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# פרשת ויחי

WITH

# R' AVIGDOR MILLER ZT"l

BASED ON HIS BOOKS, TAPES & WRITINGS OF TALMIDIM

## Strength of Character

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## Part I. Strong People

### A Visceral Reaction

Everyone knows that a snake is one of the most abhorred creatures; some people even feel like vomiting when they see a serpent. And the wolf and the lion are of course dangerous; they kill and eat other animals and even human beings sometimes. They certainly aren't beloved creatures.

And yet, when we read about how Yaakov Avinu sat up in his deathbed in order to bless his sons and to guide them for the last time we note that it is to these animals that he compares the *shevatim*.

He said גּוֹר אֲרִיָּה יְהוּדָה – Yehudah is a young lion (Bereishis 49:9). Now a lion is certainly not kind-hearted; it's not humble either. And yet, Yaakov Avinu preferred to see Yehuda as a lion. *Gur aryeh*, he should be like a lion.

## A Shidduch Ruiner

Then there's Binyomin, the beloved *shevet* of Binyomin. What did Yaakov wish upon the *shevet* of Binyomin? בְּנִימִין זֶאֵב – *Binyomin should be a wolf* (*ibid.* 27). A wolf is not a complimentary title, you know. If you inquire about a *shidduch* for your daughter, and you're told that the boy is like a wolf, it means the *shidduch* is off before it even starts. A *tzaddik* should be like a wolf? We would never say such a thing.

But Yaakov *did* say that. He looked at Binyomin like a wolf. And not only a wolf but זֶאֵב יִטְרֵף – *a hungry wolf that tears at its prey* (*ibid.*). Have you ever seen a wolf dismember its prey? It's not done with tenderness and love.

And Don is a שָׁפִיפֵן עָלֵי אֶרֶח; he's compared to a poisonous serpent lying on the road (*ibid.* 17). A snake?! If a man would describe his neighbor to you and say, "You know my neighbor Don? He's a poisonous serpent!" so you'd get a certain picture of him in your head. A snake you could say on a traitor, on maybe a sinister fellow with hateful attributes.

## The Menagerie

And yet here we find the *tzaddikim* being praised with these models. Take a look there, inside the Chumash. They're compared to wild, fierce animals. Yaakov never compares them to lambs, to sheep. Maybe a donkey of burden, yes; a swift deer, also. But not sheep.

Of course, we know that the Am Yisroel is compared to *tzon*, to sheep. וְאַתָּן צֹאנִי צֹאן מִרְעִיתִי – *You are My flock* (Yechezkel 34:31). Oh yes, all the good qualities of a sheep we have to have – quiet, humble, submissive. Absolutely, the *Klal Yisroel* has all the good *middos*. But that's not enough; that's not the only thing Yaakov Avinu was looking for in the *shevatim*. He wanted snakes and lions and wolves.

The truth is that even these wild animals, as much as we might be impressed by their strength and fierceness and courage, when they see a danger they prefer to hide. A lion will move over to the side; he won't show himself. Snakes don't want people to be in their path. They avoid people; they slither away. And the wolf certainly hides from people.

Only when you come too close to them, then their nature asserts itself. If you step on a snake, that is something else. If you'll try to pet a lion or tickle a wolf, he'll defend himself. You'll get bitten. But otherwise, even these powerful animals use their power selectively, judiciously. It means that they don't become dangerous for nothing. It's not rash and impetuous strength – by instinct these animals are discriminatingly dangerous.

## Energetic Children

And so when we study these animals and we ask ourselves, what is the common denominator, the *tzad hashaveh sh'bahen*, it's not so simple as saying שָׂכַן דְרָבָן לְהַזִּיק, that they are injurious. It wouldn't be wrong but it's superficial still; the question is *why* are they dangerous? What is it that makes them *darkan l'hazik*?

And the answer is because they have in them the quality of vigor, the *middah* of energy. They have within them a certain ability to rise to the occasion with courage. For things that are necessary, they have the energy to act.

And that quality of energy and verve is what Yaakov Avinu wanted to see in the future of his children, in the future of the nation. He understood that for the Bnei Yisroel to succeed, to remain true to its principles, they would have to have within them a certain ability to rise to the occasion and personify the qualities that he saw in these creatures. They would need the vibrance and vigor and power of action. Yaakov wanted a nation that would be strong and not weak. He wanted his descendants to be like lions; to be fearless when the moment calls for fearlessness.

### Be a King!

The whole world is standing against you? No matter! Rise up like a lion! The lion is the king of the jungle. The Am Yisroel won't cower in submission to the newfangled ideas and fads and attitudes of the world.

