



EMET Matters

The Boxing Ring of Life

by Rabbi Eliyahu Maksumov

At the end of last week's Parsha, Yaakov was leaving the house of his father-in-law Lavan, and was heading back to Israel with his family. Yaakov and his household crossed the river Yabok. On the way there, he realized that he left a few possessions behind and headed back to cross the river. On the other side of the river, Yaakov met a man who seemed to be a shepherd. The man that Yaakov encountered, turned out to be in reality, the Sar (protecting angel) of Edom. This destructive angel then attacked Yaakov, and attempted to destroy him. Yaakov fought back, and a struggle ensued. Yaakov and this angel wrestled all night, as it is written in the Torah, "Vayivater Yaakov livado - and Yaakov remained alone. Vayeavek ish imo ad alot hashachar - and a man fought with him until the morning star came up." Vayeavek is from the language of "avak." The word "vayeavek" that we translated "he wrestled" stems from the word "avak" which means dust. Rashi comments "shehayu ma'ailim afar biraglaihem" -- they were kicking up the dust with their feet. This fight was so intense and there was so much action taking place during this battle, that the dust under their feet was lifted upwards.

Chazal (our Sages) bring down that the dust that whirled up, reached and went until the "kisay hakavod" -- G-d's throne of glory.

Questions: What message was the Torah trying to convey to us by telling us that they fought so much that there was dust going upwards from all around them and that it reached heaven and went up so high it even reached G-d's heavenly throne? Why

does Hashem need dust by the kisay hakavod? What was this lesson that was a forerunner for Yaakov's descendants? What message is being passed down to Yaakov's offspring?

Our Torah is never ending; behind every letter there are so many

interpretations and lessons to be gleaned. Surely behind the episode of the fight of Yaakov and the angel there are life-applicable lessons.

Answers: One approach to understanding this event is that many times we convince ourselves that Hashem wants to see us be perfect Tzadikim who have no struggles. We may think that what reaches G-d is our good deeds. This pasuk, however, corrects this misconception and tells us that it's the struggle and the "vayeavek" -- the avak, the dust from the fight -- that counts! It doesn't matter who wins or loses, but what Hashem sees is us trying -- our efforts -- the dust and the struggle we go through in our efforts

to do what's right and not give up in that fight until "alot hashachar," until the sun rises and Mashiach comes. That is what really counts! A great Rabbi once said, that many times we feel that in order to fight the "yetzer harah" (evil inclination), we must defeat him in the big things in life and we feel overwhelmed that we will never even get close to overcoming such struggles. Yet, the Torah hints to us that Hashem looks for the things that seem unimportant to us, the seemingly insignificant things of life that make all the difference. The yetzer hara doesn't care to just BRING US DOWN, but rather to KEEP US DOWN! Therefore, we need to take it step by step and feel the success of every battle we'll fight no matter how small or insignificant it might seem. It's like the boxer, Rocky Balboa, once said, "It's not about how many times you can hit, it's about how many times you can get hit and keep moving on!" May we all be zoche to never give up and succeed in the everyday struggles we go through and revel in our successes in order to help us grow and truly become the best that we can be!



Lessons in Halacha (in accordance with Sefardic custom)

By Rabbi Binyamin Yuhanan, EMET's Rabbinic Consultant



EMET Laws of Chanukah for Sephardim

We light Chanukah candles in order to publicize the miracles that Hashem performed for the Jewish people during the era of the second Bet Hamikdash, when the Jews won against the great Greek army, and Temple service was restored with the lighting of the Menorah, whose light burned miraculously for eight days.

- Chanukah candles should be lit fifteen minutes after sunset, therefore one should preferably light Chanukah candles at 4:45 PM in New York City and its environs. Do not delay the lighting unnecessarily. Pray Mincha and Arvit and then immediately come home to light the candles.

- If one is delayed at work, his wife can light on his behalf at the proper time. Some say that it is preferable for the family to light all together.

- The flame should burn for at least 30 minutes after the stars appear. Therefore, place enough oil for the candles to remain lit for at least half an hour.

- One may light with a blessing as long as some of the family is awake. If he didn't light until the whole family is asleep, he may light them without a blessing until dawn.

- The original Rabbinic enactment was to light Chanukah candles outside one's home placed close to the left side of the outside door. When the Jews lived among hostile neighbors, the custom developed to kindle the Chanukah lights inside their homes. In areas where there is no concern of hostile gentiles, one should preferably light the Chanukah candles outdoors, in a glass box that protects them from wind and rain. However, those who have the practice of lighting indoors, near a window, have whom to rely upon and may continue their custom.

