



Dear Parents,

*Erev Shabbos Parashas Vayishlach 5782*

Troubling events occur without warning. They can be disruptive and disorienting. Many of you are aware that a highly respected educator, author, Rabbi and parenting expert in Israel is facing serious accusations of child abuse. Chances are you have one or more of his highly acclaimed books in your home. What should our reaction be when a leader, a trusted spiritual guide betrays the trust that so many have placed in him? More importantly, perhaps, what do we tell our children?

In this week's Parsha, the Torah describes the struggle between Yaakov Avinu and the 'man' who Chazal identify as the angel of Esav (Bereishis 32:25-30). The angel is unable to defeat Yaakov and the fight only ends with the angel striking a blow at Yaakov and injuring him in the thigh. We cannot understand what all this means on a superficial level. The Seforno explains that Yaakov could not be defeated because he had complete and uninterrupted focus on his connection to Hashem. The angel then informed Yaakov how, in the future, there will be leaders of Klal Yisrael who will sin. That so devastated Yaakov that he was distracted in his total concentration and in that instant, the angel was able to deliver a blow.

***What should our reaction be when a leader ... betrays the trust that so many have placed in him?***

The Rosh HaYeshiva, HaGaon HaRav Alter Chanoch Henach Leibowitz, zt'l, asks on the Seforno and wonders why the angel didn't point out the future suffering of Yaakov's descendants, the Jewish People, as a way to distress Yaakov? The destruction of two Batei Mikdash, the Crusades, Inquisition, pogroms and the Holocaust. What could be more devastating than that? The Rosh HaYeshiva answered that even with such tragedy and destruction one can look forward to rebuilding and rejuvenation. If, however, the leaders of the people, the very foundation of our nation are not trustworthy, then there is practically no hope for a brighter future. Without a foundation, there can be no rebuilding.

The current situation is indeed devastating. What can we say and what can we tell our children? How do we maintain faith in our leaders when we cannot be assured that such a thing won't happen again? How do we react to the suffering of so many people?

***Without a foundation, there can be no rebuilding.***

Not every question has an answer. It is ok to feel shaken. It is alright to be bewildered and confused. We can take some comfort in knowing that even such an incomprehensible situation has already been foretold and is part of Hashem's master plan. One approach can be along the lines of a powerful thought of Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch zt'l. The pasuk in Tehillim (22:2) states: ...למה עזבתני... which means "My G-d, why have you forsaken me." Rav Hirsch says the word למה not to be read for what reason, but למה for what purpose. Dovid HaMelech isn't asking why he is suffering – he is asking for what purpose is this suffering. Don't dwell on the why, focus on now what should we do.

To our children, we should not be telling, we should be listening. Listen to find out if they are troubled, or even know what happened. Some children may want to speak, some may close up. Both are acceptable responses. Just let them know you are there for them and available when and if they want to discuss it.

It's also ok to say you don't know if they ask why. The Gemora (Yoma 75a) implies that people want to be heard more than they expect answers to their problems. Just be there for them and reassure them that you are always there for them.

Finally, this is a teachable moment. If your child is aware of what happened and is speaking about it, you have an opportunity to discuss the privacy of one's body and how no other person, adult or child, has the right to touch, look at or talk about the parts of the child's body that are covered by a bathing suit. In as calm a manner as possible, reiterate how Aba and Ima are always open to hearing their concerns and fears and they should never withhold information about another person making them feel uncomfortable. They will not be in trouble for sharing with you and you won't think bad of them if something happened.

***Just let them know you are there for them and available when and if they want to discuss it***

We are all leaders of our family. This places a clear responsibility on our shoulders to try to live up to the expectations every child places upon their father and their mother. Our children's best guarantee for a successful life is the rock-solid foundation that only a parent can provide.

May Hashem protect us all from harm.

Best wishes for a safe and reassuring Shabbos,

Rabbi Kalman Baumann