



HOW TO OVERCOME THE MOST EXTREME CHALLENGES

HOW TO DEAL WITH YISSURIM AVOS-STYLE

Parshas Vayeshev is a unique *parshah*. It's a *parshah* where you encounter strife. You encounter *tzaros tzeruros* in the life of Yaakov Avinu. You encounter *tzaros tzeruros* in the life of Yosef Hatzaddik. Each of them, Yaakov and Yosef, endured their own difficulties, and were not able to share it with each other as they were separated by distance and weren't aware of each other's experiences. This *parshah*, which deals with *yesurim*, teaches us something tremendous, because *yesurim* are part and parcel of our lives. It is something that is totally unavoidable.

The *shaylah* is, what is the strategy to employ when *tzaros* come upon a person? I'm not talking about small *tzaros*, where you got a splinter or you twisted your foot a little bit. I'm talking about a *tzarah* that everybody agrees is a tragedy.

Chazal tell us a very interesting thing here. *Chazal* say **וישב יעקב**, and Yaakov was *vayeshev*. Literally translated, it means 'he sat.' Yaakov sat down. What does that mean he sat down? So the *Medrash (Bereishis Rabbah 84:5)* says as follows. **אמר ר' חוניא משל**, there's a *mashal* **לאחד שהיה מהלך בדרך**, a fellow is going along the road and he comes across a **כת של כלבים**, a band of dogs and **ונתיירא מהם**, and he's afraid of them. So what does he do? **ישב לו ביניהם**, he sits down amongst them. **כך**, so too **כיון שראה יעקב**, when Yaakov saw, **עשו ואלופיו**, who were listed at the end of the previous *parshah*, *Vayishlach*, he saw Eisav and all his people, his descendants, a lot of folks, all armed to the teeth, **ונתיירא מהם**, he was afraid of them. So what did he do? **וישב לו ביניהם**, he sat down amongst them.¹

The *Chiddushei Harim* explains that Yaakov knew clearly that it's impossible for a human being to go against the will of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. He understood clearly that Hashem is the Creator and the sole conductor of the entire world, the Supreme Leader of the whole world. He is the Almighty, and everything is directed by Him. You cannot escape from any *ra'ah* that He brings upon you. It's impossible. So what do you do when you're facing a *tzarah*? If you're facing wild people, if you feel like you're surrounded by a 'pack of dogs,' what do you do?

You would look around, eyes darting, looking for a place to flee. You see you can't flee. You see the tragedy is coming upon you, and there's nowhere to run. There's nowhere to hide. There's one *eitzah*. You know what the *eitzah* is? Sit down and accept it. Be *mechazek* yourself in the *emunah* of Hakadosh Baruch Hu. That is your only ticket out of this *tzarah*. Accept the fact that you are in the hands of Hashem and no one else's hands. Yaakov did not try to flee from Eisav and his soldiers. **וישב יעקב**, he sat down, stayed his ground and he was *mechazek* himself. And Hakadosh Baruch Hu saved him.

INEFFECTIVE ESCAPE ROUTES

When most people face a tragedy, they turn to all kinds of crazy things to find solace, to find escape routes, pity parties, and all they find are disappointments. If *chas veshalom* somebody gets sick and they call a friend up and they say, "You know, I'm sick. I think I have the *machalah*." So all of a sudden instead of the friend giving them *chizuk*, the friend starts to scream on the phone, "Oh no, my aunt died from that!" "Thank you for the *chizuk*." "Oh my! What's going to be with your kids? Who's going to raise your kids?" Is that what he needs? "How is your wife going to make it? How is your husband going to make it? Oh my gosh, your life is finished. I mean, I don't know how you're going to go forward." And the person goes, "One second. That's not what I want to hear from you right now." "I don't know what else to say." People are often so insensitive. They don't mean it necessarily, but they have nothing to say. A person is much better off, if they don't turn to people. And Hashem is showing him something when he does. Hashem says, "You're turning to people and you're relying on people to get you out of a tragedy? It's a situation that's very personal, because not everybody is sick."

Here is a person who's going through *parnasah* problems. He calls somebody up. That somebody gives his advice, which looks like he got it from a Cracker Jack box, and if not from a Cracker Jack box, it's from the under cap of a Snapple bottle. The guy is telling him *eitzos* of how he should get a job, how he should make money. He tells a joke from the Bazooka gum wrapper. He makes a few jokes. The guy is *pashut* giving you *eitzos*, and it's one *eitzah* worse than the next. The smartest thing the person can do is to say to himself, "Hakadosh Baruch Hu, I'm going into silent mode. I'm going to withdraw into myself, and I'm just going to focus on You."

