Yeshivas Toras Moshe
ישיבת תורת משה
Rabbi Moshe Meiselman
Rosh Yeshiva

PARSHAS VAYISHLACH

תשפ"ג

Last week, we discussed Yaakov Ovinu leaving his home with Yitzchok to find a wife and spending 20 years in Lovon's household. It was a tremendous test of Yaakov's commitment to his middoh of truth. It was obviously a part of Hashem's hashgocho to put Yaakov in such an extreme environment of deception and dishonesty. In order for Yaakov to develop his middoh of truth to the fullest extent possible, Yaakov had to find the strength to preserve his integrity in the face of overwhelming resistance. It is very easy, when you work for a master thief who is trying to swindle you out of your hard-earned wages at every opportunity, to give in and start to deceive your employer in return. But Yaakov remained honest throughout. He told his wives that they know how hard and diligently he worked for their father down to the smallest task – never cutting corners or taking breaks – while their father tried to cheat him over and over.

How does one survive such a test? It depends how you define success in this world. If success can only mean coming out wealthy, then you will justify cheating and deceiving a swindler in order to succeed. But if you define success as doing the will of Hashem and not betraying your spiritual values, then you can see poverty as success just as easily as you see wealth. I will be totally honest no matter what others may do – and within my honesty I will not be a pushover – I will still do my best to succeed, but honestly. But the outcome is totally in the hands of Hashem. In response to Yaakov's honesty, Hashem gave him tremendous wealth.

The Ramban says that there are two types of emes. There is the pure, absolute emes shel maaloh which only exists in Hashem's realm in shomayim. The Torah gave us rules and guidelines how to apply emes in this world and how to function. This is the emes that we are required to follow in this world.

There was a famous German philosopher who said it was a total violation of proper ethics to tell a lie in order to save someone's life. His notion of emes was out of balance – too extreme. The Torah's demand of emes is one of balance and harmony when living in this world. Yaakov's defining middoh was keeping all the various middos in perfect balance and harmony to produce the emes of Torah. He embodies all the different darchei avodoh and applied it to life in the most beneficial way – which is how he produced the 12 shevotim.

Yaakov perfected emes in the real world and now it was time to come back to Eretz Yisroel to carry on the mesoroh of the Ovos. He will be confronting Eisov – knowing that they both cannot be dominant – one will serve the other. When Yitzchok gave Eisov's brocho to Yaakov, he said Yaakov will rule over Eisov. When Eisov asked Yitzchok for one brocho, he told Eisov that when Yaakov will start to become Eisov and stop living by his spiritual values, he will lose control over you and you will dominate him.

Eisov is living in Har Seir which is not Eretz Yisroel. He travels from southern Jordan to intercept Yaakov coming back to Eretz Yisroel. He expects Yaakov to be this loser brother who just sits and learns all day and doesn't know how to succeed in the real world. But Yaakov is coming back a very wealthy man! Yaakov sends Eisov a message: Although I lived in Lovon's house – the master swindler – I am still Yaakov. I wasn't corrupted or influenced. I didn't change to become like Eisov in order to succeed and become wealthy. I am going to send a gift to appease you.

Yaakov is informed that Eisov is charging towards him with a force of 400 armed marauders. Yaakov is afraid because maybe he wasn't honest enough and somehow he isn't worthy of being saved from Eisov by Hashem.

There is a massive struggle between Yaakov and the Sar of Eisov throughout the night. The Sar of Eisov cannot subdue Yaakov, but he manages to inflict serious damage to his thigh – Yaakov's source of support. Chazal say it was a blow to those who support limud Torah. Yaakov can't just sit and learn without having any distractions and worries of parnossoh. There are two reasons people support Torah learning. One motive comes from a genuine appreciation of the tremendous value of Torah. The other is to just use it as a tool for influence in the Jewish world and social status. These were wounded in the battle with the Sar of Eisov.

Yaakov refuses to let the Sar of Eisov go, so he gives Yaakov a new name: Yisroel. Targum explains that Yaakov struggles before Hashem and Hashem alone. There is no other audience. This is a very important idea. We see that at the akeidoh, the only one who was there on Har Hamoriah watching it was Hashem. Avrohom made sure that Eliezer and Yishmoel did not come along. When the Kohen Godol went into the most holy place on the most holy day of the year to do the avodo of Yom Kippur, there is no-one allowed in the heichal at the time to watch. There is an audience of one – Hashem. This is how we as Bnei Yisroel serve Hashem.

Eisov arrives and he sees the wives and children. Yaakov says everything he has is from Hashem. Yaakov pressures Eisov to take the gift – which isn't too hard to do. His life is all about money and power. Of course he'll accept the gift. It's like offering an alcoholic a glass of scotch!

