

## **When he perceived that he could not overcome him, he struck the ball of his thighbone; and the ball of Yaakov's thighbone became dislocated as he wrestled with him. (32:26)**

Obviously, the dynamics of this “wrestling match” – this spiritual struggle between the forces of evil and falsehood and the forces of good and truth – have created powerful, esoteric implications and ramifications for generations. *Chazal* shed some light upon this struggle and the meaning of Yaakov *Avinu's* “limping” afterwards. *Sforno* presents an interesting rendering of the phrase: “He could not overcome him” from the *pasuk* quoted above. Eisav's angel – who represented him in this struggle to overwhelm Yaakov's *middah*, attribute, of *emes*, truth, and his clinging to Torah – fought in vain to weaken Yaakov's resolve. He clung so tenaciously to Hashem in thought and speech that the angel could not diminish him in any way. However, “he struck the ball of his thighbone” – Eisav's angel was able to make an incursion. He discovered an area which

Yaakov dreaded, and he specifically struck him there. He informed Yaakov of the sins of the Jewish nation's future leaders. This troubled the Patriarch, so that he momentarily hesitated in clinging to Hashem. This also clarifies another aspect of his subsequent limping.

It is an insightful exegesis, but can we say that the sins of *Klal Yisrael's* leadership are worse than the *churban Batei Mikdash*, destruction of the two Temples; the Spanish Inquisition; the Chemilnicki pogroms of *Tach V'Tat*, 1648-1649; the European Holocaust? Are these tragedies not worse? If so, why did Eisav's angel not notify the Patriarch of our national tragedies? That should have troubled him significantly, so that his connection with Hashem would have dwindled.

Apparently, these national tragedies would not have diminished Yaakov's concentration. Why? Are the sins of Jewish leadership that much worse? *Horav Hensch Leibowitz, zl*, derives from here that nothing frightened Yaakov as much as the awareness that one day Jewish leadership would sin. This befuddled his ability to think clearly, thereby momentarily crippling his connection with Hashem. This provided Eisav's angel with an unprotected area in Yaakov's defenses. He struck, injuring the Patriarch.

But why is faulty leadership a greater tragedy than the cataclysmic tragedies that have physically, emotionally and spiritually decimated our People? The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that as long as we have strong leadership, the national tragedies will take their terrible toll, but we will rebuild; we will rejuvenate and return to become the *Klal Yisrael* that we once were. When the *einei ha'eidah*, the “eyes” of the Jewish assembly, the leaders of the generation, have distorted their minds and perverted their actions, we have no hope of regaining Jewish consciousness. A patient can't be resuscitated if he has no pulse and his heart has stopped working. When the leaders falter, the foundation upon which the Jewish nation rests and will rise again disintegrates and the nation will

crumble.

The erosion of Jewish values, the implosion of our national religious persona, follows closely after our leadership has abnegated their own spiritual destiny. It happened in Germany 150 years ago, when a group of misguided leaders felt that Orthodoxy was too stringent and restrictive. The people needed to “breathe,” to freely move about so as to imbibe the secular culture. They chopped away at the *mitzvos*, until they no longer believed the Torah to be Divine. They created their own seminaries, founded on the principles of heresy which they expounded. What should the people do? If the leadership has deviated, the people have no hope. The people followed, and this is why millions of alienated Jews have no understanding of the meaning of being Jewish, or even how to find out. Their leadership continues to mislead them. Eisav’s angel knew exactly where to strike. He knew how to get Yaakov’s attention.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* quotes the *Talmud* in *Arachin* 17a, which relates a dispute between the Sages concerning the interpretation of the *pasuk* in *Tehillim* 24:6, “This is the generation of those who seek Him, those who strive for Your Presence, (the nation of) Yaakov, *Selah*.” *Rabbi Yehudah Nesiah* explains that this verse seems to attribute the character of a generation to its leaders. In contrast, the Rabbis maintain that the character of a leader parallels that of his generation. The *Talmud* asks to identify the specific issue of the disagreement regarding the character of a generation and its leadership. They respond that *Chazal* have stated their specific opinion in reference to the traits of anger and the likelihood of being appeased.

*Rashi* explains that, according to the view that a leader parallels his generation, Hashem installs an insolent leader when the generation is brazen in nature and a temperate leader when they are amiable to one another. According to the alternative view, the people of a generation are influenced by their leader.

Apparently, according to one opinion, a leader can positively inspire the people of his generation – and can also negatively influence them. This teaches us the enormous responsibility vested in a leader. If he is arrogant – so will be his people. If he is quick to anger – so will be his people. On the other hand, if he is temperate – his people will act likewise. Accordingly, a congregation, institution, assembly are all mirror images of their leadership – or is it the other way around?