



REMAINING SHELTERED TODAY

Withstanding A Impure Environment *“And Yaakov left Beer Sheva, and went towards Charan”*... Yaakov had grown up in the house of Yitzchok & Rivkah & learned in yeshivah for 14 years. He lived a life of holiness. Then he lived with Lavan, who was a completely dishonest swindler, idol-worshipper & sorcerer. Lavan was the epitome of *tum'ah*.

How was he able to live truthfully in an impure environment?

Enter A Sheltered Environment Yaakov *Avinu* testified about himself, *“Im Lavan Garti”*, and Rashi (*Bereishis 32:5*) explains that he was saying, “Even though I lived with Lavan, I still kept the 613 *mitzvos*.” He lived with Lavan for many years, yet he did not become influenced by his evil ways.

It is clear that Yaakov survived Lavan because he had grown up in the house of Yitzchok and Rivkah, & because he went to *yeshivah* for 14 years. Only with this deep connection to truth that Yaakov *Avinu* had lived beforehand, did he have the ability to withstand Lavan's evil influence.

Ideally, a person must try to be distanced as much as possible from bad influences. It is within a person's free choice, according to the unique circumstances which Hashem has placed each person in, to choose the best possible environment to be in: *“I will not dwell anywhere except in a place of Torah”* (*Pirkei Avos 5:22*). This is a first course of action that is the ideal kind of life that we need to strive for.

But many times, there are all sorts of reasons which do not enable one to live in a “place of Torah.” But even if a person is living in a place of Torah, the evil influences are everywhere since the power of evil is so strong. The “place of Torah” itself has become mixed with all kinds of bad influences, where the very foundations are being attacked & uprooted.

How can a person succeed like Yaakov who was not influenced by Lavan? How did Yaakov survive an environment which lived totally in the opposite of Hashem's will? In our generation, the inner, spiritual world is hidden and concealed from people, & instead, superficiality dominates.

Our Difficult Situation Any sensible person can understand that in order to survive a place of bad influences, just as Yaakov did, a person needs to have a deep connection to truth. He must be able to hold on firmly to truth and not become uprooted by the winds that rage against him. Even if a person wants to live internally & spiritually, he still faces the tests of dealing with the influences of the outside world; whether he wants to actually deal with it or not.

Therefore, he must hearken to the verse, *“Go, my nation, come into your rooms, close the doors behind you...until the wrath passes”* (Isaiah 26:20). One needs to try to find some **shelter** from the violent, crashing winds of the spiritual storm that rages outside. One needs to find somewhere that is cleaner, purer, and more sheltered from evil influences.

There are some places today which are more safeguarded than others, but there is still no place today where we are totally safeguarded. We can choose to live in a place of Torah - relatively speaking - compared to other places in the world. But no matter where we live, the *Shaar HaNun d'Tumah* is everywhere. Sometimes it is obvious and sometimes it is hidden, but the worst kinds of evil are still in every place, & no place is totally safe.

The Only Hope Therefore, the only sensible path to take is to act similarly to Yaakov *Avinu* when he learned for 14 years in the *yeshiva* of Shem and Ever. But even if a person today cannot be in *yeshivah* for 14 years, he can still live life with the same truthful perspective that Yaakov *Avinu* had where he acquired the deep connection to truth, and totally disconnected from everything taking place in the world.

The more a person lives inwardly, the better of a chance he will have in passing the *nisyonos* of today's generation. But if a person is only superficially connected to the spiritual, and acts by rote, he does not have a deep and strong connection to his inner world, and it will be almost impossible for him to withstand today's *nisyonos*.

"The *yetzer hora* gets stronger every day, and if not for Hashem's help, it is impossible to overcome" (Sukkah 52a). The only power that will save us is when we connect to the inner depths in our own soul.

What does it mean to 'enter inward'?

When you learn Torah, you need to enter it deeply, with your heart & mind until you feel a deep connection to what you are learning. When you *daven*, you need to enter into the words of what you are saying, and into what the very idea of *tefillah* is. Realize that you are conversing with the King. When you do *chessed*, don't just per-

form it mechanically; do it with your heart, from a desire to give to others and to bestow love upon others.

We need to enter the depths of our own *da'as* (thinking & beliefs), both in the areas of our *hilchos de'os* (beliefs & perceptions towards life), as well as in all areas of our Torah learning & to enter even further, into the *chadrei halev*, the "chambers of the heart" (as explained by the Chazon Ish, Kovetz Igros). We need to go from room within room until we find the very innermost point of the heart itself. However far we get, we must keep entering inward.

