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WEEKLY SHMUESS

Parshas Vayeitze

EMPOWERING YOURSELF
TO OVERCOME EVIL

DRASHAS FROM THE
AUTHOR OF BILVAVI MISHKAN EVNEH

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Vayeitze - Empowering Yourself to Survive Evil

“And Yaakov went out of Beer Sheva and he went to Charan...” Rashi states that on that night he slept, but until then, he did not sleep for the 14 years that he learned by Shem and Ever. When Yaakov came to Lavan, he worked for 7 years for Leah and 7 years for Rochel, which added up to 14 years. Then he traveled for another 6 years.

The 14 years which he served Lavan for were parallel to the years he spent in yeshivah. Not only did he study in the *yeshivos* of Shem and Ever, but he also totally immersed himself in his Torah study. When Yaakov left, he needed to develop the spiritual power to survive Lavan. He was leaving his home to go to a place of evil, the house of Lavan. In order to survive it, he would have to prepare for it by learning Torah.

The fact that he grew up in the holy home of Yitzchok and Rivkah wouldn't have been enough to protect him. In order to survive Lavan, he had to learn Torah for 14 years. He needed to become an *ish tam yoishev ohalim* (“a wholesome man who sits in the tents”) and only through that could he go outside to face evil.

The Ohr HaChaim said that in Egypt, the Jewish people were in the 49th level of impurity, and had we remained there for even one more moment, it would have been the 50th level, which is impossible to exit from. In the final exile, we will sink to the 50th level of impurity, and it will be naturally impossible to come out of it. The only way to exit it will be through the power of Torah. Only the Torah can take a person out of the worst levels of impurity. In Egypt we didn't have the Torah, so we had to get out before it was too late. But in the exile, at least we have the Torah, and that will take us out of the impurity we are in.

When Yaakov left his home to go to Lavan, he needed a strong kind of holiness that would be able to counter the evil he was entering, and that was why he went to go learn Torah beforehand. He gave himself the tools to fight with. If one learns Torah, he can go out into the world and survive. If not, he doesn't have a chance.

We are now deep in the 50th level of impurity. But we have a power which can counter all the evil we have seen [the Torah]. However, it is still our choice if we will connect to it or not.

How can we face the evil of the outside? I am not referring to the outside world, to the streets. I am referring to the outside influences that have entered the private domains of our homes.

“There is no home which does have a corpse in it.” But Hashem saw that we will go through all this. He saw that we will be surrounded with impurity, and that even those who try to keep the Torah will be influenced. He gave us a power to deal with all the impurity. We have free choice to use it.

What is that power of free choice that we have?

Firstly, it should pain a person how the world looks today! When you walk in the street, your heart can be broken inside about the situation of *Klal* Yisrael today, and our own personal situations as well.

One of the Sages said [about the coming of Moshiach], “Let him come, but I don't want to be there when he comes.” The Sages didn't think they could survive our times, because they know that their spiritual sensitivity wouldn't be able to take it. Only us, who are not so sensitive to spirituality, can survive these times, because it doesn't bother us that much anyway.

A person today says “Baruch Hashem, there is a lot of Torah learning going on, there are many people sitting and learning. There aren’t as many *yeshivos* and *gemachim* as there are today!” True. But this won’t be enough to help us counter all the evil we are facing.

There is a verse, “Go my nation, go into your room, close your doors behind you....until the wrath passes.” Hashem placed us in this situation in which the world is so impure - but He gave us a plan to, in how to come out of it....

The Chofetz Chaim already said 100 years ago that the world can’t survive anymore if Moshiach doesn’t come in his time. It is now 100 years after he said that. There is a lot of Torah today, but how much truth is there? How much heart is there? How much escape from falsity is there? How enslaved are people to the outside world? What is the level of connection that people have with Hashem, a true bond with the Torah? There are a few exceptional individuals who possess special souls, but it still pales in comparison to the general situation of most people.

These words are simple and clear. There are no novel ideas here at all.

The true kind of life can be gained by anyone in any place, as long as he chooses so; whether it is man, woman, or child. It is not too far from us; as the verse says, “the matter is very close to you”. But we must make it our desire.

This week of Parshas Vayeitzei (5771) will soon disappear, and never come back again. Some people will say that the words here are too harsh, and others will say that it’s talking negatively about the Jewish people, and others will say that the words here are true. But what will happen after all this? What will change? Everything just goes back to routine. Only Moshiach will be able to change the situation of the masses. But each person, individually, can make a choice.