The nations of the world want to forbid you from keeping the Torah? So Yaakov wants his descendants to be like wolves, hungry wolves that tear at their prey. Yes, *ovdei Hashem* sometimes have to show anger and viciousness, like wolves. When the time comes to tear their prey, they do it. וּבְעֵרַת הָרָע מִקִּרְבְּךָ - *And you should destroy the wicked from your midst* (Devarim 21:21). A servant of Hashem is not a weakling, a pushover; he's a fighter.

Sometimes a Jew has to be a שָׂפִיפֹן עָלֵי אֲרָח - *a sneaky snake on the path*. It's infrequent; it's usually not so, but a *frum* Jew should have within himself, a certain *eress*, a poison, that he can use when it's called for. It means a poison of courage, a poison of self-esteem and fearlessness. A poison of boldness to stand up for what's right.

### The Wolf in Telz

I'll tell you a little story. Once there was the Telzer Rov, Rav Yosef Leib *zichrono l'vrachah*. Rav Yosef Leib was a kind-hearted *tzaddik*; he would



with the Satan. It's because this person is a weakling. He doesn't understand what Hashem wants in this world.

### **We Should be Lions**

But Yaakov Avinu understood. He knew that Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants lions! He wants you to be active, strong, confident, energetic, resolute and even poisonous. A servant of Hashem is a *zariz*, a mover, a doer. It doesn't say *הָיִי גִבּוֹר כְּעֵזָה*, be strong like a lamb, or *כְּעֵגֶל*, be like a calf – no, it doesn't say that. *הָיִי גִבּוֹר כְּאַרְיֵי לְעִשׂוֹת רְצוֹן אֲבִיךָ שְׂבִשְׂמִים* – 'Be strong like a lion,' it says, 'to fulfill the will of Hashem.'

And that's what Yaakov was telling his children, that this is what Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants from the Bnei Yisroel; that they should be strong, courageous and energetic in the service of Hashem.

And so when the gays come from all over America, a few hundred thousand *mushchasim*, to march together, we are not impressed at all. What does Hakadosh Baruch Hu want from us? That we should just sit back and observe?! That we should slink away like little quiet sheep?!

No! He wants us to be lions. At least among ourselves we have to tell the truth. "The gays?! *Zullen zei gayn!*" They are all going into the *adamah* soon! Most of them in a few years will be in the grave.

When we say three times a day, *וְכָל הַרְשָׁעָה בְּרִגַע*, *וְלִמְלֹשִׁינִים אֵל תְּהִי תִקְוָה וְכָל הַרְשָׁעָה בְּרִגַע* *וְלִמְלֹשִׁינִים אֵל תְּהִי תִקְוָה וְכָל הַרְשָׁעָה בְּרִגַע* say it *בְּתוֹרַת הַיָּם* say it *b'kavanah!* Put poison into it! Be like Don, the *אֲרַח* *וְשִׁפְפוּ עָלָי אֲרַח*. Say it with *eress*, with poison. That's what Hashem wants. Among ourselves, among our families, our *kehillos* – and most importantly among yourself – we are resolute!

### **Whom He Chooses**

When Hakadosh Baruch Hu looks over the sea of mankind and says "Who is the one who will serve Me best? Who is the one who will find the most favor in My eyes?" so it's the energetic ones that find most favor in His eyes.

Now that's not what we might have thought. We would have pointed at that quiet *tzaddik* in the corner, "Maybe that man, the nice quiet fellow. He's mild and easygoing; people don't suffer much from him. That's Hashem's man!"

But Hashem passes him over. "No, that's not the man I'm looking for! I have a place for him in the World to Come, certainly. I will reward him for being *noach labriyos*, for getting along with everybody, of course. A kind-hearted man, a fine, quiet fellow. That's wonderful. But he won't become great however. He's not the most successful one. I'm looking for people

who will do something in this world, who will be energetic to accomplish! People who will stand strong for My principles, My ideals." That's what He wants from us. Just to be a wishy-washy, a milquetoast, that's nothing. He wants lions and serpents and wolves. He wants strength.

## Part II. Strong Character

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### **The Source of Strength**

Now, if 'strength' is so important for a servant of Hashem it pays to investigate the source of this strength; it pays to know more about what it means.

When we look in the language of Tanach we see that many times a man is called a *ben chayil*, 'a man of strength'. Now as far as a male is concerned we think we understand because in general all the men were eligible for military service. Men fought in battle; they were the warriors. So we could say it's apt to describe a man as a *ben chayil*, a man of strength. *Chayil* to us means an army, so a *ben chayil* is a man who is fit for military service.

