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פרשת וישלח

WITH

R' AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"l

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

The Everlasting Battle

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Part I. Yaakov's Wrestling Match

A Historic Incident

I would like to speak with you tonight about an incident that took place many years ago on the bank of a certain river on the border of Eretz Canaan. It's an important incident to discuss because it's something that reverberates until today. I'm talking about the wondrous encounter of Yaakov and the angel, that all-night wrestling match that we read about in this week's *sedrah*.

We're told in the Torah that when Yaakov Avinu set out from the house of Lavan to return to Eretz Yisroel, so at a certain point he crossed the River Yabok with his family. And then, after the crossing, he remembered that he had left behind certain things and so he went back to retrieve them. And standing alone on the other side – it was already night – he saw a big man approaching him in the darkness. And then

suddenly, without warning, this stranger grabbed hold of Yaakov and וַיִּאָבֵק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ, *he began to grapple with him*. And now Yaakov was left in the darkness wrestling with this stranger.

Raw Strength

Now, Yaakov Avinu was not a mean wrestler himself by any means. He was a very strong man. You remember that story when Yaakov originally came to Padan Aram many years before? He arrived at a public well that had a big stone covering it and he saw shepherds with their flocks milling around the well.

“What’s the matter?” Yaakov said to the shepherds. “Why aren’t you giving the sheep to drink?”

“Well, the stone is too heavy for us. We’re waiting for some more shepherds to gather and then we’ll be able to roll the stone off together.” So what did Yaakov do? He walked over to the well, grabbed the heavy stone and pulled it out like a cork from a bottle! A stone that required all the shepherds together just to roll it off, Yaakov was able to pick it up with ease.

You know why that story is told to us? So that we should know something about Yaakov’s muscles. That’s what Rashi says. לְהוֹדִיעַךְ שְׂכֹחוֹ – *To let us know how strong he was* (Bereishis 29:10); so we should know that Yaakov Avinu had big biceps, that he wasn’t a *nebechel*.

Hero Crime Fighters

And so you can be sure that if Yaakov had to grapple with a stranger – if he was walking in the subway station in New York City and a stranger would jump him, there would be a *levayah* right away. With one punch Yaakov would become a hero crime fighter and he’d deserve a decoration in City Hall. That’s what we need today, by the way. That’s why we say to Bernard Goetz who shot down those muggers with his gun, and to all those like him, we say, “*Yeyasher kochachem – lang leben zohl ehr!*”

But Yaakov didn’t need a gun, a weapon. His thick arms, his muscles, were more than enough. And so we would have thought that when this stranger jumped Yaakov on the bank of the Yabok, so Yaakov would be able to uphold his end of the battle. Not only uphold – it should have been over in no time.

A Night of Torture

Only that it didn't happen that way. When this opponent wrapped his arms around him, Yaakov right away felt that this man was an equal. Not only an equal; the man was steel! He had sinews like bands of steel! Yaakov tried all the tricks – he knew how to handle an opponent. He tried to squeeze him, to wrench a muscle, but you can't wrench steel. Yaakov was amazed that this man could endure so much.

And not only did Yaakov's opponent endure, but Yaakov was having a terrible time; he was hurting. And it didn't last for only half an hour. One hour passed and then another hour; it went on all night long! עַד עֵלוֹת הַשָּׁחַר – a terribly long and torturous night of wrestling.

Now we know that a man can take punishment only up to a certain limit; once that limit is breached, he yields. It's a principle: the human body can suffer, but only up to a point. It doesn't mean that you can't give your life for an ideal. People do give their lives for an ideal and they can even take torture. But if the torture is unlimited then it's extremely improbable that a man will persevere.

There were even great men who said, "If they would torture me slowly for a long time, I wouldn't be able to withstand the ordeal." We know that Chananya, Mishael and Azaryah allowed themselves to be thrown into a burning fire in order not to worship an idol! But the Gemara (Kesubos 33b) tells us that they were able to do that only because it was a momentary sacrifice. To jump into the fire and have it over with, yes. But had they been whipped without letup, constant whipping – one hundred lashes, two hundred lashes, three hundred lashes – it's too much and they would have yielded. These three heroes, our classic heroes of sacrifice for Hashem, אֱלֹמָי נְגִידָהּ, *if they had been whipped without stop, פָּלְחוּ לְצַלְמָא, they would have yielded!* Because there's a limit!