Eisov offers to accompany Yaakov on his journey. Yaakov demurs and says he will eventually catch up with Eisov in Seir. But Yaakov isn't heading to Seir! He's going to live with his father Yitzchok in Canaan! Chazal explain that Yaakov is predicting that when Moshiach comes, we will eventually battle and conquer Eisov. But in the meantime, we travel at our own pace. Yaakov isn't afraid of Eisov. He isn't intimidated at all as long as he remains true to his identity of Torah.

Eisov leaves Eretz Yisroel to Yaakov and goes to settle in Har Seir. Why? Did he forget that Yaakov stole his brochos? Of course not! At the beginning, Eisov is anticipating that Yaakov isn't Yaakov anymore after living with a master swindler like Lovon for 20 years. He figured Lovon's dishonesty pressured Yaakov to be more like Eisov in order to be successful and he can take his brochos back. But now he realizes that Yaakov is still Yaakov and he hasn't lost his integrity and spiritual values. So he walks off and abandons his ambitions to take Eretz Yisroel.

Yaakov arrives in Succos. He builds a house for himself and temporary huts for his flocks, so he calls the place Succos. This is very strange. Why is he building a house when he is on his way to Yitzchok's house? Why is he calling the place after the temporary huts? The Targum Yonason explains that this house Yaakov is building is not to live in. The first thing he builds is a beis midrash. That is the priority. Yaakov is juggling a few different things simultaneously. He has a large family, and lots of sheep and cattle and servants, and he represents Torah. He is showing that all other considerations aren't as important as Torah. They all get temporary shelters. But Torah needs a house – a permanent base which everything else is serving.

Then Yaakov comes to Shechem – whole. Chazal explain that he is

whole in all respects – in Torah, wealth, and health. Then we have the whole incident of Dina with Shechem. Yaakov is very upset about how his sons reacted to the violation of their sister.

After all this, Hashem tells Yaakov to come to Beis-El and Yaakov tells his people to remove the avodo zoro in their midst. How did he know it was there? Yaakov figured that if they were truly pure and untainted by avodo zoro, the whole incident with Dina wouldn't have happened. Shechem should have been too afraid to do anything to threaten us or trouble us. It must be that we lost Hashem's protection because of the presence of avodo zoro. When we represent Hashem properly in this world, the non-Jews are instinctively in awe of us. They will not dare to start up with Hashems' special nation. So even though they survived the danger, there must have been a cause for the danger in the first place. Once Yaakov got rid of the avodo zoro, the surrounding nations were paralyzed and did not pose any danger.

Finally, Yaakov arrives in Kiryas Arba and is reunited with Yitzchok.

What is this parsha all about?

We know that whenever the representatives of the Jewish community would have to deal with the Russian czars or their representatives, they would first study this parsha to guide them. Why? The Ovos are a paradigm of how we survive in golus among the non-Jewish nations who hate them. They didn't just live their lives as great individuals. Their live are symbolic of the existence of Klal Yisroel throughout history. "Maaseh ovos simon labonim".

Yaakov presents his philosophy to Eisov: he is who he is – he doesn't budge from his commitment to emes and his spiritual values. His first recourse in response to danger is to daven and to appease – even obsequiously. The Zionists deride this approach as having a 'golus mentality'. But this is how we survive. You give bribes and you bow down seven times and you don't threaten with any show of force. If that doesn't work, then prepare for battle. Yaakov wasn't afraid to fight. He fought the ideological battle with the Sar of Eisov and he won. Yes, he was injured, but he emerged victorious and this gave Yaakov the confidence to stand up to Eisov the next day without any fear. He knew that if he remained Yaakov and doesn't become like Eisov, he will not be subject to Eisov's rule.

When I was growing up after World War II, antisemitism fell out of fashion. It was so well known what horrible things the Nazis did to the Jews that it wasn't acceptable to openly hate Jews in civilized society. Today, more and more, it has become socially acceptable to openly express hatred for Jews. Chazal say this hatred will never go away until the coming of Moshiach. So how do we deal with this hatred? Four things: 1) We remain who we are and do not compromise our values. 2) We daven to Hashem to help us. We accept that we are in His hands. 3) We offer bribes and appeasement. 4) When all else fails we use force as a last resort. We do not look for confrontations.

This is why the Jewish representatives prepared themselves to deal with viciously antisemitic governments by reading this parsha. It is because Yaakov is the paradigm for how to survive in golus until Moshiach comes, when we can finally confront Eisov and conquer him.