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Yaakov Avinu's Bitachon Dilemma

FROM THE SHIURIM OF

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There is a topic that's very relevant in our lives today. Remember the coronavirus? Everybody was impacted by it. What's the most immediate impact that coronavirus had on people? The answer is: fear. That's the common response that a pandemic brings to people.

There are some people who have no fear. But someone else might decide he must wear a mask because he's not a spring chicken. He decides that it would be practical for him to be careful. However, everything is from Hashem and the only thing to fear is Hashem. You shouldn't fear pandemics. How sad it was to watch people disconnect from Hashem and become fearful. And dealing with fear is the subject in this week's parshah.

OVERDRAWN DUE TO CHASSADIM

Yaakov Avinu was facing off against Esav without using bitachon as a derech. Yaakov wanted to face Esav without employing bitachon. He could have had bitachon very easily, but he chose to face Esav based on his merits.

Now, the odd thing is that Yaakov Avinu was extremely afraid. He was very afraid, and that fear caused him tremendous pain.[1]

We have to analyze this. If a person chose to go the route of not relying on bitachon but proceeding just based on their merits, would that be a reason to be afraid? Let's say there was no bitachon in the world. Does that mean that a super tzaddik would be afraid? No. Even if he had no bitachon, he would say, "I'm not afraid because I know Hashem runs the world. Every bullet has its address and everything is determined by Hashem's hashgachah pratis." It's not a reason to be afraid. If you're afraid, then you can employ bitachon.

The question is: Why was Yaakov afraid? What was he afraid of? Chazal tell us the answer to that question: Yaakov was afraid that he was short on zechuyos, short on merits. He was afraid that

[1] בראשית לב:ח "וַיִּירָא יַעֲקֹב מְאֹד וַיֵּצֶר לוֹ וַיַּחַץ אֶת הָעָם אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ וְאֶת הַצֹּאן וְאֶת הַבָּקָר וְהַגְּמַלִּים לִשְׁנֵי מַחֲנוֹת:"

compared to Esav, he did not have any zechuyos.[2] What does that mean?

There are two great principles here.

First, Yaakov said, "קטנתי, I've run out of credit. I have received so many chassadim, so much kindness, and such great chassadim from Hashem." When a person receives chassadim from Hashem, they're "expensive" in terms of possibly paying for it with merits. Living in Hashem's hotel, if you pay with the credits of your maasim tovim, it can be expensive. If you ever went to a hotel and you wanted to order something from room service, you know that they usually charge an arm and a leg. For those minibars in the hotel room, they charge an arm and a leg. That is because hotels are expensive to live in.

To live in Hashem's world is very expensive. Don't think because you enjoy the chassadim, it's not going to come off of your credits. I did not say necessarily it will, but it could be. Very easily.

Yaakov Avinu was afraid that his merits had become diminished because of all the chesed that he received from Hashem. What chesed did Yaakov Avinu receive from Hashem? When Yaakov Avinu started out on his journey, he was a destitute pauper. He had zero. Gornisht! Now, a mere 20 years later, he had four wives. Not one wife, but four wives. He had a boatload of children. His children were not stam. Yaakov had children that were going to shake up the universe. He had so much cattle, so many assets, so many servants. He was a major metropolis all on his own. That was a very big chesed. So Yaakov was concerned that maybe receiving all this was costly. He did not want to rely on the rachamim and the chesed of Hashem.

ESAV'S ACCRUED MERITS

Chazal also tell us that Yaakov Avinu was concerned that Esav had been honoring his father nonstop for 22 years. Yaakov wasn't around to do that. It wasn't Yaakov's fault, but the fact was, Esav had lots of zechuyos. Yaakov Avinu was afraid that he was short of zechuyos in comparison to Esav.

