

Good Shabbos, everyone.

I want to thank the sponsors of today's drasha:

- Rick and Sarah Bernard, in memory of Sarah's mother, Miriam Levinson, Miriam bas Velvel, whose yahrtzeit is on 19 Kislev.
- Mordechai and Miriam Gordon, to commemorate the first yahrtzeit of Miriam's mother, Betty Frost Eisner, בת"יה בת מנחם מנדל, whose yahrtzeit is on 21 Kislev.
- Shraga and Yehudis Sunness, in memory of Shraga's mother, Marian Sunness, Miriam bas Avraham Shlomo, whose yahrtzeit is on 24 Kislev.

May the *neshamos* have an *aliya* and may all the sponsors be rewarded for their support of the shul with *bracha*, *hatzlacha*, and good health.

We live in a long-lasting state of *galus*, in a world of darkness, filled with so much confusion. We identify with Yaakov Avinu, who felt threatened and beleaguered. He wrestled with an unidentified "angel," which represented-- according to commentators--his enemies, his fears, and his anxiety. As the Medrash teaches, the *malach* with whom he fought took on many forms. We, too, live in a confusing reality and Hashem's plan is hidden from us. We worry about the political unrest in our country, the ongoing and tiring pandemic, the instability in the Middle East, the attack on religion worldwide, as well as growing antisemitism and assimilation.

How should we, as God-fearing Jews, react to all this confusion and uncertainty?

I think many would answer *bitachon*—trust in God.

חובות הלבבות שער הבטחון

אמר המחבר מפני שקדם מאמרינו בחיוב קבלת עבודת האלקים ראיתי להביא אחריו מה שהוא צריך יותר מכל הדברים לעובד האלקים ית' והוא הבטחון עליו בכל דבריו בעבור מה שיש בו מן התועלות הגדולות בענין התורה ובענין העולם."

The **Chovos Halevavos** writes that *bitachon* is the primary ingredient necessary for *avodas Hashem*, realizing that we **depend** on God for everything...both in times of well-being and in times of distress.

But Yaakov Avinu, one of our *avos*, a *tzadik*, did call upon God to help him in all his times of distress--as he leaves his parents' home, when he prepares to meet Esav. But even he reacts not with immediate *bitachon*, but with fear. He is afraid, distressed, and filled with anxiety. The Torah goes out of its way to stress that both ויצור לו and ויירא מאד, he was both very afraid and distressed.

How do we reconcile this reaction with his righteousness, with his *midda* of *bitachon*? Especially in light of the fact that God had given Yaakov an assurance וישמרתיו בכל אשר תלך, I will protect you.

Why did Yaakov Avinu not react calmly with full trust and faith in his time of need?

There are two approaches I would like to share with you this morning.

The first approach understands that Yaakov did not react properly. **Malbim** writes that a true בוטה - especially if he has been given an assurance--should not have this level of fear-- and that is why Yaakov Avinu became distressed. He knew that his reaction was undesirable and that one who is afraid does not merit open miracles.

מלבי"ם בראשית פרק לב (ח - ט) ויירא יעקב מאד. הנה הבוטה בה' אין לו לירא מב"ו, והיראה מורה שאין בטחונו כראוי, כמ"ש מי את ותראי מאנוש ימות ותשכח ה' עושך, בפרט שיעקב היה לו הבטחה מה' ולא היה לו לירא, וה' אינו עושה נס למעלה מדרך הטבע רק למי שבוטח עליו בכל לבו, ואחר שראה יעקב שהוא מתירא, לכן ויצור לו, שזאת עצמו הצר לו שמזה דן שאינו ראוי לנסים אחר שבטחונו בלתי שלם, וע"כ נסה לעשות הכנות טבעיות ותכסיסי מלחמה. . .

The **Gemara in Brachos 4b** says there are logical explanations for his fear; that Yaakov had received this assurance only if he kept God close to him at all times, and he was afraid that he had failed. Nevertheless, Malbim maintains that Yaakov should have reacted differently.¹

Rav Shimon Schwab takes a second approach and he looks at this reaction of Yaakov Avinu very differently. He writes, in his Ma'ayan Beis Hasho'eiva, that a *tzadik*, someone with great *bitachon*, isn't one who doesn't have normal human fear in dangerous situations. That fear, like our inborn feeling of pain when touching fire, actually protects us. **What makes a *tzadik* different is how he responds and reacts to that danger and fear**. Is it debilitating or can he gain composure and turn to God and make reasonable *hishtadlus*—human effort—to mitigate his plight? The mark of *bitachon* is not whether he is initially afraid, but—after he reacts like any human would—can he calm down and put his trust in Hashem? Does he now have *bitachon*...

