

Yaakov was left alone, and a man wrestled with him. (32:25)

Yaakov *Avinu* sent everyone away, until he was left alone to wrestle with Eisav's angel. Concerning our Patriarch's isolated state, *Chazal (Midrash Rabbah)* cite a *pasuk* in *Yeshayah 2:17*, *V'nisgav Hashem levado*, "And Hashem alone will be exalted on that day." The *Navi* addresses the day of retribution, when the great nations of the world will be humbled in Hashem's Presence. He alone will be exalted, as all those who thought they were high and mighty will be compelled to confront the stark truth: they are not. We must endeavor to understand the parallel between the two *levados*: Yaakov isolated alone to battle with the forces of evil; Hashem Alone above all those who thought they were great.

Horav Eliezer HaLevi Turk, Shlita, quotes an insight he heard from his father. We often find ourselves in difficult circumstances from which, on the surface, it appears difficult to extricate ourselves. We feel alone, disconsolate, weak and helpless. It is specifically at such a time that a person is best suited to have Hashem reveal Himself to him. As a result of his seclusion, his disassociation from "life," he is able to move closer to Hashem. Especially when a person is in a *matzav*, circumstance, of *levado*, he can sense and experience *V'nisgav Hashem levado*.

Horav Mordechai Pogremonsky, zl, would explain that it was during the the terror and persecution, the constant fear of death that permeated the air during the Holocaust, when no one knew what the next day would bring, when the Jew was (supposedly) alone, that he experienced his greatest, most intimate closeness with Hashem. He saw, felt, sensed Hashem at every juncture. How?

He explained that one thought coursed through his mind. The Nazis had complete control to do as they pleased. If they wanted to shoot a Jew, no one would stop them. If they decided to beat a Jew mercilessly to death, no one would stand in the way. They had free reign over the hapless Jews. Nonetheless, they did not lay a finger on a single Jew unless it was an order. Why? Because Hashem did not permit them to do anything on their own. They were pawns in His hands. They acted as agents, carrying out His directive. Is there any greater indication of Hashem's Presence?

The *Klausenberger Rebbe, zl*, suffered beyond human description. He lost everything dear to him: his entire family – both immediate and extended. Yet, he survived, and rebuilt his life and the lives of thousands, established communities both here and in the Holy Land, founded Laniado Hospital, and innovated extraordinary initiatives to increase and elevate Torah study and erudition. He lived *V'nisgav Hashem levado* at every juncture.

During one of the most brutal days in the camps, a broken-hearted Jew who had also lost everything asked the *Rebbe*, "How can you recite the words, *Atah bechartanu mikol ha'amim*, 'You chose us from among all the nations'? This means we are most special, the favorite, the most dear and cherished. Look around at us; is this what it means to be chosen above all others?"

The *Rebbe's* response should serve as a source of hope and pride for each and every one of us. "On the contrary," the *Rebbe* declared. "it is in moments such as this that I see the vast chasm between us, *Am Yisrael*, and them, the nations of the world. Only cruel, inhuman, vicious people could act this way to other human beings. We could never act in such a barbaric manner – even against our most vile enemy. We are *Am Yisrael*, the Chosen People, whom Hashem selected from all of them 'them' to be His."

Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, was wont to say, "During the terrible war years when I ran to escape the murderers, many times, I was alone. It was at those moments that I thanked Hashem for my good fortune in being among the pursued and not one of the pursuers."

Even in the face of unspeakable brutality and oppression, the Jewish people have maintained their humanity and ethical/moral values, distinguishing themselves from their tormentors. Throughout the millennia, we have been hounded, persecuted and brutally slaughtered by those in power, often driven by animus, prejudice, envy and political expedience. In the last century, the Holocaust in particular is a haunting example of the depths of depravity to which humanity can descend. No nation suffered as much as we did. The systematic murder of six million Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators represents one of the darkest chapters of Jewish history. On a smaller scale, but with unmatched perverse hatred, the wholesale slaughter of 1200 martyrs and the kidnapping of innocent Jews by crazed terrorists bent on quenching their bloodthirsty urges showcases the horrific consequences of unbridled hatred and dehumanization.

In stark contrast, the Jewish response to such oppression has been one of moral resilience, as Jews turned to faith, community and spiritual guidance. This is how we maintain our dignity, humanity and deeply-rooted pride, even in the face and aftermath of the most inhumane circumstances.

In conclusion, the Jew who feels alone, who is up against a wall – is never alone. It is at this time that Hashem is with him, waiting to see how he will react. Will he sit with his head in his hands, with folded arms and feel sorry for himself, or will he pick himself up and work, fight, toil to extricate himself? When we think that we are *levado*, Hashem, Who is *levado*, joins us. To see it, we just have to open our eyes and look.