

Parasha Meditation Vayislach

Bereishit 32:4–36:43

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

Alone with Your Soul

Introduction:

Overcoming the Husks of Lavan and Esav

This week's *parasha* teaches us that the life of a Jew is filled with struggles, through which we ultimately will emerge victoriously. By means of wrestling Ya'acov overcame both the *klipa* (husk) of Lavan and that of Esav. The *klipa* of Lavan is lack of Emunah (faith). Lavan used the idol-worship of *terafim* to manipulate reality according to his own will.¹ He believed that everything was in his own power, as he said, "The daughters are my daughters, the sons are my sons, and everything you see is mine."² This is why the Pesach Hagadah states, "Lavan wanted to uproot everything." This alludes to Emunah, which is everything for a Jew. Thus the *klipa* of Lavan is to uproot Emunah from the Jewish people. Esav's *Klipa* is *ta'avah* – physical desire and lust. This *klipa* has two parts as Ya'acov prayed, "Save me please from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esav."³ The *klipa* of Esav refers to the desire for the forbidden, whereas the *klipa* of "my brother" represents lust within the realm of the permitted. Ya'acov prayed to be saved from both of these *klipot*.⁴

Lighting the Darkness of our Desires for Lowly Pleasures

Ya'acov's struggle with Esav gives us guidelines for how to struggle with our *yetzer hara* (negative impulse). We learn that the rectification for the *yetzer hara*, is through "and the sun shone for him,"⁵ giving us the ability to see clearly. Esav's angel is called Sam-a-kel. This name can mean blinding G*d. The *yetzer hara* of Esav tries to blind our eyes from seeing G*d. Seeing Hashem and His power as the Creator prevents us from iniquity. When our eyes are opened to Hashem's light then the darkness of the desires of this world fades away, and ceases to attract us. Therefore, it states, "A man was fighting with him until the daybreak"⁶ – meaning until the illumination of the light. When we experience the light of Hashem, then we will no longer fear even the power of Esav's angel.⁷

¹ Bereishit 31:19.

² Bereishit 31:43.

³ Bereishit 32:12.

⁴ *Netivat Shalom, Parashat Vayislach* pp. 212-13.

⁵ Bereishit 32:32.

⁶ Bereishit 32:28.

⁷ *Netivat Shalom, Parashat Vayislach* p. 215.



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Alone with the Soul

After having crossed the Yabok River, Ya'acov prepared himself for prophesy by removing the physical, corporal outer layers of himself, so his soul would remain alone with the upper spiritual light. This is the meaning of "Ya'acov was left alone."⁸ The name Ya'acov does not refer to his body, which is only his clothing, but rather, to the inner Ya'acov – to his soul.

Wrestling with the Body

Malbim explains that Ya'acov was able to remove all physical desires and strip off his body, until his essence (soul) remained alone. The "man [that] was wrestling with him"⁹ refers to Ya'acov's own physicality, which would not allow him to remove the corporal outer layer of himself. The "man" – his physical being – held on to him and tried to overcome him. The strength of his body – his physical powers were wrestling with Ya'acov – his spiritual forces, trying to prevent him from removing the manhood of his body.

Inner Struggle

The Talmud teaches that the dust kicked up by Ya'acov and his opponent during their struggle reached up to the Throne of Glory,¹⁰ meaning that it penetrated until the root of his Neshama, reaching all the way to the root of Emunah. Ya'acov's physical being – his *yetzer hara* represented by Esav's angel, wanted to separate him from his root of Emunah. However, the power of evil was incapable of prevailing over Ya'acov, for he was able to overcome his physicality with the immense power of his soul.¹¹

Eternal Victory over the Power of Evil

Ya'acov's struggle has far reaching significance for us today. The fact that it reached up to the Throne of Glory, can also signify the effect of that struggle on all future generations. The Throne of Glory represents G*d's Providence, the guiding force in history. Ya'acov was tested in all his limbs, all his deeds, and all his spiritual powers. His victory empowers all of his seed and the generations after him to prevail against evil in the world.

⁸ Bereishit 32:25.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Babylonian Talmud, Chulin 91a.

¹¹ Malbim, Rabbi Meir Loeb ben Yechiel Michael, Ukraine, 1809-1879, Bereishit 32:25.

Meditation:

Sit comfortable in your chair, close your eyes and take several deep breaths. Breathe deeply and feel completely relaxed in all of the limbs of the body.

1. After several minutes of relaxed breathing, imagine you are standing by a river. Visualize the clean water flowing down. See yourself in the mirror of the clear waters. What do you see?

2. Notice that you are totally alone with yourself, surrounded by darkness. וַיִּהְיֶה יַעֲקֹב לְבָדוּ – “And Ya’acov was left alone.”¹² Get in touch with the feeling of being alone in your own skin. No pressures from outside, no distractions, nothing to conform to, no-one to try to please, just alone with yourself.

3. You are לְבָדוּ – alone. You are at one with your heart – *Lev*/לֵב followed by the *dalet*/ד – the letter of humility that has nothing of her own – *Levad*/לְבַד. Inhale *le*/ל, exhale *vad*/בַּד, repeat five times.

4. Imagine your most beloved material possessions, your favorite outfit... your comfortable bed... your expensive pen... anything that you own, which you treasure. Imagine letting go of each of these possessions, one by one as you breathe *Levad*/לְבַד. Inhale *le*/ל, exhale *vad*/בַּד.

5. Visualize yourself stripped of the outer layers of your stuff, just alone with your naked essence – alone to the core, comfortable with yourself, not in need of anything *Levad*/לְבַד. Inhale *le*/ל, exhale *vad*/בַּד, repeat five times.

