemara* (*Kiddushin* 31) teaches that *Hashem* created the *yetzer hara* and the *Torah* as its antidote. Learning *Torah* is a calling to the limitless greatness and holiness that lies within us. It is meant to kindle our holy spirit. We are holy and precious – the beloved children of *Hashem*.