

Yaakov settled in the land of his father's sojourning. (37:1)

The commentators have written prolifically about this *pasuk*. *Rashi* writes concerning the juxtaposition of the beginning of this *parshah* upon the closing of the previous *parshah*, which details the tribal leaders of Eisav's family. In one of his expositions, *Rashi* explains Yaakov's settling, comparing it to a flax merchant whose camels laden with flax entered a town, filled to the brim with their loads of flax. The blacksmith whose shop was along the flax merchant's route wondered where all this flax could be stored. A clever fellow who overheard the blacksmith piped up and said, "One spark from your bellows, and it will burn up all the flax." Likewise, when Yaakov *Avinu* saw the list of all Eisav's chiefs, he became disconcerted, wondering, "Who will be able to conquer all of them?" the Torah writes/responds – *Eileh toldos Yaakov Yosef*, "The offspring of Yaakov is Yosef." This implies that the solution to the Eisav problem is Yosef, who is compared to a flame, while Yaakov is the fire. Eisav represents the straw. Hashem says to Yaakov, "A spark will go out from Yosef which will annihilate and burn all of them." Once Yosef was born, the solution to the Eisav problem had materialized. Yosef, the "spark", will make ashes of Eisav's "straw." Yaakov no longer has anything to fear from Eisav.

An inspiring parable, but it does not answer the question. The blacksmith wondered how the flax merchant laden with all his flax would make it through the small space. The answer is: "A spark from your bellows will make the flame extinct." But then there is no flax! The question was how the flax would fit through the space. The answer is: Get rid of the flax by burning it. Now there is no flax, but that was not the question.

The *Sadigerer Rebbe, zl* (*Abir Yaakov*) suggests a homiletic rendering of *Rashi's* parable. We wonder how is it possible to reach out to the simple, alienated and illiterate Jew, those who have no background, no education for the most part, those who have been raised in an environment totally alien to Torah, *mitzvos* and Judaism in general. The clever man said, "One spark – the spark within each and every Jew. It may be concealed, even buried beneath layers of materialism, agnostic beliefs, or simple illiteracy. How can you bring him close to Hashem and His Torah? The spark. Ignite the spark within him, and it flames up in a holy fire. The spark of the *Pintele Yid*, essential Jew, cannot and will never be extinguished.

Horav Aryeh Levin, zl, the *Tzaddik* of Yerushalayim, earned his nom de plume for being just that: a *tzaddik*. His righteousness in his service to Hashem notwithstanding, his love, care and acceptance of all Jews, regardless of background, religious persuasion, and attitude constituted pure righteousness. Stories about his exploits abound, giving us a mere glimpse into the personality of the progenitor of one of the most distinguished families in *Eretz Yisrael*. Suffice it to say that *gedolei hador*, giants of the generation, were his proud descendants. The concept of searching for, and believing that one will find that hidden spark in every Jew, aptly describes *Rav Aryeh*. The following is one of many vignettes that underscore this idea.

One *Erev Shabbos*, after *hadlokas ha'neiros*, candle lighting, *Rav Aryeh* walked to *shul* deep in

thought, his mind focused on the aura of *Shabbos* and its appropriate welcome. Accompanying him was his young son.

As they walked, a young man, clearly not observant, evidenced by the lit cigarette dangling from his lips, chanced upon them and asked for directions to a certain hotel. *Rav Aryeh* was now in a predicament. This man clearly was clueless about *Shabbos*. To repudiate him would only distance him more. On the other hand, how does someone of his stature walk through the streets of Yerushalayim with a man who was blatantly profaning the sanctity of the holy day? He decided to walk with the man and ignore his *chillul Shabbos*. The people who want to talk – let them. He would do what he thought was right. They would think what they want – regardless. This man was clearly a stranger in Yerushalayim (probably also a stranger to Torah and *mitzvos*), looking for a place that would provide him with food and lodging. How could he allow this young man to search all over for his basic necessities?

Rav Aryeh would walk him to a hotel and see that his needs are addressed. Imagine the scene: *Rav Aryeh* with his flowing white beard, bedecked in his *Shabbos* clothes, *shtreimel* on his head, walking alongside a young man, dressed in torn jeans and t-shirt – smoking a cigarette. *Rav Aryeh* held his hand as he walked with him. Every now and then, he would comment about the imminent approach of *Shabbos* (it was before sunset) and the prohibition of smoking on *Shabbos*. For all intents and purposes, he was talking to the wind. The fellow heard nothing [or so it seemed]. He was indifferent to the approach of *Shabbos* and everything it entailed.

The man felt awkward walking down the street with *Rav Aryeh*. He was well aware of the people staring at the contrast between the two men. He knew that some might consider it ridiculous, but he was unaware of *Rav Aryeh*'s reputation. He reached out to all Jews, regardless of their affiliation. Despite the stares, the man obstinately kept the burning cigarette in his hand. When they reached their destination, the man (in a departure from his intransigence) said to *Rav Aryeh*, "Rabbi, I am not religious, and I am quite obstinate to boot. In all my life, I have yielded to no one. Bending does not become me. Yet, somehow, you have broken my resistance." As he said this, he crushed the cigarette, "How can I remain disrespectful before you? You see, I have thrown my cigarette away – and I solemnly take an oath never again to smoke on *Shabbos*." *Rav Aryeh* found the hidden spark in a Jew with whom others probably would have given up. It is present; – we just have to look – and "dig."