But that's an error. We can see immediately that this is not the real meaning because when Shlomo Hamelech wants to describe a virtuous woman he uses the expression **אִשָּׁת חַיִּיל**, a *woman of chayil*. He describes her other good qualities as well but the title that Mishlei gives her is *eishes chayil*, a woman of strength.

### **Women of War**

Now, we know that women didn't go to war. We don't find in the Tanach that women were mobilized. This abomination was left to the Israeli government to introduce to the world; *giyus banos* is one of the worst inventions in the history of the world. It's for the purpose of creating an army of harlots and demoralizing the Jewish people in one of the most wicked ways that ever happened.

We don't realize what's taking place and people are keeping quiet for too long. The truth is we should organize an army to go to war against Israel, just to put an end to that abomination. I mean it seriously. Such a destruction of the Jewish people never was done before. To mobilize women en masse into an army?! They say it themselves; they state openly that they want girls in the army because they want to create a cultural rebuilding of the Jewish people. Which means, they want to teach the girls immorality; and the army is one of the best means for doing it.

But before this, there never was such a concept – a woman in the army?! And yet here we see in Mishlei that Shlomo is praising a woman with the appellation of אִשֶּׁת הַיָּל (ayset hayil), a woman of strength. So we understand that he's not talking about military service. And we can surmise that he's not praising this woman for her muscles, that she can heft a big basket of laundry up the stairs. That's not what he's talking about at all.

### **Strength of Character**

So you'll say maybe it means 'a woman of character,' maybe that's the *pshat* in *chayil* – character and virtue. But actually *chayil* does *not* mean character; *chayil* means strength. We can prove that easily from many places in *Tanach* and in the words of Chazal. *Chayil* means strength – power and brute force. And so we have to understand then: We're praising this *eishes chayil* as a woman of virtue, of character, so why do we mention *chayil* which really means strength?

And that is the answer! It means *strength of character*. Because you can't have virtue and character without strength. Anybody who wants to be anything in this world has to have a certain courage of heart, an energy to overcome obstacles. A person of weakness of mind and listlessness of soul won't accomplish much in this world. And so the אִשֶּׁת הַיָּל is not a woman of war; she's a person of energy and initiative and diligence. She's the real *gibor*.

### **Weak Women**

Here is a place, let's say a waiting room, and everybody is dressed in denim. Because the high school bums wear blue overalls, so the adults also, they have no backbone and they yield to the environment. An elderly man is sitting in the waiting room wearing blue denim! The women are undressed in blue denim too. Ragged, artificial patches, artificial splotches on it as if somebody poured ink on it or something.

But the gentiles, we don't expect much better; they're weak. But even Orthodox women are lacking a backbone. Because when she sits down she has to tug at her skirt so that it should cover her knees. A dress that you'll have to pull down otherwise it'll uncover your knees?! And sometimes even, I don't want to say who – *rebbetzins* sit like that. It's a weakness of character, that's all.

### **Bold Women**

But here is one woman. It's terribly hot but she has sleeves down to her knuckles. She has a long dress too and high socks. Even her hair is covered. That woman is the *eishes chayil*! That's the strength that Hashem

cares about. She's a lion, standing tall and proud in the jungle of naked pygmies!

And outside on the sidewalk, you see a *frum* Jew with a beard and *peyos* and a black hat; he's walking in the street and on all sides are *chofshim*, people without anything on their heads – nothing on top of their heads and nothing inside their heads either. He looks different than everyone else. Sometimes people will make comments; they'll make fun of him.

### **A Gibor Inside**

What does strength of character mean? What does it mean to be a *gibor k'ari*? That he's going to eat them up? No, that's nothing. He's a *gibor* inside! When he's walking among them he knows that he's walking in the country among trees. There is grass all around him. Not people; it's grass. **כָּל הַבְּשָׂר הִצִּיר** – All the people are like grass all around me; not people (Yeshayah 40:6). It means 'I'm not impressed by their numbers and their ideals and attitudes and fads. Not in the least. They're nothing to me.'

Of course, if they bump into him he acts nice and says "I'm sorry." You have to be a polite man. You smile and apologize. You get along with everyone. But inside you're bold because you need *gevurah*, you need strength of a lion and a wolf and a snake. It doesn't mean you bite anyone or tear anyone to pieces. But in your mind you have to be full of energy, full of strength; in your mind you are tearing apart all of the outside ideals.