FEAR BREEDS PAIN AND DOOM

Now, was that fear a good thing or a bad thing? That fear brought much greater fear. Look at the language of the passuk. First it says "ויירא יעקב מאד - and Yaakov was very afraid". Then it says, "ויצר לו, and he was very pained." My Rebbi (Rav Meir Halevi

[2] רש"י (בראשית לב:יא): "קטנתי מכל החסדים" - (שבת לג) נתמעטו זכיותי ע"י החסדים והאמת שעשית עמי לכך אני ירא שמא משהבטחתני נתלכלכתי בחטא ויגרום לי להמסר ביד עשו: "ומכל האמת" - אמתת דבריך ששמרת לי כל ההבטחות שהבטחתני: "כי במקלי": - לא היה עמי לא כסף ולא זהב ולא מקנה אלא מקלי לבדו. ומדרש אגדה נתן מקלו בירדן ונבקע הירדן:

Soloveichik z"l) asks: Shouldn't it seemingly say it the other way around? It should have said as follows: Yaakov was thinking about his brother, ויצר לו, it caused him a lot of grief, and therefore, he was afraid. Why does it say Yaakov was afraid and afterwards it caused him great pain?

My Rebbi quoted a Rema MiPano[3] who said that Yaakov Avinu was greatly pained because he was afraid. People do not realize how terrible it is to be afraid. Most of us think that being afraid is just an inconvenience in life. Some people are hypochondriacs. Some people are scaredy cats. Some people are scared of their own shadows.

You have to know that being afraid is much, much worse than anything you can even imagine, because when you're afraid, you're bringing upon yourself and you're inviting upon yourself the worst possible outcomes. Even though Hashem promised Yaakov Avinu, "I will watch you and I will return you to this land," and He watched him in the house of Lavan, still, Yaakov Avinu was afraid. He was afraid that he ran out of zechusim, and because of that fear, he was greatly distressed.

PROJECTING FEAR OR RESPONSIBILITY?

Now, the first thing you have to know is this: When you encounter someone who's afraid, you know one thing—he lacks bitachon. A person who is afraid lacks bitachon, because bitachon means you're in a state of menuchas hanefesh, inner calm. Yaakov Avinu did not want bitachon. It doesn't explain to us why he was afraid. But the fact that he was afraid made him more nervous because he knew the dangers of being afraid. We have to know that being afraid is the most awful thing that you can do for yourself.

Let me explain this. I think it's very common in today's society to grow up with parents or grandparents who are very afraid. They call it "being concerned," but they're scaredy cats. Do you remember anything that you grew up with that your parents feared for their children's sake? Were your parents ever afraid of things that would happen to their children? What were they scared about? Who are you going around with? Were they ever afraid of you going out and getting kidnapped? Is there anyone here who remembers their mother saying, "It's very dangerous, so be careful whom you talk to because you never know. There are stories. You can be kidnapped, and if you don't believe me"—your mother would say—"look at the milk carton or the orange juice bottle.

[3] ספר עשרה מאמרות - מאמר חקור דין - חלק א פרק כד: "...היה מצר יעקב על מה שהוכרח לירא את עשו כדכתיב וייראו יעקב מאד על זה ויצר לו ומיד השתדל בהצלה ונעזר בתפלה כי אמנם יראת הפגעים היא רצועה בישא, תחת אלהים קדושים שהרחיקוה מעליהם יעקב ויוסף כמו שהעידה תורה משמו של כל אחד מהם התחת אלהים אני רצו בזה לא תהא יראתנו אלא את האלהים את כבודו ואת גדלו דעליה כתיב שבטך ומשענתך המה ינחמוני כי השבט עצמו היא המשענת וכו'

That's the face of a missing child on the bottle. There are lots of them." Do you remember growing up being afraid of robbers? Have you ever heard this: "Make sure you lock your doors at night because you're afraid of robbers coming in the windows." People are afraid. "Be careful when you go outside and make sure you don't get run over by a car."

Do you remember hearing things like that? Have you had such experiences? They were afraid you were going to fall down and break something. If you went to the park, they would say, "Don't climb on the monkey bars. It's very dangerous. You might break something." Or, "People might do bad things to you." "I'll tell you, we live in a very dangerous world. The world is not like it used to be." Have you ever had any experiences like that? I think most people experience such things.

Now, you have to know that many parents are afraid. "Don't go out if you're not wearing three coats and two scarves and long underwear and oversized boots, because it's very dangerous out there." "If you walk outside, you'll catch pneumonia. You'll catch anything that's out there."

Are those people good parents or not good parents? They're not called good parents, because what they're doing is they're putting their fears onto their children.

What they should say is, "The responsible thing to do is, when you go out in the winter, you wear a coat." "The responsible thing to do is to lock your doors at night."

Teach Kids that Hashem is Here

But you don't have to be afraid. Hashem is watching you. Hashem watched you from the day you were born. Hashem watched me from the day I was born. Therefore, Hashem will continue watching you.

