

SERENITY

In *Parshas Vayishlach*, Yaakov Avinu prepares to meet Esav with *doron* (gifts), *tefillah*, and *milchamah* (war).

There are the six days of the week for work, and there is Shabbos for rest. One who is *zocheh* can have his “hard work” in Torah study, and if he is not *zocheh*, he has to work hard in making a living. In either case, the six days of the week are a time of exertion and hard work. *Shabbos Kodesh*, though, is the time to rest from the six days of the week. *Shabbos* is a time for *menuchah* (serenity), where there is no exertion.

In our own *nefesh* (soul), there is the ability of *milchamah*, war, which we encounter through exertion, as well as the opposite power of *menuchah* (serenity), in which we rest from hard work. These two abilities correspond to the six days of the week (*milchamah*, exertion) and Shabbos (*menuchah*, serenity).

When Yaakov was preparing to meet Esav, he utilized these two extremes of serenity versus hard work, through preparing gifts (serenity) and war (effort). Yaakov also prepared through a middle point between serenity and effort, which is *tefillah*.

The *Mesillas Yesharim* says that all of life is a test. We are always at ‘war’ with something, because of this rule that our life is constantly a test. Since we are always in some kind of difficulty in our life, it seems that life should always be about war and fighting against the *yetzer hora*. However, while that is true, it is only one side of the coin. In order to fight our struggles properly and to win our personal wars, we also need the ingredient of *menuchah*, serenity. Just like we need the six days of the week to use our efforts and Shabbos to rest from our efforts, so do we need these two extremes of effort and serenity in our *nefesh*. Our life cannot be entirely spent in a state of ‘war.’ We need some serenity too- some respite from the wars we fight in our life.

If we think about the today’s lifestyle, we see that most people do not deal that much with ‘war’ in their lives. Most people are actively pursuing serenity. However, this serenity is usually not a genuine kind of serenity, because it does not come after hard work and exertion. It is not the kind of serenity that resembles Shabbos, which is the “gift”

that comes to us as a result of all our efforts during the week. It is rather a kind of sleepiness, which stems from the element of earth (*yesod ha’afar*) in the soul, which wants ‘serenity’ in the form of laziness. Most people who seek serenity totally push exertion aside. This is not *menuchah*, it is not real serenity, it is just laziness and an expression of the element of “earth.”

However, there are those who are constantly battling all kinds of difficulties in their life. Some have constant fears created from doing *aveiros*, which causes them to always feel anxious. When the power of ‘war’ is used correctly, a person constantly fights his *yetzer hora* and can exert himself in his learnings. There are people who will always say something like, “That is the advice of the *yetzer hora*!!” or “This is the *yetzer hora*!!” or This is the *Sitra Achara*!” and other such expressions. They experience life as one big war with the *yetzer hora*, which never stops.

It seems that this is the correct way to live. After all, the *Mesillas Yesharim* says that life is always a test. It seems that we must be always in a war. We need to be like a ‘seasoned warrior’ constantly fighting our *yetzer hora*. We always push ourselves to review our learning, to always fight unwanted thoughts that may enter our minds when we *daven*, and to always fight the *yetzer hora* and all of its various henchmen, in its various forms, every day of our life.

But the truth is that if we always feel that our life is a constant war, our *nefesh* (soul) finds no peace, and this lack of inner serenity can cause us to fall apart. We cannot always live with the perspective that everything is a *nisayon* (test) and to feel like we are in a constant struggle. Although all our life is a test and there are constant struggles we do need *menuchah*. We see that even when people are fighting a war, they need to take breaks, or else they will not have any strength to go on fighting. A person needs *menuchah*, and it is not possible to really survive without finding any serenity. This is true not only in the external sense, but in more inner and clearer terms, every person must form a space in his soul where he can find serenity, like a state of ‘Shabbos’ in the soul. From there a person needs to derive his *chiyus* (vitality) from.