מעין בית השואבה

ויירא יעקב פ' רש"י שמא יהרג (עיי' ב"ר פרשה ע"ו:ב') וצריך ביאור למה היה יעקב ירא והלא אין ראוי הפחד לצדיקים... ואין לומר שהיה ירא מן החטא שהרי אמר בתפלתו "כי ירא אנכי אותו" שמשמעו שהיה ירא מעשו הרשע בעצמו.

ונראה שבאמת טבע האדם להפחד מהסכנה, וגם הצדיקים בכלל זה, אלא שהצדיקים שופכים שיח לפני הקב"ה להנצל, ולאחר התפילה לבם בטוח שהקב"ה שמע קולם, ושוב אין להם שום נדנדוד פחד, וכן מצינו בדוד (תהלים שפתח תפילתו "רפאני ה' כי נבהלו עצמי, ונבשי נבהלה מאד" ולבסוף אמר סורו ממני כל פועלי און כי שמע ה' קול בכיי, שמע ה' תפילתי יקח. ולכן בעת התפלה אמר יעקב "כי ירא אנכי אותו והיה ירא שמע יהרג, אבל אח"כ היה בטוח בהקב"ה והראיה שהרי אח"כ יצא יחידי בלילה להביא פכים קטנים וגם כשנאבק איש לא מצינו שהיה לו פחד, והכין את עצמו לפגישת עשו, ולבו נכון עמו בטוח בה'."

Similarly, the **Steipler** (Birchas Peretz, p. 80) comments on the pasuk that says that when the Jewish people fought in wars they were told not to be afraid:

אמר אלהם שמע ישראל אתם קרבים היום למלחמה עלי־אִיְבֵיכֶם אֶל־יָרֵךְ לְבַבְכֶם אֶל־תִּירָאוּ וְאֶל־תִּחַפְּזוּ וְאֶל־תִּפְעַצְצוּ: מְפִיָּהֶם:

He shall say to them, "Hear, O Israel! You are about to join battle with your enemy. Let not your courage falter. Do not be in fear, or in panic, or in dread of them.

He writes that the Torah did not actually forbid someone to be afraid. Rather, the Torah simply mandated that a person not dwell upon his fears and cause himself to panic and build up in his head that he cannot be successful. The initial fear, though, is natural and very human.

ברכת פרץ עמ' ע'

...ואם ירא מצד הספק סכנה שיש בדרך כלל י"ל דאינו בכלל לאו זה דאל תיראו, אכן כל זה אם מפחד בכלל אבל אם הפחד בא לו מצד שרואה גודל המחנה של האויב ומשער בלבו שלא ינצח מחמת חזוק מחנה האויב, או שמתרבה לו הפחד בשביל זה כל כה"ג עובר באל תיראו וזה מפורש כמעט בתורה פ' שופטים כי תמא למלחמה

The **Rashbam** expands this idea and writes that Yaakov was literally struggling with himself about his reaction to this fear. He even thought of running away; a reaction similar to that of Moshe Rabbeinu, Yonah, and others when they were afraid of their missions. He struggled with his fear, but eventually overcame it..²

¹ תלמוד בבלי מסכת ברכות דף ד עמוד א: כדברי יעקב בר אידי, דרבי יעקב בר אידי רמי, כתיב: והנה אנכי עמך ושמרתך בכל אשר תלך וכתבי: ויירא יעקב מאד! אמר: שמא יגרום החטא.