You have to teach your children about the presence of Hashem in their lives, number one. That's emunah. The second lesson you have to teach your children is that they have to be reliant on Hashem. They could trust Hashem.

Now, of course, we tell children, "Don't run into the street. Don't take unnecessary risks." But not because we're afraid. Dovid Hamelech said[4], ה' לי לא אירא, I'm not going to be afraid, מה יעשה לי אדם.

Now, it says in the passuk[5] that a person should be ונשמרתם מאד לנפשתיכם. You should be exceedingly careful for your health,

[4] תהילים קיח:ו "ה' לִי לֹא אִירָא מַה יַּעֲשֶׂה לִי אָדָם"

[5] דברים ד:טו "וְנִשְׁמַרְתֶּם מְאֹד לְנַפְשֹׁתֵיכֶם כִּי לֹא רְאִיתֶם כָּל תְּמוּנָה בְּיוֹם דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֲלֵיכֶם בְּחֹרֵב מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ:"

but that doesn't mean that you have to be afraid. You have to be responsible. There is a big difference between being afraid and being responsible—that's what a person has to know.

Now when you grow up like that and you know that Hashem is watching you, you know what that fills your children with? They will develop a sense of never being alone, a sense of security and a sense of self-confidence. But if you teach children about fears, how dangerous the world is, and how afraid they have to be, it just takes away all their self-confidence. They'll have no self-esteem. They won't believe in themselves.

I've been in homes of paupers that I am sure if any ganav would come in, he would leave him a donation. And those people were so careful about locking up at night. I asked them, "What are you being so careful about? What are you worried about?" "Oh, we hear stories." I said, "Your churvah (ruin), I guarantee you, is safe, unless a ganav was deaf, dumb, and blind, he wouldn't come here. And if he came here, he would have rachmanus on you. He would see your broken breakfront. You don't have one thing in there except some torn sefarim. You don't even have a silver becher. What are you afraid of? If they rob you, you would make out like a bandit. You would only profit wildly. They'll clean your shmattas out of the house, and you'll get new ones."

That's how people are. "You never know," they say. They're afraid that they're not being responsible. And when a person is afraid, they have no awareness that they have Hashem to rely on, and that Hashem is watching you and Hashem watches your home and Hashem watches each of His children.

INVITING EVIL

What people don't realize is that if you're afraid, you're inviting evil upon yourself. If you're afraid of sicknesses, you're screaming with a big invitation, "Please, Hashem, bring it on! Bring the sicknesses to me, so that I could say, 'You see? You have to be afraid.'" You have to prove your fear. People do that.

The Rishonim, Rabeinu Bachaye[6] and Rabeinu Yonah, both say very clearly that someone who's afraid when there's no place to fear brings about a michshol and a mokesh to himself. He brings evil upon himself. He brings tzaros upon himself, even though otherwise the evil would never have come. You hear that amazing

[6] רבנו בחיי - דברים יא:כה - לפי שיראת בשר ודם הוא פחיתות הנפש וחסרון גדול בחוק יראת ה' יתברך, והירא וחרד מבשר ודם הוא מסבב מוקש ומכשול לנפשו ומביא עליו צרה אף על פי שלא היתה ראויה לבוא עליו, ומי האיש הירא ושם ה' מבטחו ינצל מן הצרה אף על פי שהיתה ראויה לבוא עליו, וכן שלמה ע"ה מזהיר את האדם על מדת הבטחון חרדת אדם יתן מוקש ובוטח בה' ישוגב (משלי כט, כה)
רבנו בחיי - במדבר יד:ט - אך בה' אל תמרודו. לימדך הכתוב שיראת העם הוא מרד בהקב"ה. וכן אמר שלמה המלך ע"ה (משלי כט, כה) חרדת אדם יתן מוקש, החרדה שיחרד האדם מבשר ודם היא הנותנת מכשול ומוקש לנפשו, וכן היא גורמת שישכח האדם להקב"ה, והוא שאמר הנביא (ישעיה נא, יב) מי את ותיראי מאנוש ימות ומבן אדם חציר ינתן ותשכח ה' עושך

chiddush?[7]

I always wonder, during a pandemic, how many people brought this illness upon themselves? They begged Hashem day after day after day until finally Hashem said: "You know? You're taka right. You don't trust Me. You don't rely on Me. You're afraid. Let Me give you a taste of your own medicine." And that's what Hashem does. That's a terrible, terrible disservice to yourself and to your family. A person could take his own life and cause his own death.

