Jewish Tribune – Vayishlach

**Fighting Fit**

Picture the scene. The intensity in the ring is palpable and the referee is about to signal the start of the fight. The boxer in the red corner is ready to do battle with his opponent in the blue corner. Just before he moves towards him, fists clenched and focused on his task, he offers a silent prayer.

“Please G-d, in the merit of my grandfather and father, help me be victorious, help me beat this guy”.

That would be fine, were it not for the fact that his opponent in the blue corner is actually his brother. They share the same grandfather and father! How can he draw on that merit when his opponent has exactly the same lineage and yichus!?

Yet, that is exactly what Yaakov Ovinu does in this week’s sedra. Before doing battle with his brother Eisav, Yaakov draws on his “zchus ovos” and pleads to Hashem, the G-d of Avrohom and Yitzchok. But Eisav has the same lineage! Yaakov’s ancestors are the same of those of his combatant.

The S’fas Emes gives a simple and beautiful answer. You can only draw on “zchus ovos” if you follow in the way of your fathers. Yaakov was entitled to do that, Eisav wasn’t. Zchus ovos was available to Yaakov and would help him but Eisav had forfeited that right.

Reb Mendy Tajtelbaum once told me a remarkable story about his late father, Reb Yitzchok Dovid Tajtelbaum. After surviving Auschwitz, just before liberation, Yitzchok Tajtelbaum was separated from his brother Meyer but managed to track him down after the war. Meyer had ended up in South America and was now married to a Jewish lady but had abandoned his faith. Auschwitz and the war years had taken their toll. Yitzchok Tajtelbaum was a clever man and wanted to bring his brother back to the glory of his youth and his pre-war faith.

He waited until the right moment and then said to his brother: “It is time we put up a matzeiva for Mummy and Daddy”, both of whom perished in Auschwitz. Meyer was incredulous. Their parents last moments in this world were in the gas chambers of Auschwitz, there was no burial spot, how could they have a matzeiva?

Reb Yitzchok, gently took out a pair of tefillin and lovingly looked at his brother Meyer. “When you put on the tefillin shel yad, that will be a matzeiva for Mummy and when you put on the tefillin shel rosh, that will be a matzeiva for Daddy.”

As if in a frenzy, Meyer started screaming. He smashed the plates in his cupboard and told his wife that we are only eating kosher from now on. The loving rebuke had hit the mark.

IYH, our children will follow in the well-trodden path set before them and will be able to draw on zchus ovos of their predecessors.

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