A Battle For The Ages

Now, what Yaakov went through that night was much worse than that. He wasn't just being whipped; he was being torn apart. And so, he could have said, "I give up." It's such a torture, that it's better to give up and die. How long could you suffer this way already? At some point in the middle of the night it would have been more luxurious to just lean back and get killed. And the stranger would have strangled him and Yaakov would have had the peace of death; the torture would be over with.

The truth is that in cases of excruciating torture, death is a pleasure. Victims sometimes give money, they offer money for a speedy death. To them it's a gift if they are able to die. And so when Yaakev was wrestling with his opponent and suffering tortures, agony worse than death, he could have chosen the blessed relief of giving in. He would yield and his suffering would end.

But then it occurred to him, "My family is on the other side waiting for me!" He thought about what would happen to them if he gave in. "How can I afford to give up? What's going to happen to my family if I won't be around? What's going to happen to that great dream of my grandfather Avrohom who hoped for a nation that would spread in the world the knowledge of the Creator and teach the truth to mankind? That great dream of a nation that would serve Hashem will go lost if I don't return to guide them."

And so, as his strength ebbed, Yaakov was thinking, "This is not an ordinary wrestling match. This is something much bigger than that. It's my future, the future of my children, the future of the Bnei Yisroel." And he decided that no matter what, he's going to continue to struggle. No matter what, he wouldn't give in. And so, instead of yielding to the desire for respite from pain, instead of giving up, Yaakov didn't falter for a moment. All night long he battled and struggled and suffered.

The stranger was squeezing every muscle he could in Yaakov's body. And it hurt; I cannot even describe to you how much it hurt. It was torture! But every time Yaakov felt the stranger's fingers closing around his arm, he summoned his willpower and he tightened those muscles to resist the pressure. All night long Yaakov summoned all of his strength; it was a battle for the ages.

The Longest Wrestling Match

Now, there's a big question on this story. Because did you ever wrestle? I did. When I was a boy I used to wrestle; I competed in a lot of matches and I considered myself a good wrestler. But how long did a match last already? Not too long. Either I got on top of him and with a half-Nelson I spread-eagled him and he couldn't move, or he got on top of me with a hook and it was all over.

Sometimes, if we were matched up especially well, so the match lasted a few minutes. But a half hour? Never. All night?! Impossible! A wrestling match would never last all night. So what was going on over here?

So you'll say it was a *malach*, an angel sent by Hakodosh Boruch Hu, and when He sends a *malach* to wrestle so He makes sure to send an especially strong one. But if so, it's even a bigger question. A *malach* sent by Hakodosh Boruch Hu, even though he may appear like a man, actually he is possessed of endless strength.

A man who picks a fight with an angel won't last too long. You'd have a better chance walking through Bed-Stuy at three in the morning with wads of cash in your hand! What human being is able to wrestle with an angel? You could be Yaakov Avinu, you could even be Shimshon Hagibor, it won't help. It's a *malach*! A *malach* could squash you in no time. Imagine a man fell into a big machine, a crusher. In one second he's reduced to dust! Yaakov should have been crushed into applesauce in the first minute.

And yet we read here that they wrestled עַד עֲלוֹת הַשָּׁחַר, until the morning arose, which means this was a contest that lasted all night. It was a bout that see-sawed back and forth until the morning. And that's a big question. How did Yaakov manage to keep up the fight against a *malach* for so long?

An Extraordinary Wrestling Match

And the answer is that this wrestling match between Yaakov and the *malach* was no ordinary struggle. You know why it is that when I wrestled, it never lasted too long? Because although we were always matched up to our opponents, at the end of the day it was a random event. Sometimes my friend was stronger than me, more agile. And sometimes I had the better move and was able to put him down. Whatever it was, it was random.