¹ מה כתיב למעלה מן הענין (בראשית לו, לא): ואלה המלכים וגו', וכתיב הכא וישב יעקב, אמר רבי חוניא משל לאחד שהיה מהלך בדרך וראה כת של כלבים ונתיירא מהם וישב לו ביניהם. כך כיון שראה אבינו יעקב עשו ואלופיו נתיירא מהם וישב לו ביניהם. אמר רבי לוי משל לנפח שהיה פתוח באמצע פלטיא, ופתח בנו זהבי פתוח כנגדו, וראה חבילות חבילות של קוצים ונכנסו למדינה, אמר, אנה יכנסו כל החבילות הללו, והיה שם פקח אחד, אמר לו מאלו אתה מתיירא ג' אחד יוצא משלך וג' אחד משל בך ואתה שורפן. כך כיון שראה אבינו יעקב עשו ואלופיו נתיירא, אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא מאלו אתה מתיירא ג' אחד משלך וג' אחד משל בך ואתם שורפים אותם כלם, הלא הוא דכתיב (עובדיה א, יח): והיה בית יעקב אש ובית יוסף להבה, וישב יעקב, וכו'.

But when a person has no relationship with Hashem, when a challenge comes on him what he does is he begins to shout and he begins to scream. It's like a little child. You see little children fall down. They scream. You can think who-knows-what happened. They scream, but it is not based on anything.

SAVED FROM A FALL

I like to say over the story that one time I was *zocheh* to experience. I can't thank Hashem enough for the *chessed* that Hashem did for me. I came running into my house, and I headed down to the basement. I was going down the steps, and all of a sudden I lost my balance. My upper body went beyond my feet, and I saw myself heading towards the bottom of the steps. Those steps had metal tips and below that was a stone floor, not a carpeted floor. I was already picturing myself getting splattered. I couldn't adjust myself. My body was way down. I had momentum going downwards. The momentum had shifted from the bottom of my body to the top of my body. And there I was. Hakadosh Baruch Hu gave me the *seichel* and the strength to suddenly put my hands against both walls, and I ended up suspended in the air with my hands plastered to the wall.

I knew something had happened to my foot because it was bent in such a way that it was unbelievable. I managed to sit down on the step, and I looked at my foot. I noticed that my knee bone was pushing out against my pant leg as far as it could go. I remember not saying a thing. I closed my eyes, and I completely went into *עוד מלבדו* mode. I closed my eyes, and I went into some deep meditation.

I remember my wife coming to check out my situation. She was talking to me, and I don't remember if I answered her, or I didn't answer her. She called 911, and the next thing I remember is some burly fellows were moving around me on the steps. They started asking me questions. I didn't answer them at all. I forgot the medical term they used - "He's in shock." I remember them getting a sheet underneath my body and lifting me up from the steps and carrying me outside onto a stretcher. We went into an ambulance. I stayed in that zone completely. I wasn't coming out of it until we got to the hospital. They wheeled me in. I just closed my eyes. It was like me and Hashem, and the whole world did not exist. I remember I had no fear. I was completely serene, which I felt was a little surreal. Eventually they took x-rays.

A doctor came to me and said, "You're hemorrhaging terribly. You should be feeling the worst pain possible. What level of pain do you have from one to ten?" I said, "I don't feel any pain." She said, "Do you mind if I touch?" By this time I was laying down, and my knee was sticking out as much as it could. "Do you mind if I touch it?" I said, "Go ahead." I remember she pushed down, and she brought a whole bunch of doctors to come into the room. I remember thinking afterwards about the *chessed* Hashem did for me. I should have been screaming like a banshee experiencing the worst pain possible. I remember the nurse or the doctor asked me, "Do you have a high threshold of pain?" I said, "No, I'm very normal. I don't like pain just like the next guy doesn't like pain." But I realized what it was - Hashem helped me. I was with Him. I accepted it. I had no *safek* it was from Hashem. I needed surgery that night, big surgery. I couldn't walk for weeks, or get off the bed. It was very serious. I had torn the strongest tendon in the body, the surgeon told me later. It goes from the top of the leg to the knee and holds the knee in place, and I just ripped it out when I bent over.

