

Achieving True Victory

Dear Parents,

In the midst of a war, we are pursuing and praying for victory, which means overpowering and destroying the enemy's abilities to do us harm. We use our military strength and prowess to achieve our goal. Victory on the battlefield is defined as forcing our will upon the enemy, totally against their wishes. May *Hashem* indeed grant us such a victory, speedily, in our present situation.

There are many circumstances in life when we are engaged in combat, when victory needs to have a different definition. In this week's *Parsha*, the Torah relates how the angel of *Esav* declares about *Yaakov* - *כי שרית עם אלוקים ועם אנשים ותוכל*. ...*For you have striven with the Divine and with man and were victorious (Bereishis 32:29)*. *Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*, in *Sefer Aleinu L'Shabeiach*, questions the nature of *Yaakov's* 'victories.' The Torah is referring to *Yaakov's* struggles with *Lavan* and *Esav*. Neither of those were victories according to the above definition. *Yaakov* spoke to *Lavan* in a tone of surrender, and he and his family bowed excessively to *Esav*, in an apparent sign of submission.

It is apparent, therefore, that *Yaakov* sought a different means for achieving his goals, and his 'victory' was **not one of overpowering and overwhelming his adversaries**, but using submission to get what he needed. He was not equipped to do battle through conventional military means against *Esav*, and he chose not to humiliate his father-in-law *Lavan*. He focused on his ultimate goals and found effective, alternate means to achieve them. He needed to be free of *Lavan*, and he needed to thwart *Esav's* evil designs against him and his family.

The *Seforno* tells us (*Bereishis 33:4*) that *Esav's heart was instantaneously transformed from one filled with hate to one of love, due to Yaakov's submissiveness*. Rather than fight, resist and confront *Esav* in a fight to the finish, ***Yaakov used submission as his tool to dismantle his enemy***. So often, when one feels under attack, the instinct is to lash back. *Yaakov* is teaching us for all eternity, we need to keep the bigger picture in mind and realize that we need to be wise in how to best deal with the challenge.

Were someone to attack us with a stick, we are smart enough to know that we don't focus our defense on breaking the stick. The enemy is not the stick, and successfully defending ourselves requires disempowering the person yielding the stick. We can try many tactics, such as a physical beating, incarceration, expulsion of the attacker, etc. Those are all temporary solutions. If we can turn the stick-

wielding adversary into an ally, we are removing the danger permanently.

These insights are applicable to the vast majority of our interpersonal difficulties and disagreements. One will not persuade others to their point of view by beating them up. **One will not achieve a loving, respectful personal or professional relationship through demonstrating their superior strength and power.** *Yaakov's* lesson is that we must consider alternatives when in conflict. Sometimes power and might are called for, as in conflict with an armed enemy when you have no other alternative. Most of our encounters, need a different solution.

This message needs to be imparted to our children. They won't love everyone they meet and they need to resist certain people and circumstances. They will confront difficult people and they will need to know how to deal with those who seek to harm them. This begins at a very young age. How successful our children will be in handling conflict will depend on their parents and teachers. Most importantly, is how their parents handle their own disagreements and differences.

Are the parents flexible enough to be willing to submit to maintain peace, or are they unable to get past a particular issue and fight to the finish to show they are right, no matter the consequences? Is there an atmosphere in the home that *shalom* is more important than being right, and therefore it is not shameful or weak to submit to the other to maintain that peace? When there are fights among siblings and when children come home from school or the playground with reports of fighting, we must do whatever we can to have them turn to us to help them cope. With calm wisdom, we can educate and train our children to handle conflict in a way that will ensure long-term success and happiness. **Be one who can look the other way, be forgiving, be positive and be focused on finding the good in others.** These are all long-term, effective solutions to the inevitable clashes that are part of every person's life.

May the lessons of our forefather *Yaakov*, a person of towering physical strength, who chose peace and submissiveness over conflict serve as a guide for our interactions and the developing personalities of our children.

Best wishes for a peaceful *Shabbos*,



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