An *eishes chayil* and an *ish chayil* don't yield to the environment. To give in just because all around you are people who don't think? Just because you're surrounded by people – even *frum* Jews I'm sorry to say – who have strayed after *taavos* and foolish attitudes and pop-culture, that means you'll do the same?

Never! A Jew has to be strong-minded to fight back against the *yetzer* of taking the path of least resistance, the path of yielding to the environment.

### **A Better Fight**

Now the truth is that this energy and strength of character that we're talking about – the courage of the lion and the *eress* of the snake and the strength of the wolf – it doesn't have to be used only against the wicked. It's not intended only for your attitude toward the outside world.

Because what's the purpose of this vigor that Hashem wants from us? It's to uphold the *dvar Hashem*. And therefore it doesn't have to be used only against others, because often the wickedness is right here (*the Rav pointed at himself*). More than you have to worry about being a fighter against all the evil people in the world, more than you need to be a lion and

a wolf when it comes to the Reformers and the Zionists and the gays, you have to be a lion and a wolf against yourself.

### **The Strength to Not Fight**

You know, a young lady called me up on the phone a few weeks ago, and she was asking me if it's better that we should fight against the liberals and our other enemies or maybe we should we just ignore them.

Now, whether you should fight against anybody or just ignore them, I couldn't really tell her on *regel achas*; it depends on the circumstances. It's too general of a question. But one thing I can tell you, young lady – and that means all of you young ladies – you'd better learn *not* to fight with your husband.

That's what you need strength for! To know when *not* to fight! That's how to be a lion! While you worry about fighting against other people, against evil men, there's one evil man that you have to get along with! Because you're going to be married one day. And if you're going to be successful it means being a lion, a *gibor*, to overcome your natural inclinations.

### **A New Girls Seminary**

And if you think that what I'm saying is superfluous – let me tell you, that's the first thing you have to learn! If it was up to me, I would institute in all the girls' schools – in all the seminaries – courses for success in marriage. Because right now there aren't any good courses.

You know, I used to speak to the Bais Yaakov girls frequently and when I brought up this topic of studying for success in marriage they thought of it as a waste of time. They wanted to hear – they were good girls and they were interested in hearing about the *mefarshim*, what the Malbim says and what the Kli Yakar says.

Now that's wonderful; *mefarshim* are wonderful. But the *peirush* that is most necessary is, 'What does Hakadosh Baruch Hu say on the subject of living with another person in the same house?' Because you aren't trained for it.

### **A New Training**

All your life, up to the age of eighteen or whatever it is, you were trained by your parents that whatever you said, they said "Yes, yes." If you stamped your foot they became frightened. And if they didn't do what you wanted, you ran to your room and slammed the door. And your mother brought supper to you on her hands and knees and you still said "No, no.

Go away.” And then when your mother went to sleep you would sneak out of your room and eat up the whole plate of food.

And now you marry a young man who did the same thing in his house. Now, two such people, two people who never had the strength to say no to themselves, have to learn to live together!

### **Fight With Yourself**

And that’s why I say when it comes to the question of against whom to be a lion and a wolf and a serpent, the first answer is against *yourself*. Be energetic and strong and courageous against yourself. Most of your energy should be focused on overcoming the bad *middos*, the wrong reactions in yourself.

So let’s say you have an urge to fight with your neighbor or your boss or your brother; so be a lion and fight *against yourself*. Yes you’re a lion because you’re summoning the courage to overcome your inclinations. If you answer back when he says something mean to you, you’re not being a lion; you’re a weakling.

You think if your husband says something to you that’s when you should be a lion?! No, that’s when you slink away quietly like a sheep. You look like a sheep; you’re slinking away quietly like a sheep. But actually you’re the lion here. That’s called an *eishes chayil*. That’s called strength.

### **Fight With Your Yetzer**

Everybody knows what it states in Pirkei Avos: **אִיזְהוּ גִבּוֹר** – Who is called ‘mighty’? **הַכּוֹבֵשׁ אֶת יְצֵרוֹ** – A person who can overcome his inclination (4:1). So we see that that’s called mightiness. You need strength to overcome the natural inclinations, the instinctive reactions.

Not only to keep your mouth closed. There are many *yetzers* that must be fought against: men and women, there’s a tremendous *yetzer hara* there. The desire for wealth, the desire for *kavod*, the desire for jealousy, the desire for revenge. And of course there’s anger and *gaavah*. There are many forms of *yetzer* and all of them are given to us for one purpose – so that we should fight back against them.

Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants of us strength! Strength of character! That’s what Hashem expects of a Jew! And if that’s what Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants then we must learn the art, how to acquire this strength.