But this story of Yaakov and the angel was something different altogether. This was no random opponent – it was an opponent sent by Hakodosh Boruch Hu. Of course this *malach Hashem* had the power to crush him immediately, but Hakodosh Boruch Hu gave him instructions, “Always push him to his limit. Ramp up the pressure, struggle with him and push him to his breaking point. But never test him beyond his abilities.” That was an order to the *malach* from on high: “Squeeze Yaakov but don't squeeze him with more than he could endure.”

This was no ordinary wrestling match. It was a match that was being manipulated by Hakodosh Boruch Hu at every moment. Every move that Yaakov made, so Hashem commanded the *malach* to respond, to maintain the equilibrium. And upon the command of Hashem the

malach would go on the attack, bitter attacks that Yaakov had to fend off with all of his strength. It was an especial ordeal, a test of being pushed to the limit.

And for Yaakov it was excruciating, because he was fighting a being that knew all of his weaknesses and all of his strengths, a being that could supernaturally push Yaakov to the extremes of his endurance without making it impossible. And this measured tit for tat, this see-saw of a wrestling match went on all night.

Part II. Our Wrestling Match

Our Battle

Now, this whole incident isn't merely a story; it's a prophecy. That's an important principle: **מַעֲשֵׂה אַבוֹת סִימָן לְבָנִים** – *the events in the lives of Avrohom, Yitzchok and Yaakov are all prophecies for the future*. The Avos were *nevi'im* of the highest order, second only to Moshe Rabbeinu, and therefore what transpired that night was actually a prophetic event.

What is it telling us? What's the prophecy teaching us? We have to know that this is not Yaakov; it's our history, it's us. Yaakov's all-night wrestling match with the *malach* was the personification of the battle that every Jew would fight against the *yetzer hora* all his life in the darkness of *Olam Hazeh*.

It's a very long fight; it might even seem to you impossible to hold out any longer. How could man be capable of surviving the battle? Not only surviving but *defeating* the *yetzer hora*? After all, what is the *yetzer hora* if not a *malach Hashem*? It's steel, invincible; it's impossible, you'll say. No, it's not so because every detail of the battle, every move of this *malach Hashem* is being manipulated, arranged, by Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

A Fair Fight

And that brings us to the famous principle that applies to all of us no less than it did to Yaakov: **שָׂאִין הַקְּרוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בָּא בְּטוֹרְוֹנָא עִם בְּרִיּוֹתָיו** – *Hakodosh Boruch Hu doesn't come with tyranny, with unjust force against his creatures* (Avodah Zarah 3a). It's an ironclad rule that Hashem doesn't subject them to tests that are beyond their ability; He always leaves an opportunity for you to conquer.

And therefore nobody has an excuse that this ordeal that's being presented to him is too big for him. It's not, because it was measured according to your strength – with precision.

That's the famous principle that the Gemara says in Mesichta Sukkah (52a): **כָּל הַגְּדוֹל מִחֲבֵרוֹ יֵצְרוּ גְדוֹל מִמֶּנּוּ** – *The bigger a man is, the bigger is the yetzer hora that's sent against him.* Why is that? The answer is that great men are tested with great ordeals. Because as great as you become, as much as you overcome the yetzer, that's when Hashem ramps up the pressure. A new test will come, a different struggle, a bigger yetzer. And so, you'll be an old sage, with a long white flowing beard, with great-grandchildren all around you, and many disciples sitting at your feet, and you're teaching the Torah to the world. And you must know that the tests will continue to come until the last minute of your life.

The Struggle of Life

We are constantly being tested and the tests increase in quality as we increase in quality. As we grow and make more and more progress in life, the things that once seemed to us as difficult are now no longer a test. But different tests come at you, even bigger and stronger than before.

That's because of the great principle that our lives are built with the purpose of testing us, each one of us according to his abilities. Being tested is the purpose of living. Don't think that you're here to raise a family, to make a living, or even to learn Torah. Of course you have to do all those things, but those are all merely details of the test that this world is. What's your goal in life? To eat and to sleep?! No, your goal is to be tested. That's your achievement and good fortune in this world, to make battle.

