

## And a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. (32:25)

It was in middle of the night that Yaakov *Avinu* encountered a “man” who fought with him until he was bested by the Patriarch. We know that this was no ordinary man – and no ordinary fight. This was none other than Eisav’s Heavenly angel, and the battle was one which represented the forces of evil against the forces of good. The angel representing Eisav lost the fight, but, throughout the millennia, he has not thrown in the towel, as he has attempted at every available juncture to turn the tide against Yaakov’s descendants. The question that confronts the reader is, “Why Yaakov?” Avraham *Avinu* and Yitzchak *Avinu* preceded Yaakov, and apparently Satan did not challenge them. What was it about the third Patriarch that spurred such a Heavenly reaction? Apparently, Satan felt that Avraham and Yitzchak’s qualities and ways of serving Hashem did not present a danger to his plan of destroying the spiritual growth of Judaism and its adherents. Yaakov did, thus requiring an open challenge to the Patriarch and everything that he represented.

The various commentators, each in his own inimitable manner, respond to this question. *Horav Elchanan Wasserman, zl*, explains that it was Yaakov’s *koach haTorah*, power of Torah study, that outweighed Avraham’s power of *chesed* and Yitzchak’s power of *avodah*, prayer/service, to Hashem, because, in the long run, these two paths of serving Hashem would not guarantee Jewish survival. Torah study has been, and continues to be, our only antidote to the forces of evil promoted by the *yetzer hora*/Satan and the various guises through which he seeks to sever our spiritual connection with Hashem.

Alternatively, it was Yaakov’s ability to confront and expose the forces of evil for what they are that presented the greatest challenge to Satan and his plans for the spiritual ruin of the Jewish People. Yaakov *Avinu* was subject to – and compelled to address – the two primary forces of evil represented by Eisav and Lavan, two individuals who wrote the book on evil and set the standard for all malicious people to follow. The symbol of Eisav is the *chazir*, pig, who presents its split hooves, which is one of the signs of a kosher animal. He would have us ignore its other sign (lack of chewing its cud) which obviates its *kashrus*. Eisav does not want to be known as evil. He acts under a cloak of respectability, friendship, brotherhood and love, until he is able to ensnare the unknowing and gullible in his tentacles, after which it is too late.

Growing up in the Patriarchal home of Yitzchak and Rivkah *Imeinu*, Yaakov had the dubious opportunity to have a ringside seat to observe Eisav in all his surreptitious, charlatan, evil. He saw him masquerade as a *tzaddik*, righteous person, when Eisav spoke to his father, and then quickly change into his “street” clothes when he was about to act out his evil self, plundering, murdering and acting with complete moral abandon. Yaakov had seen his true colors. As a result, he knew what to look for and how to recognize the evil that was Eisav’s trademark.

Another form of evil which Yaakov was forced to confront and live with for over two decades was that of Lavan *ha’Arami*, his father-in-law, who was infamously known for his ability to swindle and lie. Lavan did not put on a show. He had nothing to hide, because he did not care. He always had a

reason to justify his ignominious activities. When Yaakov confronted him for switching daughters on him, Lavan calmly (with a smile) replied, "We do not act this way here, to give the younger daughter prior to the older one." He had no qualms about lying. This is how he lived. If Yaakov did not like it – he could leave. This form of unvarnished evil, wrought by one who had no compunction to conceal his unsavory, malicious goals was the backdrop to the life our Patriarch experienced for over twenty years.

Yaakov excelled in dealing with Eisav, not allowing his clandestine, underhanded evil to influence him. He also was able to leave Lavan's home, with its lies and justification of every and any immoral activity, holding his head high, proclaiming that he continued to observe all 613 *mitzvos*. Neither Eisav nor Lavan tarnished his spiritual sphere of operations. Do we need a greater and stronger adversary over which the *yetzer hora* must triumph? Satan had no room for error; he had to take down Yaakov, for he was a threat to his future propagation of evil in all its insidious forms. Yaakov triumphed because he had the power of Torah, the power of *emes* – which go hand in hand. With Torah as our lodestar, and the *emes* it generates, we will triumph over Eisav, Lavan and their minions.

We have no dearth of Torah stories, but I could not resist the following story (The Story Rolodex). A young couple living in an upstate New York community enjoyed the peace and quiet that was one of the caveats of living in a near-rural community. On the other hand, while there was a sizable Jewish population in the city, they had yet to succeed in establishing a viable Jewish day school. The parents were frustrated that, like the others, they were forced to send their children to the local public school and augment their religious education at home. One day, the father met what appeared to be a devout religious Jew. After speaking with him, he acknowledged that this man was a bona-fide scholar. After sharing with the man his problem concerning his sons' lack of a meaningful Jewish education, the man offered to tutor the boys on a regular basis. The father was overjoyed. His sons would finally receive a Jewish education.

The next day, the father accompanied his sons to the man's home for their first Torah lesson. A few hours later, the boys left for home. It was not a long walk. It was marred, however, by the presence of a group of teenage delinquents who were bent on harming the young boys. They punched and slapped the two boys, pulled their *peyos* and stole their *yarmulkes*. They topped off their malevolence with name-calling. The two boys ran home, dirty and tear-streaked. After relating the incident to their father, he explained to them that the alternative was not learning Torah and growing up ignorant of Torah, which ultimately would affect their entire religious outlook and practice. Tomorrow, they would return to the *rebbe*. Hashem would protect them. *Baruch Hashem*, they were more humiliated than hurt. Things would work out.

The next day, as the previous day, the father accompanied them on their walk to the *rebbe's* home. Five minutes into their walk, they froze in their tracks as they saw a large black dog preventing them from going forward. Their father assuaged their fears, "A dog will not bother you if you leave it alone." They continued walking, albeit nervously, and they looked back to notice the dog walking

obediently beside them. The hoodlums, who had yesterday ruined their day, were out in force, but stood by without making a move for fear of the dog's reaction.

At the end of their learning session, the boys were surprised – but heartened – to see the dog waiting for them under a tree situated on the *rebbe's* lawn. This went on for one year, with the dog meeting them daily, accompanying them to their Torah lesson, and then walking them home. At the end of the year, the boys went off to *yeshivah*. Shortly after the boys left, their father discovered the dead carcass of the dog on the street. He had served them well.

There is an incredible postscript to this story. Apparently, this was no ordinary dog. When the story of the dog was related to the *Ribnitzer Rebbe, Horav Chaim Zanzvil Abramowitz, zl*, he remarked that the dog was a *gilgul*, transmigration, of a *Yid* who had not spent sufficient time learning Torah during his lifetime. By accompanying the boys, thus enabling them to learn Torah, he restored and fulfilled his own mission, and was now granted entry into *Olam Habba*, the World to Come, where he received his due reward.