Jewish Tribune – Vayishlach

**Nothing Worth Having Comes Easy**

We recently marked the first yohrtseit of Dayan Ehrentreu ztl. Many readers were either at the magnificent siyum recently held at the Decorium or read about it. The superb planning and uplifted atmosphere was a fitting tribute for a majestic Torah personality who is sorely missed.

The evening had many highlights. My brother’s warm words of welcome as the joint-chairman (well done Maurice!), the first-rate speeches, the impressive crowd, all of whom had a very real and personal connection with the Dayan, and the realisation of the huge impact that one man can make in his lifetime and the consequent ripple effects of a live well lived.

One small comment made by guest speaker HaRav Uren Reich, Rosh Yeshiva of Woodlake Village in Lakewood, made an impression, and relates to this week’s parsha.

As a nephew of the Dayan, and many years younger, Rav Uren Reich said that he only knew the Dayan when the Dayan was older, and he had no knowledge or memory of the Dayan when the Dayan was in yeshiva or kollel. But one thing he was certain of, was that the Dayan’s greatness in Torah and halacha could only have come from hard work during those years.

There is no doubt, he said, that the Dayan learned with great hasmoda and diligence for many years to achieve what he achieved. That degree of success could only happen through enormous effort and toil.

The Netziv observed that when he was a bochur, he learned 18 hours a day and was just called Naftoli, and when he got married and had more responsibility, he was called Reb Naftoli. When he became a maggid shiur and had even less time, he was called HaRav Berlin and when he became Rosh Yeshiva and had even more responsibilities, he was called HaRav HaGaon, Moreinu Rosh HaYeshiva. And when he became more involved in Klal matters and one of the leaders of Klal Yisroel, it became HaRav HaGaon, Moreinu Rosh HaYeshiva, Sar HaTorah Rav Naftoli Tzvi Berlin.

The Netziv would joke that it should have been the opposite and yet the less Torah he learned the more honour he got!! But the truth of course is, the later achievements were because of his earlier hard work.

Which brings us to this week’s sedrah, where Yaakov Ovinu has his name changed. As the possuk says:

וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יַעֲקֹב יֵאָמֵר עוֹד שִׁמְךָ כִּי אִם יִשְׂרָאֵל, כִּי שָׂרִיתָ עִם אֱלֹקִים וְעִם אֲנָשִׁים, וַתּוּכָל.

And he said, "Your name will no longer be called Yaakov, but Yisroel,

because you battled with [an angel of] G-d and with men, and you have prevailed." (Bereishis 32,29)

As a result, until today, we proudly bear the name Yisroel.

The trouble is, surely the main point of this possuk is not that Yaakov fought the angel, but that he was victorious! So why are called Yisroel, which is a derivative of כִּי שָׂרִיתָ – because you struggled; shouldn’t we be called “Victory” or some derivative of וַתּוּכָל – you prevailed and were victorious!

The answer often quoted is illuminating and is as relevant as it is powerful.

Yes, Yaakov overpowered the angel, but the main thing is the struggle, not the outcome. Yaakov was renamed Yisroel because of the battle, the struggle, and to a large degree, the outcome is almost irrelevant.

At a siyum, we say: “onu ameilim, v’heim ameilim” - we toil and they toil. The Chafetz Chaim would give the moshol of tailor. You want to buy a new suit and choose material, the tailor measures up and tells you to come back in a couple of weeks. You do so and excitedly try on the new suit. To your dismay, it’s a disaster. It doesn’t fit and you can’t even get your arms in to the jacket sleeves let alone do it up!

And to add insult to injury, the tailor charges you for his work. “No way!” you say. “I asked for a suit and this is not fit for purpose.”

“But it took me ages!” cries the tailor.

“I am sorry, but you just wasted your time. I’m not paying.”

L’havdil, when it comes to Torah, we can shvitz over a Tosfos and after an hour or two be none the wiser. We can push ourselves to attend a shiur despite our tiredness and countless other reasons, but every moment of effort is rewarded.

We are called יִשְׂרָאֵל, not וַתּוּכָל, to reflect that the main thing is the struggle.

Rav Moshe Shapiro makes a fascinating observation. In the wider world, spring is often used as a metaphor for youth: “the spring, when proud … April, dressed in all his trim, hath put a spirit of youth in everything.” (Shakespeare)

L’Havdil, in Yiddishkeit, winter is used. As it says in Iyov (29,4): “ "כַּאֲשֶׁר הָיִיתִי בִּימֵי חָרְפִּי- “As I was in my early days.”

Rav Moshe Shapiro explains that winter is the time for planting and hard work. Spring is already a time of reaping and enjoyment. In our hashkofo, youth is a time for work and effort.

In a world which seems to want instant rewards without the toil, this message is ever more important. The main thing is our efforts, not the result. Yaakov was renamed Yisroel because of the struggle, and not the outcome. The name we all bear should remind us that HKBH wants our effort and the outcomes are up to Him.

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