The Mesillas Yesharim says, **וְנִמְצָא** – *we have to know that right this minute we are found to be*, **בְּתוֹךְ הַמְלַחְמָה הַחֹזְקָה** – *in the middle of a big battle.* Even though you are sitting in your home and it is quiet; you don't hear anybody knocking on the door. And inside the house there is no dissension, nothing but peace, you have to know that you are in the midst of a big battle.

Attaining Peace

It is important for us to realize there is no quiet in this world, there is no *shalom* in this world; when you pass out of the world, that's when

you can hope for *shalom*. That is why we say to a man who leaves this world, we wish him that “You should go *b’shalom*.” “*B’shalom*” means you go *into* the peace because there is peace after death. There’s no more war there; the great battle is over. But a man who is not leaving this world, if we’re only saying farewell to him because he’s going on a journey – let’s say your neighbor is traveling to Eretz Yisroel so you don’t say *lech b’shalom*, you say to him “*Lech l’shalom*.” Because in this life all you can say is *lech l’shalom* – go *towards* the peace but not in peace, there is no peace because we are in a מִלְחָמָה הַחֲזָקָה, a *difficult war*.

And so the real *shalom* will come only after we pass out of this world. Unfortunately! It’s an unfortunate day when you leave this world *b’shalom* because the battle is our good fortune; we are happy to have such a battle. It’s only the man who doesn’t realize this, he’s the one who fails the tests. He doesn’t make any progress. He lives like a log. One day flows into another; the years pass by and he’s just standing in his store selling merchandise, putting money in the bank. He goes to *shul*. He comes back. He eats supper every night. He’ll just live his life. All his days become one great tragedy.

It’s the Jew who understands that he is going through tests, that’s the man who is living for a purpose. And he’s the happy one! As long as we are here, subjected to this constant test we’re happy. And the more difficult the test is, the happier we should be. We should be happy warriors because it is going to pay for us. The bigger the battle, the greater is the reward of a victory.

True Success

So let’s say you have a difficult wife who doesn’t let you keep *yiddishkeit* and despite everything you carry the day; you live according to the *derech haTorah*. Or let’s say you are a boy who is growing up in a western town where there aren’t any *shomrei Shabbos* and you are able to fight the environment and you stick to *yiddishkeit*, you are the great victor more than somebody in Boro Park or in Meah Shearim! Your reward is much greater than that of those who live in the security of a very *frum* Torah environment. Because in Meah Shearim you’d have a difficult time trying to do the opposite of *yiddishkeit*. Try in those places to rebel against *yiddishkeit*; there you have to be a hero – the wrong kind of hero.

And so, wherever you are in this world, whatever *yetzer* you’re contending with, that’s your success; that’s your greatness. And it’s the

one who battles forward, the one who struggles and battles all night long, he's the one who has succeeded most in this world.

Dessert Beans

Now, the Gemara in Masichta Beitzah (25b) expresses a criticism of people who became discouraged in this battle. Hashem is talking and He says like this: **בְּתַרְמוֹס הָיָה לֹא עָשׂוּ אוֹנֵי בְּנֵי** – *My children didn't behave with Me the way they behave with the turmus bean.*

There is a certain bean, a *turmus* bean, which is extremely bitter and so when people want to prepare it for food they have to cook it in water to boil out some of that bitterness. But when you pour out that first batch of water the *turmus* bean is still bitter so you have to cook it again a second time and again you have to pour out the water. And again and then again.

Now by the fourth or fifth time you are sick and tired of it. "I have to fight with this bitter bean again?! It's no use. I give up!"

No; anybody who knows anything about the *turmus* bean knows that you don't give up, you keep cooking and re-cooking. And by the seventh time it becomes a delicacy; and not just any delicacy – it's such a delicacy that **אוֹכְלֵי אוֹתוֹ בְּקִנְיַת סְעוּדָה** – *people eat it as a sweet compote for dessert.* It is so delicious that it's considered an expensive dessert.

