

## And as for me, I have given you Shechem – one portion more than your brothers, which I took...with my sword and my bow. (48:22)

*B'charbi u'b'kashti*, with my sword and with my bow. *Rashi* interprets sword and bow as: sword – sharp wisdom; bow – prayer. *Targum Onkelos* translates it as *tzalusi u'b'bausi*; with my prayer is my supplication. Thus, Yaakov *Avinu's* strength lies not in his physical prowess, but rather, in his spiritual potency. Yaakov's prayer was much more effective than his physical strength. This is true for all of us. Our strength is in our spirituality. We vanquish the enemy with our supplications, not with our guns. *Horav Shimon Pincus, zl*, observes that during an *eis tzarah*, period of tribulation, when the numbers are against us and the enemy's weapon is far more advanced than anything we have, we emerge triumphant because we have the power of prayer. *Rav Pincus* explains that Hashem runs towards us. As the Psalmist says, *Imo anochi b'tzarah*, "I am with him in his troubles." Hashem shares with us the *tzaar*, pain and anguish. It may appear that we are running towards him, but, in essence, He is running towards us. A person travels in a car; it seems as if the buildings that he passes are moving towards him, while he stands still – when, in fact, it is the opposite. We think that we are running to Hashem, when, in fact, the moment that we turn to Him, He "comes running."

We do not realize that Hashem is present, ready and willing to help. We do not ask, because we do not think. A *chassid* once came to *Horav Mendel, zl, m'Kotzk*, and lamented his bitter circumstances. "*Rebbe*," he cried, "my cupboard is bare. I have a houseful of children and nothing to feed them." He then broke down in bitter weeping. The *Rebbe* looked at him and said emphatically, "Pray to Hashem! He will sustain your family." "But *Rebbe*," the *chassid* cried, "I do not know how to pray." "If this is the case," retorted the *Rebbe*, "you have a greater problem than a lack of livelihood!!"

A Jew must be acutely aware that his success (as part of *Am Yisrael*) is through the medium of prayer. His "mouth" is his greatest and most effective tool for catalyzing salvation/deliverance. Yaakov *Avinu* alluded to the power of prayer and supplication. The *Kotzker* explains that the efficacy of a sword is determined by how the soldier prepares it prior to battle. He sharpens it razor sharp. Likewise, in order for the arrows to reach their distant target, the soldier's bow must be prepared by tightening it. Prayer is no different. One must prepare himself prior to *Tefillah*. This is why the early *Chassidim*, pious Jews (*Talmud Berachos 30A*) put their minds and hearts in order, so that they could focus properly on the prayers before them. I guess this means that they did not just run in a minute before *Barchu* and leave after *Kedushah*. They took the time they spent speaking with Hashem seriously.

Ask someone who has just concluded *Shemoneh Esrai*, "Did you say *Bircas Hashiveinu*" (or whatever *brachah*), the response will most certainly be, "Probably." The *Baalei Mussar* offer an insightful analogy to a fellow traveling in a wagon. At one point, the driver ties the reins around the

horse that is pulling the wagon. The driver then proceeds to go to sleep. The bewildered passenger asks the driver, "What gives?" The driver's response is: "Do not worry. The horse knows the way. He knows when to stop for water. 'We' will get you to your destination in time." Our *davening* is often like that of the horse who knows when to stop for water. When we finish "reading the words," we know that *davening* is over; we have reached our destination. It is now time for water.

Everyone knows that *tefillah* is required as a tool for extricating oneself from a *tzarah*, trouble. When someone is in need of a *refuah*, healing, *brachah*, blessing, any form of *yeshuah*, he knows that *tefillah* is the address to which he should turn. It is the most effective medium for reaching Hashem, Who is the only responder. There is something else for which we must *daven*, something that might ruffle some readers' sensibilities: I refer to the *tefillos* parents must offer that their children grow up in the Torah way and be a source of *nachas* to them, *Klal Yisrael* and Hashem – not necessarily in that order. Some parents might neither agree that this warrants serious *tefillah*, nor will they acquiesce that the qualities that *Chazal* consider important are to be the objectives of our prayer service.

The *Mishnah Berurah* (47:10) (quoted by *Horav Matisyahu Solomon, Shlita*) writes: "The *tefillos* of a father and mother should always be fluent in their mouths, *davening* that their children learn Torah, become *tzaddikim*, righteous people, and have good *middos*, character traits." He then goes on to point out that one should especially concentrate during *U'va'LeTzion* when we say: *Shelo niga larik v'lo neilad la'behalah*, "In order that we should not toil in vain nor give birth to confusion."

Parents are expected to be fluent because they are (or at least should be) constantly *davening* for their children. This, explains the *Mashgiach*, is at the very heart of success in *chinuch*. *Tefillah!* A faithful Jew understands that absolutely nothing is in his hands. He can – and should be – *mishtadel*, endeavor, but he must reiterate in his mind that only Hashem can affect the outcome. There is no *kochi v'otzem yadi*, "my power and the strength of my hand," that sees the achievement through to fruition. If one understands this verity, then he will *daven* – and *daven*, for his children's success. Parenting techniques are *hishtadlus*, but, at the end of the day, without *tefillah*, one does not show that he really cares.

When parents are successful in raising a beautiful family which gives them much Torah *nachas*, satisfaction, it is because they are the beneficiaries of Hashem's blessing. Those who have missed achieving success, is because Hashem withheld the gift of success from them. They must ask, plead, beg for it. It is the most effective thing that they can do.

The *Mashgiach* underscores the necessary attitude one must have when *davening* for his children's success. It must be as the *Mishnah Berurah* writes: "We should *daven* that our children learn Torah and will become *tzaddikim* and have good *middos*... so that we should not toil in vain nor give birth to confusion." We must be infused with the feeling that if our children do not learn Torah, are not *tzaddikim*, do not have good *middos*, then something is very wrong. We have toiled

in vain and given birth to confusion. These should be every parent's goals.

So what if he does not learn Torah, or is not a *tzaddik*, or has not developed good *middos*? Parents who have this attitude have a problem that goes far beyond child-rearing. Their own commitment to Torah ideals are questionable. One who is *frum*, observant, follows *halachah* and does not concoct his own theory on what determines Jewish values. He follows tradition. The *Mishnah Berurah paskens*, renders the *halachic* basics, concerning childraising. This is what we should ascribe to. This is what we should adhere to.

The *Chafetz Chaim* did not become the spiritual leader of his generation overnight. It was the attitude and focus on the manner in which he was raised that set the trajectory for his spiritual evolvment. He would often talk about his mother's *siddur*. The *Chafetz Chaim's* mother passed away when he was a young child. Many years later, someone brought to the *Chafetz Chaim* the *siddur* from which his mother had davened.

The sage took the *siddur* in his trembling hands, kissed it and began to weep incessantly over it. "Can you imagine how many *tefillos* my mother *davened* and how many tears she shed, so that her young Yisrael Meir should grow?"

It all begins and ends with *tefillah*. Obviously, issues arise and interventions are necessary, but that is all part of *hishtadlus*. Without *tefillah*, first and last, one has nothing.