## Part III. Strong Muscles

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### **Muscle Building**

Now, before we go on with this subject, I'm going to tell you something in elementary psychology. Those who know more about the subject I think will agree, but even if they don't I'll say it anyway because it's true.

You know, your muscles must be exercised in order to develop them. With this, everybody agrees. People who play tennis have one arm that is very much developed; a blacksmith or a man who works all day with one arm you see that his hands are very uneven. This one is big and muscular, and the other one is smaller. It's well-known. Muscles atrophy because of disuse, and they develop exceedingly because of practice.

Now the same is true of *the muscles of the character*. If a person is always showing weakness, always giving in to himself, so the 'muscles' of self-control and strength of character begin to become flabby. And conversely, if you use the muscles, if you use them again and again, so they become firm; they grow tough.

And therefore one method of gaining strength of character is to employ strength of character; to find various ways of exercising the character muscles. And it's something that we can do all the time if we put our minds to it.

### **Silent Strength**

One form of exercise that is very available and it's very effective too, is to practice not talking. If a person practices keeping his mouth closed – he wants to shoot off his mouth, to say a wisecrack or retort but he doesn't – he becomes a *gibor* in character after a while.

It's not very difficult to practice. Anytime you have to talk, think beforehand. Whatever you have to say, try to say it briefly. Don't sit down and talk and talk and talk and talk. You know, when people talk at length, they are showing their weakness; they have to talk out what's inside of them. A strong person does not say what is inside – he keeps it to himself.

Especially if somebody says something to you, let's say, a husband or wife, and you right away want to answer back. Oh no! That's a weakling. If you're a *gibor* you keep quiet! You don't have to answer. You don't have to be right. You don't have to have the last word. It's nothing. It will pass by.

And therefore, if both the husband and wife can be strong and keep quiet, that's the very best thing. And Hashem loves you for that. He loves a man who keeps quiet. He loves a woman who keeps quiet. You know why?

Because to be quiet, you have to be strong. It takes the character of a lion to keep quiet and Hashem loves Jewish lions.

### **Unwanted Invitations**

Another exercise: Avoid going to places where you don't have to go! People run around to every kind of *simchah*. Some people never miss an invitation; every *chasunah* and every *kiddush* and every *bris*, every *pidyon haben*, they are always there. Of course, there is a mitzvah to go, no question about it. But if a person is always running around, always going to places where he can eat something, a place where he can enjoy company, so he is a weak man. He can't control himself.

Don't run around always to everything. Be strong and say no. Just because everybody is going, so you have to go too?! That's not a lion; that's a little *shepseleh* being pulled along with the flock.

Anyone who wants to become a *lamdan* has to put in work into learning in his spare time, absolutely! And he has to be strong for that. He doesn't care about the fact that he could go someplace else and have a 'good time.' It could be he does care; his friends are going to the pizza shop, to the amusement park, and he likes pizza too. But no, he won't be a weakling. Just because his *chaveirim* are going, so what? He's a lion; he'll spend time doing *chazarah*, reviewing the *shiur*, making sure he understands what he learns.

### **Save Your Character**

Another form of weakness is if a person is always ready to spend money on unnecessary things. Frugality, saving your money, is a strength of character. Men and women, instead of buying what you don't need, put your money in the bank. Yes, you can give *tzedakah* too, but saving money is a very good thing. It is a strength of character to save money. You shouldn't always buy whatever your eyes see. It's a weakness. If you see a neighbor has certain expensive things, you also have to buy expensive things?

All of these things are signs of weakness, yielding to the environment, to your desire. The luxuries that people have today are all unnecessary things. Many things people can avoid spending money on if they would be willing to flex their muscles of character.

### **A Snake for a Father**

Boys who see that there is a *bar mitzvah* where parents waste so much money – it's a *bar mitzvah* like a *chasunah*. Poor people have to suffer from that, because their sons say, "I want a *bar mitzvah* like the other boys have."

But if the boy would have a little *chochmah*, he would build up his strength of character muscles, he would say, “No, I’ll get along with a little *bar mitzvah*. I don’t need this expensive *bar mitzvah*.” That little boy is becoming the lion that Yaakov wanted to see in his children.

And who needs a wedding in the biggest fancy hall with everything there, all kinds of expensive things? You can make weddings cheaper too. People should learn self-control. Be a *gibor* and not waste money.

Sometimes you have to be a snake, and tell your daughter or your son, “Nothing doing! We’re not spending that money!” There are good places to put your money. You don’t have to give it to caterers and to other people who are wasting your money. And so saving money is also a form of strength of character.