Fight Like A Bean

Now, the Gemara says that this bean will be used against us on the Yom Hadin. One day, Hakodosh Boruch Hu will say to you, "Why didn't you change your ways? Why didn't you pick yourself by the bootstraps and fight the *yetzer hora*?"

So you'll tell Him, "Oh Ribono Shel Olam, don't punish me; I tried. I really tried."

But He'll say, "Oh no! You didn't try enough!"

"What do you mean I didn't try?! I fought the *yetzer hora* but it was a very bitter fight."

"Did you try as much as the *turmus* bean tried? Did you try once, and again and again and again? The *turmus* bean also seems like it'll never become sweet! And then at the end, after the seventh time it becomes a delicacy."

When Hakodosh Boruch Hu created the *turmus* bean He made it not only for the purpose that we should enjoy it as a desert for the meal.

More important than that, we are supposed to enjoy it by learning this lesson from the bean. Even though at the beginning it looked like a hopeless case, but if you put in enough effort and you persevere and don't give up, it becomes one of the most delicious things.

So Hakodosh Boruch Hu says, "Why didn't you behave to Me like you behaved with the *turmus* bean? Why do you give up? So what if My *malach*, the *yetzer hora*, is battling you? So what if it's not easy? It wasn't easy for Yaakov either. But those difficulties are your greatest opportunity! And if you keep battling, I guarantee you, you'll become delicious."

Keep Resisting

And therefore, if a man makes this his ideal, that he is going to follow the *mashal* of the *turmus*, he'll finally be ready for the dessert of the next world. At first you are bitter, you are not sweet, your character is not sweet. You're selfish – who isn't? You're mean – everybody to some extent is. You're rebellious – a lot of people are naturally rebellious. And of course you are lazy too. So get busy cooking out all of that bitterness.

Good *middos* you have to know come only by cooking; you have to cook that bean, you have to keep on cooking it and don't get discouraged. And keep pouring out the bitter waters; it means pour out your bad *middos*, regret your mistakes. There's no harm if you shed a couple of tears for youthful errors – even your youthful errors of your forties and fifties and sixties. As much as possible, you pour out the old bitter waters and you become a little bit sweeter.

That's what the Gemara is telling you: keep on pouring out the water from the *turmus* pot. Learn from this little bean a big lesson and say, "I am a *turmus* and I will continue to boil myself in Torah, in *yiras shomayim*, in *mussar*, in my efforts to improve. Then I will pour it out – it means, if I didn't succeed perfectly I will try all over again. Just like Yaakov battled without let up – whenever he felt those claws ripping him and beginning to close in on his muscles, so Yaakov strengthened himself. He made himself tense to resist, to withstand the pressure of the *malach*, that's what I'm going to do as well."

Part III. Keep Wrestling

The Bump

Now, there's an important part of this story, this wrestling match between Yaakov and the angel, that we left out. And that is the *gid hanasheh*. The Torah makes a point of letting us know that before Yaakov emerged victorious there was one small bump on the road to victory.

First the *malach* grabbed him by the neck, but Yaakov didn't budge. He grabbed him by the ears, and Yaakov resisted with all his strength. He grabbed him by his hair, whatever it was, but Yaakov wouldn't falter. Finally he grabbed him by the thigh; the thigh is a big limb and the *malach* got a good hold on it. And Yaakov weakened for a second. And in that second the *malach* did him dirty and gave him a twist; he took hold of Yaakov with his steel claws, gave a strong pull, and a sinew was wrenched loose. That's the story, the way it's told in the Chumash.

Now, there's a question on this. Because if we are going to learn Chumash like a story, so stories always have a lot of unimportant things; you want to tell me about a pulled muscle, so tell me. But now we're learning the Toras Hashem, the thoughts of Hashem. And so it's a question: what's so important about this detail that Yaakov's sinew was dislocated?