- The custom is to place the candle on the right side of the menorah on the first night. On the second night, you begin to light with the wick adjacent to the one you lit on the first night. Next you light the candle of the first night. On the 3rd night, you begin with the newest wick, and continue towards the right. And so on, each night. By the last night you'll be lighting the candle closest to your left hand first and moving to your right.

- Electric Menorahs cannot be used to fulfill the Mitzvah. Use either wax or paraffin candles, or any oil. Olive oil is the best.

- We may not use the light of Chanukah candles for any benefit. Therefore, aside from the Chanukah lights necessary for that night, an extra candle is lit: the Shamash. It is also used to light the candles, and it stands apart from the others.

- Only the head of the household lights the Menorah with the blessing. Others may participate by lighting the Shamash or additional candles of the Menorah besides the first one. Even if a family member is not present at the time of lighting, he nevertheless fulfills his obligation.

- On Friday, the Chanukah Menorah is lit before the Shabbat candles. Since the Menorah must burn for at least half an hour after the stars appear, make sure to put enough oil to last about 1 hour from the time it is lit.

- On Saturday night, the Menorah is lit in the synagogue before Havdalah, but at home the Menorah is lit after Havdalah.

- The candles or wicks must be placed in an even row and at equal heights.

- There should be a space between each wick so that it is easy to distinguish how many candles are burning.

- On the first night, three blessings are recited before the candles are lit: 1) Lehadlik Ner Chanukah, 2) She'asa Nisim La'avotenu Ba'yamim Ha'hem Ba'zeman Hazeh, and 3) Shehechyanu Vi'kiyemanu Vi'Higianu Lazman Hazeh. Every other night, only the first two blessings are said.

- After the first flame is lit each night, the Hanerot Halalu is said as the others flames are lit.

- Once the Menorah is lit, it may not be moved.

- Women and girls are also obligated to light Chanukah candles. If the father is not home, the wife or another member of the household must light instead.

Building Connections at Emet's 6th Annual Alumni Couples Retreat: *A Weekend of Marital Growth & Inspiration*

Thanksgiving weekend was a time to relax, reconnect, learn and be inspired when over 300 people attended Emet Outreach's sixth annual "Alumni Couples Retreat." Held at the majestic Ocean Place Resort and Spa in Long Branch, New Jersey, the coastal setting was befitting a Shabbat of spiritual and marital rejuvenation.

The theme of the weekend was "Connections" and that was not only evident in the incredible warmth and ruach of the gathering, but also encompassed the focus of the carefully crafted three-day program. Participants enjoyed lectures, classes and workshops that provided a multi-dimensional perspective on the pivotal connections in life -- each individual's relationship with Hashem, their spouse, family and themselves -- all within the framework of marriage.

"At Emet, our couples and alumni are like our family. We've watched many of them grow in Judaism from the time they were college students and we were honored to attend their weddings," said Mrs. Rivka Muskat, Emet's Associate Director. "Our goal in designing the many elements of this retreat was to have our couples emerge with an invigorated appreciation for their marriage within the context of a stronger relationship with Hashem. Our greatest mission at Emet is to build strong Jewish families and a healthy couple is the foundation of every family."

The retreat balanced Torah concepts, growth-oriented learning, and relationship guidance with fun activities, socializing and gourmet dining.

At the close of the weekend, a feeling of gratitude or "Hakarat HaTov" was in the air. One couple remarked, "Every time we attend an Emet Shabbaton, we're reminded of Hashem's role in the big picture of life. We feel like we're with family." Another couple said, "This Shabbat was like a rejuvenation for the soul. It was one of the best vacations we've had in a long time. It was a chance to not only reconnect with each other, but also with friends, relatives and people from Emet who have become like family." The most oft-expressed comment was, "We look forward to this retreat all year and we can't wait for next year."

"This weekend truly represented the spirit and core philosophy of Emet," said Rabbi Rutenberg. "Over the past 16 years we have been driven to not only form deep and lasting connections with our students, but also to guide them in strengthening their personal connections with Hashem and their Jewish heritage. These connections have in turn resulted in Jewish marriages which fulfill our ultimate goal of ensuring the Jewish future by building families. We are fortunate to have such a dedicated team of rabbeim and educators as well as the most growth-oriented students. We look forward to more meaningful events like this and to G-d willing sharing smachot with our couples."

Emet would like to thank the generous corporate sponsors: Caring Professionals and East Coast Auto Plaza. Simcha Gurgov, of Simcha Palace Caterers, provided the lavish and delicious meals for every aspect of the weekend and Rabbi Chaim Schwartz of the VHQ oversaw the highest level of Kashrut.

The weekend would not have been possible without the tireless efforts of Emet's office staff led by Rabbi Goldberger, Ms. Celia Harary and Mrs. Malkie Friedman who handled the extensive details that made the retreat such a successful and memorable experience.