ACCEPTANCE BREEDS TRANSCENDANCE

A person has to know that this is the *eitzah*. When Yaakov faced Eisav, this is what he did. "Hashem, You want me to be here. You want me to face this. I'm going to sit down, *וישב יעקב*, I'm going to sit down and accept it." And then all of a sudden, Eisav was grabbing onto him. He was kissing him. He was hugging him. *ויחבקו וישקרו*. Eisav even tried to take a bite out of Yaakov's neck, but Hashem helped Yaakov out. Yaakov was spared *baruch Hashem*.

Later on in the *parshah* you have the episode where Yosef was sent down to Egypt. He eventually finds himself a home to work in, in a prestigious place as far as an *eved* is concerned. He is granted tremendous honor, tremendous trust, and then eventually gets sent to jail. Egyptian jails in those days were a lot worse than Egyptian jails nowadays. And Egyptian jails these days - they're not having picnics in there either. That's where they eliminate the Muslim Brotherhood. Whenever they get too many prisoners, they have a way of reducing the number of prisoners and it's not by letting them out the back door. It's by putting them in a deeper pit in the ground and covering it up with dirt, and they smooth things over it. They cull the herd. They put them to sleep.

So Yosef Hatzaddik finds himself in such a kind of place, and it says: *ויתנהו אל בית הסוהר*, and they put him in the jail, and then it says *ויהי שם*, and he was there *בבית הסוהר* (Bereishis 39:20). Many of the *mefarshim* ask what does that mean *ויהי שם בבית הסוהר*? Obviously, if you put somebody in jail then that's where he is! Why does the Torah have to say that *ויהי שם*, and he was there? It's a simple question.

HASHEM PUT HIM THERE

The answer is, when Hakadosh Baruch Hu sends a person into a challenging place and the person doesn't acknowledge it's from Hashem, you know what he does? He tries his hardest to fight back. He tries his hardest to struggle. He thinks of ways of escaping. He thinks about what he would like to do. He may employ things to get out of his situation. But he's not acknowledging the fact that Hashem is the one who put him in there.

Yosef Hatzaddik was a very, very wise man. Yosef Hatzaddik was very powerful. Yosef Hatzaddik was very wily. And nevertheless, Yosef Hatzaddik accepted his fate, *ויהי שם בבית הסוהר*. He settled down. He didn't feel like a caged animal. They put

him in jail, ויהי שם בבית הסוהר. He didn't attempt to do any actions to try to escape. He didn't try to outsmart the *hashgachah* of Hashem Yisbarach.

The same thing is apparent when Yosef Hatzaddik is required to act as an *eved*. I'm trying to picture Yosef Hatzaddik placed in the service of Potiphar. He's an *eved*, and he's being asked, *Chazal* tell us, to cook hot water, bring him cold water, to do all kinds of menial labor and services. *Mamash* like an *eved*. Unbelievable! *Chazal* point out a tremendous thing here. That to Yosef Hatzaddik's credit, he served his master with tremendous *ne'emanus*. He tried to do the best job possible.

Now what's the *pshat* in that? *Chazal* compared him to Eliezer *eved* Avraham who served Avraham faithfully. Seemingly, there's no connection. In one case, Eliezer was a servant of his *rebbe muvhak*, Avraham Avinu. Eliezer was a *tzaddik* working for a *tzaddik*. And in the other case, here Yosef was sent into prison. He was sent away into a terrible, terrible situation! You know what Yosef Hatzaddik said? "If I'm here, this is where Hashem wants me to be. This is not an accident. I'm not here by mistake. Whether I know why or don't know why, I know one thing for certain, that Hashem wants me to be here. And if Hashem wants me to be here, I'm going to do the job that Hashem gave me *be'emunah*."

THE ALTERNATIVE, LEARNING THE HARD WAY

There was once a boy, a young boy, who lived in my house. He didn't like to be told what to do, a very ungrateful kid. He liked presents. He liked love. He liked everything. But he never wanted to do anything with his life that had meaning. Eventually, he went off the *derech*. He was sent into the Israeli army. He called me the night before he was going to the army, to ask if I could get him out. I told him, "No can do." He ended up in the army, and after he came out, I met him. I asked him, "How did it go with the army?" He said, "I had my challenges." I said, "Can you tell me an interesting story?" He said, "I'll tell you." This is the story he told me:

"One of my first weeks I was there, we were in training, and in training they train you how to run. You have to run on sand. They make you load up your backpack with all your stuff and with that, you have to run 10 kilometers on the sand." (Now, this guy was the kind of guy who never liked to do that. If you told him to walk a half a kilometer on the sand, he'd go, "Ummm" and make faces). I was smiling, listening to the story. I said, "Yeah, what happened?" He said, "We completed the 10 kilometers and we were finished. The officer turns to me and calls my name. He says, 'You don't look happy. Are you happy? *Atah mabsut oh lo mabsut?*'" He said, "Mmmm." He did one of his *yeshivishe shtiklach mmmm*'s. The guy said, "Sing a song for us." This guy liked to sing. He said, "Sing a song for us right now!" "Mmmmm." He said, "I'll tell you to sing a song one more time. Sing a song for us." He wouldn't do it. The officer said, "*Lechvod* so and so, I'm being *mechabed* everyone with another 10 kilometer. Run *kulo lechvodo*, completely in his honor." He said, "On the way, all my friends spit on me. They kicked me. They cursed me. Every time they did a lap they cursed. They were upset with me. When we finished, the officer said, "How are you doing so and so?" And he said, "Fine." He said, "Sing a song for us." *Hoshiah es amecha!* He said, "I sang like a bird, because I didn't want to get 'honored' with another 10 kilometer run."

Now, it's a *pelah* what a person does. People don't accept it. People fight their situations. They're angry. No one cares if you're angry. You're only doing yourself a terrible disservice. What you have to do, is you have to learn that a person has to accept.

When Yosef Hatzaddik was having his cloak, his tunic, removed from him, you know what he said to himself? "This is my father's gift. And my brothers are taking it off me. Hashem wants it to be taken off me." That's what he said. Hashem wants this to happen. He didn't fight it. He pleaded with them to have *rachmanus*, but he understood that they have no power over him, other than the power that Hashem granted them. That's the first step that a person has to take in order to accept that his situation is from Hashem.

FIGHT AND FLIGHT OR ACCEPT AND GROW

Chazal tell us a very interesting thing. Yaakov Avinu was a superstar. He went through an unbelievable amount of *tzaros*. He never said "Boo." There was one *tzarah* that he went through and he did say 'boo.' You know what that was? When he heard the report that Yosef was torn apart by a wild animal. It says, he put a sackcloth on himself, and he cried, and he mourned. This was something that was too much for Yaakov Avinu to handle. You hear that? Dina, Eisav, Lavan, all the *tzaros* that Yaakov had, he never said 'boo.' He was able to swallow it, and accepted it, until he came to the *nisayon* of the loss of Yosef. That tore him apart. Do you know why it tore him apart? Why did that tear him apart more than anything else? You know why?

Rashi (37:35 *ibid*) tells us that Yaakov Avinu was given a *siman*, that if you ever lose one of your children, if they die in your lifetime, that's a *siman* you're not going to see *olam haba*.² If none of your children die in your lifetime, then you're not going to see *Gehinom*. When he heard that Yosef Hatzaddik was killed by animals, that broke him. That was the straw that broke the camel's back. And he cried and he was in pain. We understand that it was a test.

But a person has to learn how to be *mekabel*. Did Yaakov Avinu really lose his *olam haba*? No. Eventually he found out that it wasn't true. But he suffered terribly from that news that he lost all his eternity.

² אבל שאלה. כפשוטו לשון קבר הוא – באבלי אקבר, ולא אתנחם כל ימי. ומדכשו, גיהנם; סימן זה היה מסור בנדי מפי הגבורה, אם לא ימות אחד מבני בחיי, מבטח אני שאיני רואה גיהנם

The Chasam Sofer says an amazing thing.³ Esther the *tzadekes*, when she was facing the challenge with Haman, she was facing the most terrible *tzarah* for Klal Yisrael. It says that she was *boteach* in Hakadosh Baruch Hu, in the *yeshuah*. She said: רחוק מישועתי דברי (Tehillim 22:2). Literally translated it means רחוק, far away from my salvation, דברי, the words of my cry. The Chasam Sofer says, do you know what that means? She was saying, “The more I cry and the more I *shrei*, to that degree and that measure, I’m going to distance myself from my *yeshuah*.” She said, “The *ra’ayah* to that is אקרא יומם, I will call out by day, ולא תענה, and I won’t be answered, and by night, לי, ולא דמיה לי.” She says a *peladike zach*. She says, “Do you know where I got this from? I learned this from Yaakov Avinu. The more Yaakov Avinu mourned Yosef, it didn’t bring his *yeshuah* closer. It didn’t bring his salvation closer. What brings the salvation is ואתה קדוש יושב תהילות ישראל. Hakadosh Baruch Hu, You know what You were waiting for? For the *tehilos* of Yaakov Avinu. You were waiting for Yaakov Avinu to pass this test too, and that he should say, “Hashem Yisbarach, just like all the other tests, I accept this one too, and I’m going to continue to be *modeh* and *meshabeach* You, even though the *tzarah* seems like the worst *tzarah*.” It says Yaakov tore his garments and he refused to be comforted.