In the beginning, there is the “war of Torah” when a person exerts himself in learning Torah. The Gemara explains that when first learning Torah with a new chavrusa, they are like enemies fighting with one another. But even amidst the very “war of Torah” in one’s Torah learning, there must also be *menuchah*. *Chazal* said that a *Talmid Chochom* finds *menuchah* by taking on the yoke of Torah. Thus, *menuchah* is not merely an inevitable result of exertion which is necessary to advance, but it is part of how a person must actually live in order to “acquire” Torah.

There are some people who are perplexed when they hear about the need for *menuchah*. After all, we know that a person must have exertion all the time in learning Torah. He must always fight the *yetzer hora* in the morning when it tells him to lie in bed. He must

fight the *yetzer hora* when he is *davening* and he is having disturbing thoughts. He must fight the *yetzer hora* not to waste time from learning Torah. So when is there time for *menuchah*?! And even on Shabbos and Yom Tov, we must learn Torah, because *Chazal* said that “The Shabbos and the festivals were not given to the Jewish people except to learn Torah.” It appears that we must always be exerting ourselves in a war against the *yetzer hora*, and that there is never a time to have *menuchah* from this perpetual war.

But there is a deeper understanding about how to approach life. Fighting our personal wars and putting in our hard efforts is only from the point in our *nefesh* that is able to feel opposed and challenged. There is a deeper point in our *nefesh* which is above all opposition, and that deeper point is where *menuchah* comes from. In other words, all fights and wars exist on the outer layer of our *nefesh*. But we have a deeper place in ourselves, where there is only harmony with no possibility of being opposed or challenged.

This sounds like a contradiction. If a person always faces some struggle and he needs to be fighting his *yetzer hora*, how can he feel deep down that there’s a place in him where everything is complete and serene, where there are no challenges? How can a person be in a place of *shleimus* (self-perfection) when *shleimus* comes only at the very end of our *avodah*, as the *Mesillas Yescharim* says? The answer is that only rare individuals of the generation reach *shleimus*, but anyone can delight in whatever percentage of *shleimus* he has already reached. That is his *shleimus* right now. This is where a person can be “*someiach b’chelko*” (happy with his portion), and find *menuchah* in. This is where one can find *shalom* (peace) in himself, amidst all of the wars and struggles of his life.

When one is clear about this perspective, he knows that there are times in which we must battle evil as well as times in which we must draw forth serenity. This is the sensible way to approach life, and it enables one to have the proper balance, to move back and forth between ‘war’ and ‘serenity’, to move between one’s aspirations and inner contentment, to move back and forth between exertion and serenity. When one has the correct balance, he knows that on one hand, there must always be war, exertion with aspirations in his life, but at the same time, he knows that he also needs to find serenity, pleasure and contentment in all of his efforts.

How much serenity does one need, and how much exertion does one need? How much should

a person feel fine with his accomplishments, and how much should he push himself further? This needs to be thought about carefully, because if a person becomes too content, he will not work as hard and his aspirations will decrease. Yet, if a person goes in the other extreme and he tries too hard, he is always trying to get all of his vitality from war alone, which is not his deepest resource. When one feels like he is struggling all the time, his *nefesh* cannot be calm, because the inner world of a person requires *menuchas hanefesh* (serenity of the soul). In Kelm, and in other places, they stressed the importance of *menuchas hanefesh* as one of the fundamental keys to one’s inner world.

How indeed can a person reach *menuchas hanefesh*? If a person is the type who has a strong intellect that is very in control of his emotions, he is a person whose “mind controls the heart,” and he will have a much easier time getting *menuchas hanefesh*. This is certainly true, but there is a more fundamental approach. When a person is able to exert himself and is also able to find serenity afterwards by focusing on whatever he has achieved already, this then becomes a basis of his *menuchas hanefesh*. This will also enable him to fight his ‘wars’ better, because he will have gained more *yishuv hadaas* (settled mind).