6. Go deeper into feeling alone with your essence, even beyond your body. Let go of your worries about your health. Give them all up to Hashem, and breathe into the knowledge that you have nothing. It’s all Hashem’s even your body. Try giving it up to Him.

7. וַיִּצְבֹּק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ – “A man was wrestling with him.”¹³ Tune into your own inner struggle. Remember one incident where your body and soul played tug of war. Your Neshama wanted so badly to do this particular mitzvah, but your body pulled you the other way. Perhaps you didn’t want to spend all that money, or give away that precious possession, possibly your body was tired, lazy, didn’t feel like exerting and extending yourself.

8. Imagine the glow of your soul as a bright ball of light, and enter your selfishness, laziness, tiredness etc. into this light-ball. Visualize how all of it is melting away, disintegrating, allowing your Neshama to get the upper hand. Yet, you still feel the struggle of yourself within

¹² Bereishit 32:25.

¹³ Ibid.

yourself on a deeper level. Tune into the struggle to let go, and let G*d, the struggle to let go of what you have worked so hard to attain.

9. Visualize that which is dearest to you in this world, feel the pull. Get in touch with the pain of having to leave even this, and be alone, completely alone with your Neshama. *Levad*/לִבְדָּ – Inhale *le*/לְ, exhale *vad*/בַּד, repeat five times.

10. Now visualize the word *Yisrael*/יִשְׂרָאֵל – the *yud* – י, *shin* – ש, *reish* – ר, *alef* – א and *lamed* – ל. *Yisrael*/יִשְׂרָאֵל.

11. You may be slowed down but you are not overwhelmed; you persevere. *Yisrael*. This name can also be read *Yashar El* – the one who G*d makes straight. *Yisrael*. The one who is straight to G*d. *Yisrael*.

12. Inhale *Yish*/יֵשׁ, exhale *rael*/רְאֵל, repeat five times. Breathe *Yisrael* – *Yisrael*, into your head – ראש. Breathe *Yisrael* – *Yisrael* into any part of yourself which is tense, painful or tired. *Yisrael* – *Yisrael*. Notice whether you feel invigorated, empowered and victorious. You have prevailed, “you have struggled with Divinity and Humanity and you have prevailed!”¹⁴

Notes:

Bereishit 32:14-33 tells the story of Ya’acov preparing to face Esav by facing his own shadow side by the river. Before Ya’acov could confront Esav in person he had to confront the power of Esav – Esav’s angel, which is hence his own *yetzer hara*, hence the general *yetzer hara* of the world.¹⁵ After this encounter, Ya’acov receives a new name: *Yisra El* – the one who struggles with G*d. The same name can also mean “straight to G*d,” because through wrestling, he came face to face with Hashem. The struggle is the essence of the name *Yisrael*. The fate of the Jewish people is one of constant wrestle. How do we derive the power to carry on these struggles? The Midrash states:¹⁶ “There is none like G*d; yet who is like G*d? *Yeshurun* – (*Yisrael*).” Just as it is written of Hashem, “Hashem alone shall be exalted.”¹⁷ So, too, “Ya’acov was left alone.”¹⁸ Both Hashem and Israel have the ability of being alone. No outside power can affect Hashem, by adding to or subtracting from His Essence. Israel has the ability to emulate Hashem in this respect. When we know who we are, then nothing external, no problem or challenge, can stop us. With the inner strength of character, we can recognize that all external obstacles are just that – external. We know that even our failures are only in unessential matters. When our essence remains untouched, we stay strong.

¹⁴ *Bereishit* 32:29 freely translated.

¹⁵ Op cit. Malbim, *Bereishit* 32:25.

¹⁶ *Bereishit Rabah*, Parasha 77, Piska 1.

¹⁷ *Yeshayahu* 2:11.

¹⁸ *Bereishit* 32:25.

About Us



Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum, a native of Denmark, is Founder and Director of Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin. She holds a Bachelor of Education in Bible and Jewish Philosophy from Michlala Jerusalem College for Women, and a Masters of Art in Jewish History from Touro College. Chana Bracha also began her practice as a spiritual healer through Emuna, tefila and energy work. For more than two decades Chana Bracha has taught Bible studies with special emphasis on women's issues in Israel and the United States. She creates curricula emphasizing women's

spiritual empowerment through traditional Torah values. Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin located in the Judean Hills of Israel offers a unique program to women of all ages and backgrounds to learn in a holistic Torah study environment that nurtures the mind, body and soul. Intensive textual study of Tanach, Halacha and Chassidut are woven together with creative spiritual expression, and connection with the land of Israel through organic gardening, herbology, Jewish sources of healing and sustainable living. Classes in Jewish mysticism, Chassidism and Jewish meditation are directed at the spiritual thirst so prominent in our times.

*In 2010 Rebbetzin Chana Bracha published her first book, *Women at the Crossroads: A Woman's Perspective on the Weekly Torah Portion*.*

Chana Bracha has a married son and several granddaughters. She lives with her husband and younger son on the land of the Judean hills, Israel.

If you are interested in:

Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin contact info@berotbatayin.org or in Spiritual Healing with Rebbetzin Chana Bracha, please contact her at director@berotbatayin.org

or visit her blog: <http://rebbetzinchanabracha.blogspot.com/2010/11/emunah-healing-for-women.html>

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At Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin, we weave together Torah studies with creative spiritual expression, connecting with the Land of Israel, and healthy, organic lifestyles. In the heart of the Judean Hills, with its serene beauty, our students experience an approach to Judaism that bridges mind, body and soul. Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin is designed as a micro-community within the Village of Bat Ayin where women of all ages and backgrounds engage in intense Torah learning as part of an integrated, participatory approach to Torah living.

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