

"And he said: No longer shall your name be said as Yaakov but Yisrael, for you battled with angels and with men and have prevailed" (32:29)

There are many explanations regarding the episode of Yaakov's battle with the "man." Indeed, the divergence between the literal and symbolic meanings of the episode is reflected in the many interpretations applied to this passage. Many commentators view the narrative as a parable for the righteous individual's inner struggle against the forces of evil. Yaakov stands alone in the vastness, in the deep silence of the night, a mortal being in confrontation with the Divine messenger. This mysterious encounter represents the numerous struggles which surface on the eve of an approaching ordeal.

The *Sh'lah Hakadosh* views this struggle in the night as a foreshadowing of the decisive battle which is to occur on the morrow, in broad daylight. Man is judged in the silence of the preceding night. It is in this abyss of darkness that man's moral value and inner strength must be asserted in order to prevail against the forces of evil. If man emerges triumphant, he will be personally blessed by the angel of evil, in preparation for the imminent trials which yet await him. In the crises of our lives, our destiny is decided in the dark night, in the secret recesses of the human conscience.

The *Brisker Rav* suggests a similar homily. He questions *Rashi's* statement that the "men" with whom Yaakov fought were Lavan and Eisav. Why does *Rashi* assume that Yaakov had prevailed over Eisav, when he had not yet confronted him? *The Brisker Rav* explains that the "man" with whom Yaakov struggled was Eisav's guardian angel. As the *Midrash* states, their "wrestling" raised dust all the way up to the Heavenly throne. In other words, this battle actually occurred in Heaven. If Yaakov managed to succeed in Heaven, then he would emerge victorious over Eisav himself on earth.

We must always concern ourselves with what is taking place in Heaven. Are we prevailing up there? Did we pass the test of judgement on Heaven? If we are to be victorious in Heaven, then we should have no fear on earth. Man's continued concern should be only, "What will they say up in Heaven?" Man should subdue his heart and purify his thoughts, dedicating them only to the Almighty. Hashem will thereby enable him to defeat all the powers of this world which are designed to constrain him. This resolve will enable the individual to fend off all harsh decrees. No longer will he be intimidated by earthly obstacles, for he has acquired the greatest strength, trust in Hashem!