In *davening* as well, a person needs to develop the balance between exertion and serenity. A person should certainly try to concentrate on the words he is saying and push out any unwanted thoughts that enter his mind during *davening*. But, a person must be able to return to calmness, by enjoying the very act of talking to Hashem while *davening*. After a person feels an enjoyment in simply talking to Hashem, he should then return to concentrating in the words. When we *daven*, we certainly need to exert our minds in order to concentrate, but there must also be a heartfelt yearning for more connection with Hashem, which can only come from a serene place inside ourselves.

If a person only has exertion in Torah and can only argue in learning with others, but isn’t finding any *menuchah* (serenity) amidst all of his exertion in his learning, he will never find the words of Torah sweet to him. Although there is always a certain sense of sweetness as one exerts himself in his learning, the true and complete sweetness and pleasure of Torah learning is only felt when one can feel the serenity after he has exerted his mind. This occurs when he revels in the pleasure of the words of Torah that he has been *zocheh* to comprehend so far. He should review those words of Torah, verbally and mentally, and he should realize that what hadn’t been clear to him beforehand has now become clearer to him and has become more absorbed in him. When the *nefesh* absorbs this kind of pleasure from Torah learning, it becomes satisfied. After feeling that serenity, one should then return to exerting himself in his Torah learning.

When a person keeps to this formula, of exertion, then finding serenity, and then returning to exertion, he is constantly advancing and retreating, back and forth, between two different places in the *nefesh* that are necessary to traverse: exertion and serenity. One who does this will become a true *ish menuchah* (man of serenity), who has *yishuv hadaas* (a settled mind) and *menuchas hanefesh*.

ANTI-SEMITISM

QUESTION What is the source for the dislike which the *goyim* have always had towards Jews? Does it come from jealousy? Is it because the Jews have the Torah, or because Jews have better lives than they do, or because they have a better Afterlife? Or is it because the *goyim* think that the Jews are “bad” and that it is the *goyim* who are good, and as we have seen throughout the generations?

ANSWER *Chazal* said that ever since the Torah was given at Har Sinai, a hatred descended upon the nations of the world for the Jewish people. The root of this hatred is because the Jewish people are “one” with Hashem and with the Torah, whereas the very concept of hatred stems from the idea that there can be “two,” the idea of separation, in which “one” becomes divided into two. This root hatred branches out into all other forms of hatred that exist.

QUESTION Is there a difference between the hatred of Esav with the hatred of Yishmael, towards the Jewish people? It seems that Esav hated Yaakov and his descendants ever since Yaakov took the blessings from him. Yishmael hated the Jewish people because he was thrown out of the house which made Yitzchok into the sole offspring of Avraham, because a separation was made between Yishmael and Yitzchok. Furthermore, the descendants of Yishmael (the Arabs) hate the Jews because they feel that *Eretz Yisrael* is theirs. Did these specific reasons for hatred become further increased when the Jews received the Torah, which caused all of the nations of the world to hate them?

ANSWER Yishmael’s hatred towards the Jewish people is because Yishmael is the ruined side of the “element of water” (*yesod haMayim*), a damaged faculty of kindness (*chessed d’kelipah*). The hatred of Yishmael for Yisrael is a hatred for those who are similar to them, resembling the teaching of the Sages that “A craftsman hates his competitor.” Esav’s hatred for the Jewish

people, though, comes from the ruined element of “fire” (*yesod ha’Aish*) which breeds hatred for those who are different than they. The reasons of hatred which you mentioned [jealousy, etc.] are just the outcomes of the aforementioned reasons.

QUESTION Was Amalek’s hatred for the Jewish people always exists since the beginning of Creation? Or did their hatred for the Jewish people begin only from Timna, when the Avos refused to marry her as a concubine. Her grievances against the Jewish people was inherited by her son Amalek, whose descendants later instigated war against the Jewish people because of their hatred towards them? Or was this merely an outcome of Amalek’s already existing hatred towards Hashem and the Jewish people?