If a person wants to wear a mask or stay away from groups because he wants to be responsible, fine. No problem. "Are you afraid?" "I'm not afraid, but I'm taking rational precautions." Fine, wonderful. Farkhert, just the opposite, that person will continuously be motivated to daven to Hashem and to be mechazek his bitachon in Hashem, and he will be protected. But if a person is going to be fearful and talk about his fears, that becomes a trap for him and a stumbling block.

You never want to ask for judgment from Hashem. Let's say you go in a car. You want to tell your child to drive responsibly. You say, "You know, having a car is a davar chashuv. It's a big responsibility that we're entrusting you with. You have to stay focused and drive carefully." Your child asks, "Ma, are you afraid I'm going to have an accident and kill myself?" If she says, "Yes," that's not the right answer. She says, "No. I'm sure Hashem will watch you, but Hashem wants you to drive responsibly." Sometimes the punishment for driving irresponsibly is that you get into a crash. For driving irresponsibly, Hashem gives you a ticket. Hashem gives you a crash. But if a person is afraid, it's geferlech, it's terrible.

There are many people who are extreme health nuts. They're petrified of getting sick. They believe everything they read, and they think everybody is getting cancer. They don't have enough vitamin D. They don't have enough vitamin B12. They're definitely short on vitamin C, and they don't have vitamin A. They don't eat enough greens. They don't eat enough lycopene.

Not enough tomatoes. These people read everything it says on the labels, and they go to the store and they load up on preventive medicines. "Okay, here's my cancer medicine. Okay, here's my

[7] רבנו יונה - משלי ג:כו - והענין המכוון במה שנאמר "חרדת אדם יתן מוקש" החרדה שיחרד מן האדם היא חטא נפשו ונותן מוקש ומגברת האויב ומקרבת הצרה עליו, כי ראוי לאדם שלא יחרד מזרוע בשר ודם, ויכין יראת לבו בשם, ובוטח בי"י ישוגב מן הצרה בשכר הבטחון, אע"פ שהיתה הצרה ראויה לבא עליו והוא שנאמר אחריו "רבים מבקשים פני מושל ומי"י משפט איש" (כט, כו). "מי את ותיראי מאנוש ימות" (ישעיה נא, יב), כי זה משפלות הנפש, ונתבאר שם כי הירא מן האדם שוכח את השי"ת, שנאמר "ותשכח י"י עושך" וגו' (שם, יג), פי' בראותך את הצרה קרובה ומוכנת ונבצרה מאוד מזמת הצלתה "ואיה חמת המציק" (שם), היה לך להעלות על לבך כי גם פעמים רבות מצאתך כזאת וזרח אור ישועת השי"ת ונפלאותיו

kidney medicine. Here's my..."

"Do you have sick kidneys?"

"No."

"So rely on Hashem. Hashem took care of your kidneys until now. He'll take care of you vaiter, further."

You have to understand this system. You don't want to do harm to yourself.

FEAR CAUSED PAIN

Yaakov Avinu saw that he was very afraid, and he couldn't shake that fear. That caused him a great amount of pain. Fear is so unhealthy. I tell all these vitamin people and all these scared people, scaredy cats, "Do you know the biggest danger you're bringing upon yourself is your fear? Your being scared is the biggest trap that you're bringing upon yourself." It's a frightening thought. Here is a guy who is so afraid, and he's trying to do everything to protect himself, yet he finds out he's been bringing the sickness upon himself the whole time—because of his fears.

People ask me, "How come you're not afraid of having Corona?" I say, "I'll tell you a little secret. I have a special, private doctor, and this private doctor has been providing me with services since my childhood. He was the family doctor. He took care of the family." A couple of people have asked me, "Did your family have a private doctor?" I said, "Absolutely! The best one! You know what his name was? Dr. Hashem." I once told a doctor, "I'm going to see a bigger doctor than you." I was asked, "What's his name?" I said, "Dr. Hashem." "Oh, Dr. Hashem? I never heard of him." "That's your problem. I have."