The Victorious Dark Horse

And it's an especially good question because actually Yaakov is the one who won the match. Suppose somebody won a championship wrestling match and came out of it with one sinew wrenched. Would that detail be reported in the newspapers? Of course not. Especially if it's some little fellow, a dark horse who wasn't known beforehand to be a good wrestler, and he came along and challenged the champion to a wrestling match. And now they're wrestling all night. Imagine such a thing – they're going at it and the champion just can't overcome this challenger; he can't do a thing. Finally all the spectators go home – after all, they have to get up for work in the morning – and the whole arena is already dark. But they keep on wrestling.

The janitor comes in early in the morning to clean up and they're still wrestling! And when the champion sees now that morning is coming – the janitor is already putting on the lights – and he sees that

he's losing out, so in frustration he gives a wrench, a last minute jerk just to cause some damage before he gives up the fight. So he gave a wrench, who cares?! The champion threw in the white towel!

The janitor would run right away to the Associated Press, the wire services, and report to them, "The champion gave up; he lost. I saw it with my own eyes; he was crying for mercy." That would be the biggest news of the day! Who cares that he gave the victor a wrench in his thigh?! Why mention that?

Commemorating Forever

And not only mention it, but to make it such an important event that our forefathers began immediately to commemorate it by not eating the *gid hanasheh*: **עַל בֶּן לֹא יֵאָכְלוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת גִּיד הַנֶּשֶׁה** – "Therefore the children of Yisroel don't eat the sinew in the leg of the animal" (Vayishlach 32:33). That's what the Torah tells us. It's our ancient tradition; from then on the Jewish people wouldn't eat the *gid hanasheh*.

That's why you won't find kosher porterhouse steaks. Those round steaks, the porterhouse steaks from the hindquarters, they go to the gentile market. Today, we don't even eat from the hindquarters at all. It costs a lot of money to hire a person who will be *minakeir*, carve out the sinew, so we just sell the hindquarters to gentiles – we Jews have to be satisfied with just the front part; the part that's less expensive to prepare for eating.

In Europe, in small towns where meat was very expensive and nothing was put to waste, the Jews ate the hindquarters. They had what they called a *treiberer*, a person who was an expert in excising the forbidden parts. But today it doesn't pay for us; there's a big gentile meat industry, a big market where we can sell it to the public, so every kosher slaughterhouse sells the hindquarters to the gentiles.

The Inevitable Fall

The question is, what's the big tumult already? Was it such a significant event when he wrenched his thigh loose that we have to commemorate it by not eating it? It's not important.

The answer is that it's important for us to know that we *will* falter in this world. **אֵין צְדִיק בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה טוֹב וְלֹא יִחַטָּא**. In this life-long wrestling match against the *yetzer hora*, sometimes he might make a wrench, a dent. But Yaakov pushed ahead anyhow. He didn't give up. "So he pulled my sinew; so what? I'm not going to let that stop me. I still

have many battles to fight, a war to win, and so I'm going to get up and keep fighting."

And that's what happened. Immediately, Yaakov regained his equilibrium and self-control and he stiffened. He fought back and extricated himself from the tight grip of the *malach*, and he continued wrestling for the rest of the night, resisting every move the *malach* made.

And it's such an important lesson that the Bnei Yisroel always commemorated that, not to eat the sinew. They ate everything else from the animal, because Yaakov strengthened himself and everything else Yaakov resisted. But not the *gid hanasheh*; that sinew is a sign that you have to keep getting up even after you fall down.

The Stubborn Tzaddik

There's a certain Rebbe, the Breslover. So, in one of his *seforim* he writes as follows. He himself writes this – about himself. He says, "When I was younger, I tried to serve Hashem. I tried and fell, and sometimes I fell down a hundred times. And each time, I got up again and I tried again." That was his stubbornness. He got up and he fell down again. He didn't succeed but he got up again. A hundred times he was *nichshal*. "But I got up," he says. "And in the end, I remained standing!"