ספר ההגדה עמ' 448-449 כך, בדיוק כך, אמר הקב"ה ליעקב אבינו. הבטיחו בשמירה, אבל בתנאי אחד: "והנה אנכי עמך, ושמרתך בכל אשר תלך." אם אהיה אתך, וכאשר אהיה אתך אשמרך. אבל עברה יוצרת חיץ בין האדם לבוראו "כי אם עונתיכם היו מבדילים ביניכם לבין אלקיכם, וחטאתיכם הסתירו פנים מכם משמוע. ולפיכך פחד שמא גרם החטא וחצי...
² רשב"ם בראשית פרשת וישלח פרק לב פסוק כט

ומה שלקה יעקב ונצלע לפי שהקב"ה הבטיחו והוא היה בורח. וכן מצינו בכל ההולכים בדרך שלא ברצון הק' או ממאנים ללכת, שנענשו. במשה כתי' שלח נא ביד תשלח, ויחר אף י"י במשה. ולפי הפשט אעפ"י שאמרו חכמים בכל מקום חרון אף עושה רושם וכאן מה רושם יש? הלא אהרן אחיך הלוי עתיד היה להיות לוי ואתה כהן ועכשיו הוא יהיה כהן ואתה לוי, אך לפי הפשט לפי שהיה מתעצל ללכת כתי' ויהי בדרך במלון ויפגשוהו [י"י] ויבקש המיתו. וכן ביונה שנבלע במעי הדגה. וכן בבלעם ויחר אף אלהים כי הולך הוא ונעשה חיגר, כדכתי' ותלחץ [את] רגל בלעם, וילך שפי, חיגר כמו ושופו עצמותיו:

The powerful lesson for us, is that even great people, like Yaakov Avinu, are also afraid, anxious, and hesitant to realize their potential...but their greatness lies in the fact that they overcome their fear.

And indeed, after the initial fear, Yaakov Avinu adopts a multi-prong approach. He turns to God in *tefilla* in this time of fear.

(יא) קטנתי מכל החסדים ומכל האמת אשר עשית את עבדך כי במקלי עברתי את הירדן הזה ועתה הייתי לשני מחנות:
(יב) הצילני נא מיד אחי מיד עשו כי ירא אנכי אתו פן יבוא והכני אם על בנים:

In addition, on a pragmatic level, he splits his camp, he sends gifts to Esav...and he prepares for war.

וַיִּחַץ אֶת־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר־אִתּוֹ וְאֶת־הַצֹּאֵן וְאֶת־הַבְּקָר וְהַגְּמְלִים לְשְׁנֵי מַחֲנוֹת:
(ט) וַיֹּאמֶר אִם־יָבֹא עִשָׂו אֶל־הַמַּחֲנֶה הָאֶחָד וְהִכּוּהוּ וְהָיָה הַמַּחֲנֶה הַנּוֹשֵׂאֵר לְפִלִּיטָה:

A *tzadik*, one who lives with *bitachon*, is not a *malach*. He is also human, with the full range of human emotions and instincts. What distinguishes him from others is how he deals with the challenges that are thrown his way, how he responds to fear and anxiety by moving forward with intellect and faith, and trust in Hashem.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z'l, wrote in an article entitled “Feeling the Fear (Vayishlach 5776)” regarding Yaakov Avinu: *Courage does not mean having no fear. It means having fear but overcoming it. If that is true of physical courage, it is no less true of moral and spiritual courage. . . . We are as great as the challenges we have the courage to undertake. And if, at times, we feel like running away, we should not feel bad about it. So did the greatest. To feel fear is fine. To give way to it, is not. For God has faith in us even if, at times, even the best lack faith in themselves.*

From where did Yaakov Avinu derive the strength to carry on productively in times of distress?

He believed he had an important mission and purpose to carry out in his life. At the beginning of his journey, God told him about his mission--to produce children who would convey God's message to the four corners of the earth

בראשית פרק כח
(יג) וַהֲיָה ה' נֹצֵב עִלָּיִךְ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנִי יְקִיֶּךָ אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתֶיךָ וְאֵלֹהֵי יִצְחָק הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה שֹׁכֵב עָלֶיהָ לָךְ אֲתַנְנָה וּלְזָרְעֶךָ:
(יד) וְהָיָה זָרְעֶךָ פֹּעֵפֶר הָאָרֶץ וּפְרֻצֹת יָמָה וְקֹדְמָה וְצַפְנָה וְנִגְבָּה וְנִבְרָכּוּ בָךְ כָּל־מִשְׁפַּחַת הָאָדָמָה וּבְזָרְעֶךָ:

And he lived every day with that sense of purpose. Despite all the challenges he faced, Yaakov always looked towards the future, refusing to become a victim of the painful experiences, always focused on what he needed to accomplish to achieve his goals.