Yaacov called the place of the future *Beis HaMikdash* a house even before it had become a house- it was only a mount and a field at that time. Since the *Beis HaMikdash* reveals to us that a person can be connected inward, even as he in a space that connects outward to the rest of the world; he can find a "house" of shelter within himself, even as he is an open space.

There are thus two different attitudes of how a person can be sheltered in a 'house,' even when there is no 'house' in front of him. There is a way to start from above, by living the exaltedness and greatness of the soul, of the 'top rung of the ladder' which is in Heaven; and the other way, which we have mainly been describing here, is to live inwardly: "*lifnay v'lifnim*."

These are two distinct spiritual ways to live in our generation. One way is to live an inner kind of life, and to keep going more inward, to keep entering the depth of Torah learning, *avodah*, and *chessed*. Another way is to live all the time thinking about lofty ideals; to live from a place of exaltedness.

Avoiding Delusions But, first you need a ladder that is firmly rooted in the ground. For this reason, we have to be careful in *halachah* and in basic *derech eretz* which comes before Torah. Then we

can sensibly make ourselves more spiritual. If we ignore this we will become delusional and think that we are being spiritual.

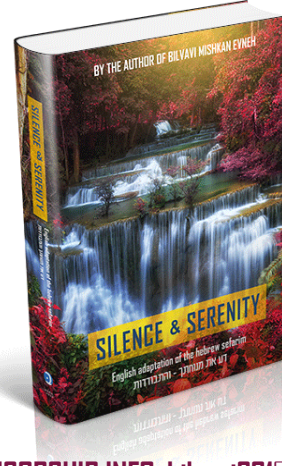
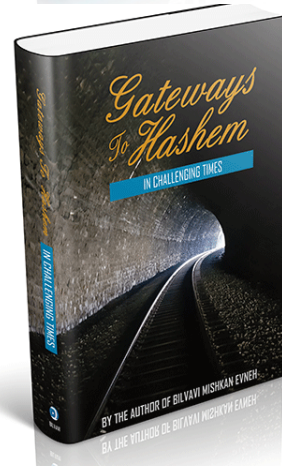
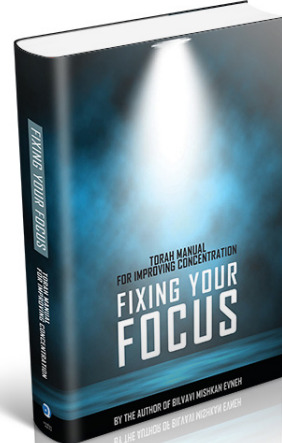
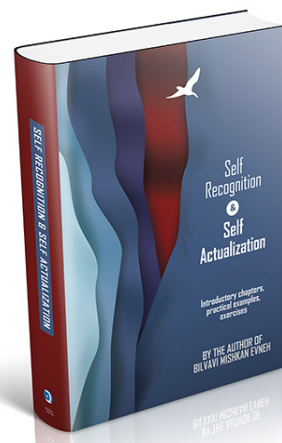
One needs to keep going deeper, in the areas of Torah, *avodah*, and *chessed*. One also needs to live all the time with exalted thoughts (according to his level, and not in a delusional way), and to avoid thinking of the frivolous and empty things that much of the generation thinks about.

With these two aspects combined (remaining connected to one's inwardness, and thinking about exalted concepts), Yaakov was able to go to "*Charan.*" (from the term "charon af"-wrath). He was able to survive the "wrath" of the impure environment of Lavan.

Yaakov could only survive Lavan because he had acquired these two aspects together: he had reached the exaltedness, the "top rung of the ladder, which reaches the heavens," by learning how to always place his mind in a higher place; & he had a deep inward connection in his heart, to whatever spirituality he had acquired from beforehand.

One needs to work on these matters with great exertion & with *mesirus nefesh*, according to his own level, along with davening to Hashem for help, with tears. Through this, a person will merit, with Hashem's help, the time in which "I will remove the spirit of impurity from the land," (Zechariah 13 2) where the perfected state of Creation will be revealed, when we will be able to express, "This is nothing but the house of G-d, and this is the gate to Heaven" (Bereishis 28:17) – a place that reveals completely the Shechinah, in This World.

(Editor's synthetis of several derashos: Weekly Shmuess - 011 Vayeitzei | Remaining Sheltered Today, Droshos 060 - Empowering Yourself to Survive Evil, Droshos 103 - Fiftieth Gate of Impurity, Pesach - 003 Avodah of our Generation)



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