You have to know that Hashem provided and took care of me for all my life. Tens of thousands of people have been challenged with coronavirus, but I haven't. I actually was disappointed, to tell you the truth. I thought that I had had a bout with coronavirus lasting a few hours, so I recently went for a blood test. They said, "We're sorry to inform you, you never had Corona. You have no antibodies." I told the doctor, "I don't need antibodies." He said, "Why?" I said, "I've got bigger bodies protecting me. I don't need the antibodies protecting me." "Who is that?" "The One Above." He had too many tattoos on his hand. I don't know if he *chapped* what I was talking about.

But a person has to know that you have to believe that Hashem took care of you all your life. And just because you're a big tzaddik or a big talmid chacham doesn't mean that you have bitachon in Hashem. It could be you're afraid. It could be that you are very afraid.

MEKAYEM A HALACHAH

I once was surprised at my Rebbi. My Rebbi made a wedding, and

on the day of the wedding, he hired a frum Yid to sit and learn in his house for the entire wedding, until he came home. He wanted him there as a shomer. I had heard of stories where ganavim take an invitation to see who is making a wedding that night, then they break into the house. Easy score. I was wondering: Why did my Rebbi do that? So I asked him. I said, "Rebbi, are you scared? Who is going to break into your house? There is nothing in your house to break in for. Did anybody ever break into your house?"

He said, "I'm not scared."

I said, "If you're not scared, why did you hire somebody?"

He said, "I have a din of a shomer. There are things in my house that I'm a shomer on that don't belong to me. Money for tzedakah. Money for the yeshivah. Money for poor people. I have a borrowed sefer Torah in my house." (It did not belong to him at that time.) He said, "I'm a sho'el, a borrower. You know what the halachah of a sho'el is? That a sho'el is chayav on onsim, he's obligated no matter what. A sho'el is mechuyav the biggest shemirah possible. I did it to be mekayem a halachah in Shulchan Aruch."

I lowered my eyes. I remember thinking, "Wow, am I out of the loop! Am I out of the loop!" I did not even dream to think about that. I did not even think of that. You're a shomer? Yes, you're a shomer. You're a watchman, and a watchman has legal obligations.

GET A DOSE OF BITACHON

Now, during this time, when the fear factor keeps on raising its head, you must employ bitachon and rid yourself and free yourself of the fears. You have to free yourself from the fear and rely on your Doctor—Hashem. Again, act responsibly. But if you think that silly, lousy, dumb shmatta that's on your face is going to protect you from Hashem's gezeiros of coronavirus, you must be smoking some very serious dope. Such dope that you become a dope. That's the dopiest thing I've ever heard of. You want to be responsible? Fine. But that's not going to save you. Hashem is going to save you. So why don't you rely on Hashem?

This is extreme. Why are you afraid you're not going to get married? When a person is afraid he's not going to get married, that's the biggest cause not to get married. If a person is afraid he's not going to have a job, that's a very big reason why he won't have a job. He won't have parnasah. I don't care what your mother, or your father, or your grandfather, or your grandmother told you. "Nu. How are you going to make a parnasah? You're going to grow up and you're not going to have parnasah? Learning in a yeshivah? Are you going to have parnasah from that?"

"Yes. I have some news for you. Yes."

You have to be mechazek your bitachon. And if you do that, you'll be a free person. You'll be a person who is in the hands of Hashem. And every day, over and over, you'll be mekayem the mitzvah of having emunah and bitachon in Hashem. And you'll taka have the best insurance out there.

Everybody should be gezunt. Everybody should have parnasah. Everybody should have a shidduch. Everybody should have kol tzarchav, all his needs—without having fear.

In Summary

Yaakov Avinu was afraid that the chassadim he had received had diminished his zechuyos, while Esav had accumulated zechuyos through honoring his father. But the fear itself caused Yaakov tremendous pain, because he understood how dangerous fear can be. A person has to know that there is a big difference between being responsible and being afraid. Of course, you have to take reasonable precautions. But who is watching you? Hashem! The same Hashem Who took care of you from the day you were born is watching you today. That is what we have to teach ourselves and our children: act responsibly, daven to Hashem, and be mechazek your bitachon. Don't fill your home with fears about what might happen. Fill it with the awareness that Hashem is here, that you have Someone to rely on, and that you are never alone. That is how a person develops menuchas hanefesh and becomes a free person, knowing that he is in the hands of Hashem.

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