This is what a person has to realize. I’m not blaming anybody. I don’t blame Yaakov Avinu, *chas veshalom*, and we can’t blame anybody for the reaction that they have when they’re facing a *tzarah*. But people don’t realize, and people must realize this, that when they’re facing a *tzarah* and they accept it, that’s the hope that it will pass. They should try to find the *shalvah* and *menuchas hanefesh* to say to Hakadosh Baruch Hu, “I’m sure You know what’s best and it’s all for the best.” That’s what a person has to realize. Maybe a person thinks that *shrei’ing* and screaming is going to help him because he remembers when he was a little child, he *shrei’ed* and screamed, and his mother finally got fed up with him. She said, “Okay, I’ll give you the candy. Just keep quiet already. Okay, you want to go on the trip? Just keep quiet. Okay.” The child said, “Ah, you see it works.” A person tries the same *shtick*, but with Hashem the *shtick* doesn’t work.

רחוק מישועתי, I am far from my salvation. You want to know how far I am away? דברי שאגתי, I can tell how far away I am by the amount that I’m *shrei’ing* and being *tzo’ek* to Hashem. It doesn’t mean you don’t *daven* to Hashem. It doesn’t mean you don’t turn to Hashem. But there’s a difference between *davening* and relying on Hashem, and *shrei’ing* at Hashem. When a person loses his mind - and again, I’m not blaming anybody - but that’s not helpful. It’s not going to help a person if they *shrei*. To accept the *ratzon* Hashem is the means and the way for a person to find solace and peace from his *tzarah*, and hopefully the *yeshuah* will follow immediately.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Yesurim are an unavoidable part and parcel of our lives. When Yakov Avinu saw the impending *tzarah* of encountering Eisav and realized that he had nowhere to run, he simply sat down (וישב יעקב). He didn’t cry or try to fight that dangerous predicament; he accepted that it was the *ratzon* of Hashem. With that approach, Yakov strengthened his *emunah* that he was completely in the Hands of Hashem, and incredibly, that in itself became his ticket out of his *tzarah*. In our daily lives, it behooves us to follow in Yakov’s footsteps as well, when we experience *tzaros*. So, instead of crying or screaming, and getting wrong advice, or even (the unintentional) unsympathetic and insensitive comments from our friends, we should instead try to get into the “silent mode” of Yakov Avinu: sit down and accept that our challenge is from Hashem alone, and then focus entirely on Hashem. This is the first and the most important step of finding solace and peace in our *tzarah*, which will then enable us to see the forthcoming *yeshuah*, IY”H.

³ והנה יעקב אבינו ע"ה היה כך מדותיו שסבל צרות הרבה בשמחה עצומה כאמור (בראשית ל"ב י"א) קטנתי מכל החסדים, שסבור שיגרום החטא, ולא מציינו שתפס השק להתאבל, עד שנכשל בזה לבסוף במכירת יוסף, כי סבור היה שזה יגרום לו אבידת עוה"ב כפירש"י (בראשית ל"ז ל"ה), כי סימן היה מסור בידו אם לא ימות אחד מבניו בחייו וכו', מ"מ כיון שלבש השק נגזר לבניו שלא יעצרו חיל לעמוד המלחמה עצומה, וללבוש שק ולהתאבל על צרותיהם. אבל באמת הוה קבל וקיים, שסבלון אחד עושה יותר מכמה תפלות, לכן לבסוף זמנתה להמנן ועשתה משתה להורות כי שמחה בה' ובטחה היא בישועתו כי קרובה לבוא. וזהו רחוק מישועתי, שהרי אקרא יומם ולא תענה ולילה ולא דומיה לי, כי כל זה ממדה שלבש יעקב השק ולא קיים אודך כי עניתני שהיה משבח מעת בוא הצרות, ולא חפץ הי' באלה, כי אם אתה קדוש יושב ומצפה תהלות ישראל, באותה מדה שהיה ישראל רגיל לשבח ולהלל על צרותיו. ולכן תקנו שמחת פורים ומקודם יקראו המגילה טרם שמחם, להורות כי התפלות והבקשות שכנגדם נתקן קריאת המגילה לא הועילו כ"כ כמו השמחה בה' והבטחון בישועתו (דרשות לשבת זכור דף קפ"ה טו"ג)