ANSWER Amalek’s hatred for the Jewish people was already rooted at the beginning of Creation, because they think are the “first” (*raishis goyim Amalek*) and therefore they are at war with Hashem, Who is the true First.

QUESTION Regarding the rule “It is well-known that Esav hates Yaakov.” Are there exceptions to this rule? Are there any *goyim* who don’t hate Jews? And can a *goy* love a Jew?

ANSWER If a *goy* will one day convert to the Jewish people, he doesn’t hate Jews (and he might also love Jews) even while he’s still a *goy*. There are also *goyim* who both love and hate Jews at the same time.

QUESTION If it is indeed possible for a *goy* to love a Jew, does this connect the *goy* to the Jewish people and give *zechusim* (merits) to the *goy*?

ANSWER Yes, because [by loving the Jew] he is receiving *shefa* from a Jew. An example of this is when a *goy* becomes an *eved canaani* (gentile slave) to a Jew.

QUESTION In Egypt, Hashem turned the hearts of the Egyptians against the Jews and the Egyptians hated them. Does this mean that the Egyptians used to love the Jews before that, and it was just that Hashem made the Egyptians hate the Jews so that He would separate

the Jews from the *goyim*?

ANSWER Yes. By all logical means, the Egyptians should have loved the Jews because the Jews had been very good to them and did so much work for them.

QUESTION Is anti-semitism something illogical which cannot be explained? Or is there some logical understanding to it?

ANSWER The “root” of anti-semitism is something that cannot be comprehended logically. The “branches” – the outcomes of this hatred - can have a logical reason to it.

QUESTION How can a Jew live peacefully amongst the *goyim* when he is found in *galus* (exile)? Does he just need to greet everyone and smile at them and that’s it, just like Rebbi Yochanan did, who greeted every *goy* in the street? Or is that a level only for *tzaddikim*...?

ANSWER In any situation where a person might be negatively influenced by the *goy*, it is not proper for a Jew to greet and smile at him.

QUESTION In America, anti-Semitism seems to be increasing in the last few years, especially due to the media and internet, which gives a platform for all *goyim* to voice their hatred towards Jews. The *goyim* on the media are constantly attacking the Jewish communities. What do we need to do prevent awakening the hatred of the *goyim* towards us? Do we need to especially treat them with *kavod* and *derech Eretz*? I’ve heard (based on the *Kli Yakar*) that the jealousy of the *goyim* is aroused when we make fancy *simchas*, wear fancy clothing and jewelry, and build beautiful houses. But if anti-Semitism is a decree from Hashem on us then is there really anything we can do to avoid awakening the hatred of the *goyim*?

ANSWER You should be cautious both about causing *chilul Hashem* and about awakening the jealousy of the *goyim*. You should treat them with *kavod* (respect). But try to minimize having any close relationship with them. And remember that Yaakov *Avinu* admonished his sons for not keeping a low profile from the *goyim*: למה תתראו “Why

do you have make yourself shown [to them]?”

QUESTION What is the way to feel towards the *goyim*? Are we allowed to feel a love towards a *goy*?

ANSWER There is an inner perspective of unifying with all of Creation, but this can only be an inner perspective, and it is not meant to be practiced outwardly. Outwardly, the souls of gentiles are connected at their root to the three impenetrable *kelipos* (husks), and therefore looking at their faces and certainly feeling an inner connection to them is dangerous, because it connects you to their *tumah*. Therefore, it is only rare individuals who can remain very deeply connected to their inner spiritual self, attached to the Torah and to Hashem, who are able to sometimes connect with gentiles. And even then, they need to cleanse themselves afterwards, disconnecting from any traces of *tumah* which may have become attached to their souls. But most people need to emotionally disconnect from *goyim*, except for rare circumstances where they may allow this connection. This is very hard for people with a very loving and compassionate nature. *Chazal* teach that we must be the first to initiate a greeting for each person. Since there is *darkei shalom*, the need to live peacefully with the other nations of the world, one needs to greet every person he meets, Jew or non-Jew. This was how the Sages conducted themselves, always being the first to greet any *goyim* that they met. There is no need to hate a gentile, unless he is in the category of “Those who hate Hashem, I will hate.” But it is dangerous to openly reveal any love towards a gentile, as explained above. (However, the souls of the “*Erev Rav*” are worse than all other gentile souls. This is because they are the roots of *tumah*, and we should not have any connection with them at all, as much as possible.)