Every moment, one has the choice to decide if he will truly connect himself to Hashem and to His Torah, and to understand that This World is really Gehinnom (hell) – no exaggeration here. That’s the reality now. In the Next World, even in Gehinnom there is no impurity. On this world though, which is very impure right now, it’s a much worse Gehinnom than the Gehinnom upstairs.

There are many *baalei teshuvah* today, who have left behind their entire past and upbringing, so they could change over. Are we, the Bnei Torah, also capable of leaving everything behind? Can we make such changes too...?

We need to return to the way the Chofetz Chaim lived, to the way the Ben Ish Chai lived, to the same life of purity and holiness which they lived with, and not to stay with the false kind of life this world lives. It means to abandon the styles of dress today, the accepted conduct of today, the slang of today, the desires of today’s times – and to return to what we really should want, to what our forefathers wanted.

Some will say that “If you’re right about all this, then why aren’t the *Gedolim* speaking about this? Why are our *Gedolim* letting things continue the way they are?”

Someone once asked Rav Elyashiv *zt”l* why he doesn’t give *mussar* to the generation. Rav Elyashiv said, “If I would tell people what I really want to say to them, do you think there is even one person who will listen to me?”

There are generally two kinds of people today. Some people feel that “Our generation is wonderful, even better than the previous generations; everything is great. Sure, we need to improve on some things, but overall, everything is great. This is the way it should be.” Others, though, are aware of the truth, but they feel that “There is nothing we can do to change the situation. After all, we don’t live in the desert – we live in civilization, and we have families to take care of. I cannot be the Avraham *Avinu* of this generation

and be different than everybody else. What should I do already about it?!”

This is a good justification. It’s a good defense. But the real issue is: “Do we have an inner world inside of us which can counter the outside world we are in?”

Yaakov learned by Shem and Ever before he went to Lavan. In order to prepare for Lavan’s trickery, he had to learn Torah. He had a good excuse for not having to learn – his parents told him to go there to find a marriage partner. He knew that he had to go there, because his life was in danger from Esav. But he was still going to the home of Lavan, who was full of impurity. He knew that in order to survive it, he will have to learn Torah for 14 years.

In other words, he developed his inner spiritual world to fortify himself so that he could face Lavan’s evil. He went to the beis midrash and truly learned Torah there, immersing himself there. He didn’t just go to a big beis midrash and learn Torah there over the phone. He went there to truly learn Torah, so that he could gain the spiritual strength to fortify himself. Of course, it was still hard for him after that. But he developed the power to at least have a chance to withstand Lavan.

It seems that the outside world can provide us with some life-giving vitality. After all, we see that many people delude themselves into thinking that the outside world does have what to offer us. If someone has real and deep chiyus (spiritual vitality) today, and he is connected in mind and heart to the Torah he learns, and he is connected to the mitzvos he does, he is connected in mind and heart to Hashem. Such a person has a chance of fighting the evil of today’s times. But if a person is not getting enough chiyus from Torah, mitzvos, and from the One who gave the Torah, he doesn’t stand a chance of being able to win over the evil in today’s times. He will lack the tools to succeed in overcoming the evil of today.

The intention here is not chas v’shalom to cause you to despair or to become depressed. Rather, it is meant to

help you become aware of how to fight the war against evil. When you go out to war, you need to know how to prepare, and to recognize how the [spiritual] war keeps changing. The [spiritual] war today has changed in the last couple of years. Today, the only way to survive the outside influences which have crept into our homes, is by developing our own inner world within us.

This does not mean inspiration, which comes and goes. It is referring to the inner depth about life, to be connected to what truth is. I will tell you this: I have a very hard time talking about this, and for two reasons. The first reason is because the inner essence of every Jew (besides for souls of the Erev Rav) is that we are a holy neshamah, and it is just that the garments covering our neshamah are not always proper. It’s like a person who has a child who goes astray, and he has to separate him from his other children; it is painful, even though he knows he has to do it.

Even more, the very fact that there is evil in this world is already a difficulty. It’s much easier to sit comfortably in the beis *midrash* and learn Torah pleasantly, reveling in the joy of Torah *chiddushim* – than to have to talk about the outside world, which is full of evil.

I don’t know at all if the words spoken here will be of any use to you. But perhaps if it will help even one person change and realize the truth - not because I am saying it, but because the person himself has come to that conclusion, and he will truly decide to give himself over to Hashem and to His Torah - through that, perhaps that person will be able to survive the world today.

I am sure that at least two or three people, or more, will say about this that the words here are too extreme and that they are far from how to understand our current situation. But if there is someone here who doesn’t have a heart of stone and his eyes can see a bit clearly, and he’s not enslaved to his desires – he sees the truth as it is.