Assembly Notes

PARSHAS VAYISHLACH, 5785

Assembly Theme: Raising the holy sparks imbedded in everything

Yaakov wrestled all night with the Malach (angel) of Esav. He had forgotten a few cheap jugs, went back over the river to get them, and a Malach (Angel) wrestled with him in a struggle that lasted all night. It was the Malach of Esav who fights against holiness, representing the opposite of Yaakov,

Why in the world did Yaakov go back to retrieve some insignificant jars? As a result, he was left alone and had to endure the struggle! After twenty challenging years he and his wives had built a strong family and amassed great wealth. Why did he need those jugs?

Torah sources provide a fascinating answer and insight. The episode with the jugs actually encapsulated the essence of the whole struggle between Yaakov (Kedusha, Holiness) and Esav (Kelipah, unholiness). The Malach accepted the idea that a person should focus on their life in general. But the small details of life are irrelevant. By contrast, Yaakov says that the small things matter very much, because there are sparks of G-dliness in everything, waiting for us to redeem them, which happens when we use physical objects for good purposes. In Chinuch and parenting as well, we should use the opportunity to inspire our children in every aspect of life; nothing is small or unimportant.

The Maharshal says that the miracle of Chanukah nearly 1500 years later was Hashem's reward to Yaakov. Yaakov returned to get the jugs because nothing is trivial in serving G-d. Hashem said: You risked your life to retrieve the small jugs in order to serve Me; therefore I will help your descendants with a small jug of oil.

The Minhag to give Chanukah gelt is also connected. Chanukah is Chinuch. By giving Chanukah gelt, we are training our young to make good choices in spending their money. The Greeks "laid their hands" on the Jews' possessions (.(פשטו ידם בממונם They were saying: You can keep your money, but you should spend it in a "Greek" way, where it has no spiritual significance. Instead, we respect everything, however small, because it contains Divine sparks that we can elevate.

STORY OF THE REBBE

There was a brilliant Professor in France. He was raised totally secular. When he met people with real Yiddishkeit he saw that this was a perfect lifestyle, not only for spiritual growth; rather a lifestyle that brings beauty and meaning into the physical side of life. He was captivated by it, and became a full Baal Teshuvah (a totally observant Jew).

He decided to use his vast knowledge of the secular world to show the benefits of Mitzvah observance for one who keeps the Torah. In fact, he wrote a book which shows how keeping Mitzvos benefits a person's physical, emotional and spiritual life.

For example, he explains in his book that the human body operates at its best when it keeps a cycle of seven days; six days of work and one day to rejuvenate.

The Professor sent the book to the Rebbe. The Rebbe responded by thanking him for the book and congratulating him for the knowledge and meticulous research contained in the book.

The Rebbe then pointed out a mistaken impression that some people have about the connection between Torah and the physical world. They think that the reason that Hashem told us in the Torah to keep Shabbos is because that is in harmony with our body. But the reality is the opposite: the connection starts from the Torah. Since the Torah commands us to keep Shabbos on the seventh day, therefore Hashem created our body to be in harmony with Torah and Mitzvos.

The Torah preceded the creation of the world. That is why everything in nature is aligned with Torah. It is a privilege and a pleasure to reveal the Elokus that is hidden in nature.

GOOD SHABBOS!

גוט שבת!