### Holy Dieting

I’ll tell you one more exercise before our time runs out. Another way to strengthen your character is by not eating unnecessary things. Absolutely you should eat; and you should enjoy it too. But it should be with strength of character. You eat what Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants you to eat for your health. But the things that spoil your health, you have to practice being a *gibor* and you say, “No, I’m not touching it.”

*Nosherai?! Who needs it? And some people indulge even in liquor and in smoking. Chas v’shalom! Smoking is a weakness of character! Drinking is a weakness of character. Here is a man smoking – he is a weakling! He is a chalash! A strong man doesn’t smoke.*

Hakadosh Baruch Hu likes *giborim*; He likes people of character, people who can say, “No, I’m not going to do that.” And בְּרוּךְ שְׂאֵרָם רוּצָה לְלַכֵּת – מוֹלִיכֵינּוּ אוֹתוֹ, it’s the people who want to be strong and they labor to become lions, those are the ones whom Hashem will help succeed.

### Seeking Help

Now, as much as we practice up, you have to know that you can’t do it on your own. אֶלְמָלֵא הַקְרוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עוֹזְרוֹ אֵינוּ יָכוֹל לוֹ – *Without Hakadosh Baruch Hu’s help you can’t do it* (Kiddushin 30b). And therefore, no matter what, we have to always be asking Hashem for His help; He should make us strong. Your *tefillos* have to be full of asking Hashem to help you with strength of character, for energy and vigor to stand up to everything.

That’s what Dovid Hamelech says, ה’ עֹז לְעַמּוֹ יִתֵּן – *Hashem gives strength to His people* (Tehillim 29:11). It means that a person is able to gain more fortitude, more strength of character, if he has a connection to Hashem. If he thinks about Hakadosh Baruch Hu, if he prays to Him, “Hashem please

help me; please help me be strong to overcome all the obstacles.” If you are always thinking about Hashem, so He says, “I’m going to help you.” That’s what it means, ה' עז לַעֲמוֹ יִתֵּן.

And therefore, one of the great forces in gaining strength of character is a person’s *emunah* and *bitachon* in Hashem. When a person doesn’t think about Hashem – he’s just a *frum* Jew, but his mind is empty of the *emunah*, that person is able to yield many times, *chas v’sholom*. If Hashem is not on your mind, if you’re not constantly thinking about the strength that Hashem wants from you, then you can’t be a fountain of energy.

### **Gird Yourself With Strength**

If you haven’t developed Torah attitudes for how to deal with all the tests of life, and you’re not turning to Hashem constantly for His help in being strong, then you’re fighting a losing battle. Because of all the things that the *yetzer hara* would like to accomplish – and he wants to accomplish a lot of things with us – the most important to him is that we should be weak of courage, that we should capitulate easily. Strength is the *yetzer hara*’s enemy! When he sees strength, that’s his enemy. When strength comes in, the *yetzer hara* has to go out.

And that’s why we mention it every morning as soon as we get out of bed. אֹזֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּגִבּוֹרָה – Hashem, thank You for girding me with strength, with the belt of *gevurah*. Isn’t that a pity, that you say these words and you don’t utilize the tremendous opportunity which it affords us? Right away in the morning, you put on a belt, you put on a *gartel*, whatever it is, it’s a sign of *gevurah*; you’re girding yourself for battle. It’s a reminder that you’re heading out in the world to be a *gibor*.

It’s a good thing to think about when you make this *brachah*. בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' – Hashem, You have girded us with the strength of the lion, of the wolf and the snake, to overcome it all! The belt is only a symbol – if you forgot your belt at home or maybe you wear suspenders, no matter – you still have to know that you’re putting on the *koach* of *gevurah* that is going to help you live successfully despite everything that you face in this world.

### **People of Verve**

That’s what Hashem looks most of all – the quality of energy, those who act with *gevurah* in the service of Hashem. Hakadosh Baruch Hu loves *giborim*. He loves people of character, people who can say “No, I’m not impressed by the *umos haolam*. I’m not going to follow what the crowd does. I’m not going to waste money. I won’t waste time and I won’t waste words. I won’t be a milquetoast and let my inclinations run roughshod over

me. No! I'm going to be strong! I'll keep on thinking about my duty in this world, *mah chovoso b'olomo*, and not yield to every wind that blows." That is what Hakadosh Baruch Hu wants. He wants a *gibor*, like a lion, like a wolf, like a serpent.