That was the character of Yaakov. He refused to live with resentment from the past—to get swallowed up in the pain of the present. He always looked ahead with purpose and hope.

This is an important lesson we can take from Yaakov Avinu. As a people and as individuals, we all have challenges. We all have disappointments. In our long exile, frustration and defeat have been the rule, not the exception. There is so much disappointment and struggle in life. Now, 10 months into the Covid19 pandemic, we are getting worn out. We want life to go back to normal. This disillusionment can plunge us, without warning, into crisis. What then do we do? How do we survive the trauma and the pain?

Yaakov Avinu teaches us to always look towards the future, to know that God has guaranteed our destiny as a people and that our job as individuals is to help build the foundation of that destiny.

And when we fall, we must learn to get back up and try again. What made Yaakov Avinu a *tzadik*; was not that he did not have struggles, but that he was able to confront them and move forward. Indeed, Yaakov

Avinu struggles with a *malach* who engages him in battle. He fought the entire night, and eventually suffered an injury, but when it was over...he was still standing. But not only did he persevere--at that point he came out stronger. At the end of this long and challenging episode, it says *ויבא יעקב שלם עיר שכם אשר* *Yaakov came out whole*. How was Yaakov described as *shalem*, whole? He had just spent years in the house of a *rasha*! He had just battled an angel who left him limping!

Rav Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin writes in his **Pri Tzadik**, (Nitzavim 1:1):

אבל ישראל נופלין ועומדין וכן הוא אומר אל תשמחי אויבתי לי כי נפלתי קמתי והוא שע"י הנפילה זה עצמו יהי סיבה לקימה ע"ד לשון חז"ל (מכות ז'): הירידה שהוא צורך עלי' שע"י הירידה יכול להיות העלי' יותר וכן הוא אומר כי שבע יפול צדיק וקם שע"י הנפילה דייקא יהיה הקימה.

But Israel falls and stands as it says, "Do not rejoice over me, Oh my enemy! Though I have fallen, I rise again." This is that through the act of falling this is the reason that one rises. This is the language of Chazal, "Downward motion for the sake of upward motion." That through the descent one can reach an even greater ascent. Likewise it says, "Seven times the righteous man falls and gets up." That specifically through falling, he is able to rise up with strength.

Yaakov Avinu might still have been limping—as the episode with Esav indicates, but he was *shalem*—he was more whole than before because he had learned from those experiences. He came out wounded, but stronger—in his faith and commitment.

We see this when he says to his attacker, *לא אשלחך כי אם ברכתני* “I will not let you go until you bless me.” What is he doing at that moment? **He is looking to take something positive from the challenging experience.**

His name was changed to Yisrael. The Angel names him Yisrael, *כי שרית*, because you struggled and you succeeded.” Yaakov’s new name memorializes his valiant struggle...

This is the life of Yaakov. And this is the life of Am Yisrael—a life of struggle, growth through struggle, and of eventual triumph.

Yaakov Avinu teaches us that, even though life is filled with heartache and challenges, it is our task to respond with intellect and faith. Feeling afraid in times of uncertainty is natural. Responding appropriately to challenges is what differentiates a *tzadik*. That is the measure of a *baal bitachon*.

We may not be able to choose our tests, or conquer our fears, or control our initial emotional reactions to crises, but we can always choose our response—how to move forward gracefully—how to best live our lives as Jews—how to leave a lasting mark on the world.

In this time of darkness, let us do our part to spread light and goodness, and as the **Navi Ovadya** teaches (1:18) in today’s haftara—

והיה בית יעקב אש ובית יוסף להבה ובית עשו לקש ונדלקו בהם ואכלום ולא יהיה שריד לבית עשו כי ה' דבר:

The House of Jacob shall be fire, And the House of Joseph flame, And the House of Esau shall be straw; They shall burn it and devour it, And no survivor shall be left of the House of Esau—for the God has spoken.

The light of truth represented by Yaakov and his son Yosef, and demonstrated today by their descendants, the Jewish people, will push away the darkness of Esav, and usher in an age of clarity and Godliness. May Hakadosh Baruch Hu end all suffering and hardship, and replace them with peace and tranquility and the rebuilding of the Beis Hamikdash and the *geula shleima... bimhera viyamenu... amen.*