QUESTION It is said by some commen-

taries on the Siddur that one should daven for Mashiach ben Yosef in the final war so that he shouldn't be killed by the wicked “*Armilos*.” Who is this *Armilos* and what particular evil does *Armilos* represent?

ANSWER *Targum Yehonasan* (*Yeshayahu 11:4*) describes the death of a wicked figure, “*Armilos*,” at the end of the final war, and that he exists in a large stone found in Rome, and when the time for the final war arrives, the stone will fall and this giant figure “*Armilos*” will emerge from it. (See also the commentary of *Tzror HaMor* to *Devarim 24:8*). He will challenge Mashiach ben Yosef, and the *Arizal* explains, when one *davens* for Mashiach, he should daven especially that Mashiach ben Yosef should not be killed by the wicked *Armilos*. The root of the birth of *Armilos* is explained in *Heichalos Rabasi* (39:2): He will be born from an engraved image, and half of him will come from a stone and his other half will come from the engraved image. Thus, *Armilos* is the root of the “heart of stone” within man. He will be the only stone that produces offspring, and therefore his power can counter the offspring of Yosef. The *sefer Dan Yadin* says that *Armilos* is another name for Gog and Magog, who are two brothers, and *Armilos* has two heads. That is why he has two names – *Armilos* and *Romilos*. The *Ohr HaChaim* (*Bamidbar 24:17*) also discusses this. *Armilos* is the “chief ruler of the *Erev Rav*”, as explained in *sefer Kol HaTor* (vol.I), who also adds further that [the tribe of] Ephraim [who descends from Yosef and whom Mashiach ben Yosef will descend from] will wage war against *Armilos*. The *sefer Kinas Hashem Tzevaos* (vol.II) of the *Ramchal* says that *Armilos* is the “secret of Amalek.”

QUESTION Will *Armelos* be a physical person or he is a spiritual concept? If he will be a physical person can we know who he is? Can he be someone who is a great leader? Will he know that he is

Armelos? Is he a soul reincarnation of *Bilaam*? Can he do *teshuvah* and save himself from being destroyed?

ANSWER *Armelos* is a spiritual [and evil] power who may very well become clothed in a certain person or in another person. He won't be able to do complete *teshuvah*, because by his very concept, he is evil.

QUESTION Was there a possibility for Hitler, may his name be blotted out, to have free will? Did he have the option of doing *teshuvah*? And what about Haman – was it possible for him to have free will and also do *teshuvah*?

ANSWER He had partial free will, and regarding that level of free will he had, he was able to do *teshuvah*. But he is from Amalek, who cannot do complete *teshuvah*. And the same was true about Haman.

QUESTION It is said today by many *Gedolim* and *tzaddikim* that the “Smartphone” stands for S”M (the *Sitra Achra*). Does this have anything to do with the final enemy of the Jewish people who will come at the end of the war of Gog and Magog, whose name is “*Armilos*” who will try to kill Mashiach? And if the final battle of the *Sitra Achra* against *Klal Yisrael* is through the “smartphone” then what is the connection to this figure “*Armilos*”?

ANSWER Yes. The physical description of *Armilos* is that he has a big eye and a small eye, and according to another view he has seven eyes, because he represents the *yetzer hora* to stray after one's eyes [in contrast to Yosef *HaTzaddik*, who is called the “good eye”, and who represents holy eyes that are careful not to observe lewdness. This is why *Armilos* is the counterforce to Yosef *HaTzaddik* and by extension Mashiach ben Yosef]. Straying after one's eyes (surfing the net) is the entire idea of internet and all media devices.