And that's the special strength that Yaakov wished to see in his children – the verve and fortitude and boldness to overcome everything; all the *sheker* of the outside world, all the foolishness that has seeped into our people, and all of the *middos ra'os* and inclinations that are inside of us.

And it's these people, the ones who are capable of applying the *middah* of *gevurah* in their lives, they're the ones who will live most successfully. Because they know that even though **וְאַתָּן צֹאֲנֵי**, *we are His flock* (Yechezkel 34:31), we are also His lions and wolves and serpents. It means that even though we are kind-hearted and soft and submissive, but when it's required we are capable of bringing forth the energy of these creatures that Yaakov identified us with. Those are the ones whom Hashem loves most and they are the ones who are singled out to stand before Him forever in this world and the next.

### Have A Wonderful Shabbos

## LET'S GET PRACTICAL

### *Awake With Strength*

Yaakov blessed his children with the quality of energetic animals, because it's people with energy who are successful in life. Every morning this week before I say the *brachah* of **אוֹזֵר יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּגִבוּרָה**, I will *bli neder* stop for ten seconds and think about the *gevurah* that Hashem wants me to gird myself with before I go out to face the world. There are so many temptations, so many tests and obstacles, that I face every day, and it's only because I'm willing to tighten my 'strength of character belt' that I'll have the vigor and courage and boldness to overcome it all.

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# TORAS AVIGDOR *Parshas Vayechi 5784* **Bulletin**

Issue #11

## Toras Avigdor Snippets

*A sampling of previous Toras Avigdor booklets*



### • Vayechi 5781 – Personalities and Growth

The children of Yaakov were very different. So the Medrash tells us that Yaakov looked over his sons who were gathered around his deathbed and he said: “What’s going to happen after I leave this world? What’s going to be when I’m not here anymore? Who will keep the holy nation together? לישועתך קויתי השם – Hashem, we need a big *yeshuah*, a big salvation.”

So at that time, when Yaakov Avinu cried out to Hashem, the brothers said to him: *Shema Yisroel* – “Listen, Yisroel our father; it’s true – we’re very different one from each other. But we have something that unites us. *Hashem Elokeinu* – Hashem is our G-d; we’re all *avdei Hashem*. *Hashem echad* – There’s one Hashem who we’re all serving and that’s going to keep us together despite the differences in our nature.

שמע ישראל השם אחד. Whatever differences there may be that seem to pull us in different directions, they’re all overcome by the glue of *avodas Hashem*. We’re all connected to each other in the bond of serving Hashem Echad – it’s Hashem that makes us one people.

And that’s why we identify with all observant Jews, whether they’re Jews in Teiman or Lakewood or Lubavitch or Bnei Brak or in Boro Park or Baltimore. Wherever they are, we identify with them because we’re

one with them. Whether they're Sephardi Jews, whether they're Syrian Jews, whether they're Egyptian Jews. All the Jews who are loyal to the Torah, that's our people. That's the Am Echad of the Hashem Echad and we have to identify with them – you can't feel like he's an outsider. A Galicianer can't think, "I'm a stranger to a Hungarian Jew." No, we're not strangers to anybody if they're loyal Jews.

### • Vayechi 5782 – The Function of Regret

When a person has regret for the past, when he's full of sorrow about the things he did or didn't do – that's the first step to achieving in the future. We must learn from the past, from our past and the past of others or what the Torah teaches us and make use of the emotion of regret and sorrow to make changes in our lives.

So tomorrow morning, as you get up in the morning, make it your business to do that, to make a little time for regret. "Ah! Yesterday! How much more I could have accomplished had I put my mind to it." And a little bit of regret before you go to sleep the previous night won't hurt you at all. And then when you get up in the morning you're thinking, "I'm going to the *beis haknesses*. I'm going to daven *tefillah b'tzibur* today. And I'm going to put in effort to pray properly. And I'm going to try to live like a model Jew in everything in good character, in *yiras Hashem*."

You made mistakes yesterday? You ran through the *davening* and the whole time you were on a safari in Africa? You didn't open a *sefer* during those few extra minutes you had? You said something sharp to your spouse? So you have *charatah* for that and you make every day a new beginning.

Every husband can wake up in the morning and feel regret for what he did the day before and for what he didn't do as well. That itself is a *tikkun*. And then he makes up his mind to make today a better day. "Starting today I will try to live in complete harmony with my wife. I won't hurt her feelings, and I'll try always to honor her and make her

happy.” A wife too; if she feels genuine regret about the past, she’ll be sure to make today a much better day. She should think, “My regret for the past means a new start to my life. I’m going to try to make my husband happy and never say anything mean to him. I’m not going to ask him for too many things for myself or for my house. I’ll try to limit myself to make it easier for him.”