Never give up! **שִׁבַע יפול צדיק וְקָם** – *A tzaddik might fall seven times.* It doesn't mean you *have* to fall; it could be you won't fall; you'll almost fall. But whatever it is, even if you do fall *chalilah* you keep on getting up each time. And at the end it will be **קָם**. *At the end you will remain standing.*

That's the lesson. It's a *nisayon*, a test, and you have the *bechirah* to pass that *nisayon*. You keep on trying and the end is that you will surely succeed. There's no such thing as not succeeding. You keep on trying and **וְהָבֵא לְטִהָרָה מְסַעֲיִין לוֹ**. If you are actually coming to succeed, if you really want to succeed – that's what **וְהָבֵא לְטִהָרָה** means – then you will remain standing in the end. The first times you fall, the first ninety-nine times you fall, are just a test to see if you are a weakling. That's what they're there for! To see if you're a weakling or if you're serious about it. And if you overcome the first ninety-nine times, then you're on the way. Then you're on the road to greatness.

The Holy Road

And actually it's not the road to greatness, it's the road of greatness. The road itself is the most important achievement. It's the struggles, the falling down and getting up again to persevere; it's when the *gid hanasheh* is pulled and you regain your equilibrium like Yaakov did, that's what makes you perfect in the Eyes of Hashem.

In Mishlei it says like this, וְאֶרֶח צְדִיקִים כְּאֹר נֶגְהָ, - *The path of tzaddikim is like a path that is being illuminated.* There is a path to greatness but right now the path is somewhat dark and it is not easy to see where you are walking. But *tzaddikim* stick to the path and הוֹלֵךְ וְאֹר עַד נִבְּחַן הַיּוֹם, *it continues to become more and more light until the day is established.*

Imagine somebody sets out early in the morning, before daybreak, and it's still dark. But he must reach his destination, he must! So he thinks, "I can't see my way in the street, but I will try anyhow." There are potholes and booby traps, wild animals and obstructions. But he knows that this is the only way forward and so he continues. Little by little it becomes more and more light and after a while the sun comes out.

That is a *mashal* of a man's life. תְּשֻׁת חֲשֵׁךְ וַיְהִי לַיְלָה - זֶה הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה. הַרוֹמָה לַלַּיְלָה. *This world is compared to the darkness of nighttime, וְאֶרֶח, וְצְדִיקִים, and the way of those who want to be righteous is to keep going.* You make up your mind that no matter what, this is going to be your path. "I am going to travel toward Hashem. I am going to travel towards Torah. I am going to travel towards true Judaism. I am going to travel towards the way that Jews always lived. I am going to travel towards better character and perfection in *mitzvos* and *davening* and Torah. That's my ideal."

The Sun Will Rise

It is not always easy, but it is כְּאֹר נֶגְהָ, the light is going to increase. The older you get, the more battles you'll win. And when the new battles come, you'll face them too and you'll keep on battling and winning. And finally the sun will rise.

Now don't think the sunrise is in this world; in this world there will never be sun because it will always be dark to some extent. No matter how old and how wise you are, the *yetzer hora* is a super salesman and he will think up new ways, new booby-traps, to trap you to mislead you even in your old age. But there are many things that he already gave up

on you because he knows you learned too much to be bamboozled any more by them. But it will still be a struggle all the way till the end.

Yaakov struggled all night. He was already at his end and he no longer had an ounce of energy left. But he remained determined and just at that moment when he thought he would drop dead, the daylight began to come over the horizon and the *malach* let go of him.

Not only he let go but at the end, this *malach* gave Yaakov Avinu a blessing: "From now on your name will not be Yaakov, but Yisroel." Yisroel means, "You shall conquer over all. You shall win out." **בְּי שָׂרִיתָ**, *You will win out over everyone*. Yaakov had passed the test, and he passed it gloriously and that's when he gained the name Yisroel, "the one who conquers."

And that story, that *nevuah*, is being fulfilled every day in our lives. The children of Yisroel continue to reenact in their own lives the long and difficult struggle of our forefather, as we fight against the *yetzer hora*, each of us fighting our personal battles that Hakodosh Boruch Hu is arranging according to our strengths and weaknesses. And every battle, every struggle, is a preparation for when the sun will finally rise, the day when we will enter into the palace of the World to Come where all of our efforts and struggles will be requited forever and ever.

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