And when a person lives like that, his happiness only continues to increase because every day becomes a better day. The regret he feels becomes a constant dynamo for perfection and living successfully; it only adds to his happiness. Every time he falls down he gets up again and takes another step forward.

### • Vayechi 5783 – Peace of Mind

The last thing Yaakov Avinu said to Reuven was, “Don’t do things in haste! You should have done nothing! And because you were פְּרוּחַז בְּמַיִם, you did something in haste like water, אֶל תּוֹתֵר, you won’t excel, you won’t become great.” And then Yaakov passed away.

That was the last thing that Yaakov spoke to his son Reuven; the last words that went into his heart. And it’s in the Torah because it’s talking to us too: “You want to become somebody? You want to be תּוֹתֵר, to be lifted up and to live successfully? You have to have a calm personality. That’s the path to success.” What the Torah is teaching us here is actually the subject entitled menuchas hanefesh, to have calmness of mind as much as possible. That’s the path to success.

And it’s very important because everyone to a certain extent is a פְּרוּחַז בְּמַיִם. I say “everyone” because it’s not an accident – it’s one of the stratagems of the yetzer hora, to make you nervous and confused. People don’t know about this. It’s important to understand that one of the tricks of the evil inclination is to make you frightened, mixed up. It’s one of the objectives of the yetzer hora against you, to upset your menuchas hanefesh and to cause you to act in haste.

## Toras Avigdor Inbox

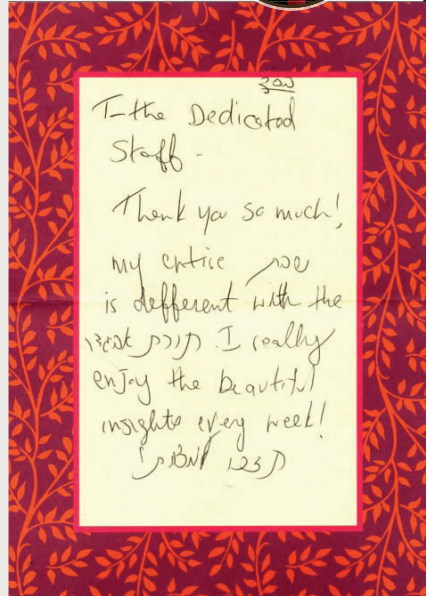


I want to express my profound appreciation for all that you do. I can barely imagine the amount of work entailed in preparing one parsha of R' Miller's Torah, kal v'chomer week after week without letup. We now consider ourselves true talmidim of R' Miller Ztz"l.

Also the Toras Avigdor Junior has really influenced our children (and the parents!). Each week everyone waits excitedly to hear the story and the lesson. The illustrations are terrific as well. Keep up the great work.

**S.M. and family, Yerushalayim**

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I think all your TA products are absolutely earth shatteringly special and amazing and I cannot imagine how many zechusim the producers are accumulating by spreading the light of Torah in such a huge way! May Hakadosh Baruch Hu continue to bless your worthy endeavours with much much hatzlocha!

By the way, the TA parsha booklet so enhances my Shabbos that my husband specially goes to fetch it for me when it arrives in shul just before shabbos even though he davens in a different shul!

**S. Schlesinger, London, UK**

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# QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

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Q:

**Someone told me that there's a basis for the idea that the world is really much older than 5,000 years because there's a Medrash that says Hashem created other worlds before He made this one. What do you say about that?**

A:

Now here is a Medrash that bothers some people unnecessarily. The Medrash states that before this world Hakadosh Baruch Hu was creating and destroying worlds.

Now, that doesn't mean He was creating physical worlds and destroying them but even if it did mean that, if He destroyed those worlds then Hakadosh Baruch Hu did a good job on destroying the world, which means that nothing remained of it. Just as He created the world, He destroyed it. Nothing remained.

And so when He created this world, even if you'll take it in a material sense that there were actually worlds before this world, but this world is *the* world, and therefore this world is only as old as it is. You can't add to this world the age of worlds that didn't exist when this world came into existence. You understand that.

So if He made worlds – I don't believe that the *ma'amar* means that at all; I think it refers to *olamos elyonim* of *ruchniyus* – but even if you'll say it meant physical worlds then the worlds are finished already and nothing remains of them. No stars, no planets. Nothing remains. And then when He said “*Yehi*” this universe came into being as it is. And therefore the universe is only *taf shin lamed tes*. That's all.

TAPE # 279 (August 1979)

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