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by Rabbi Yaakov Finestone

THE STRENGTH TO OVERCOME THE CHALLENGES OF LIFE!

PARSHAS TOLDOS

Asher & Rochel lived in a small town in Poland. They were exceedingly poor. One day, Asher decided to save a few pennies at a time to be able to buy material to make a suit for himself and a dress for his wife. A few weeks before Pesach, Asher had saved enough money. He traveled to the big city to buy the material. When he arrived in the city, he saw that many people were excited by the first volumes of a newly printed Shas. He knew that his son would be thrilled to receive and learn from these brand new volumes. After much soul-searching, he bought these volumes of Gemora instead of the material for the suit and dress. Clearly, Asher knew his wife well, for she was very excited at the choice that he had made. They ran to their son's yeshiva to present him with the new Gemoras. As they presented it to their son, they said, "This is my suit" and "This is my new dress". "Your Torah learning is the most important thing in the world to us". They inspired their son who became a talmid chacham and the Rav of a city. Their grandson, Rabbi Avrohom Kalmanowitz became the Rosh Yeshivah of the Mirrer Yeshivah in Brooklyn. (from Magid Stories for children by Chaviva Krohn Pfeiffer)

Yitzchak was aging and wanted to give a special *bracha* to his first-born son, Esav. Yitzchak asked Esav to hunt an animal and prepare a meal for him, after which he would bless him. Rivka overheard Yitzchak and knew that Yaakov was the one who truly deserved the blessings. Rivka knew that Yaakov was a *tzadik* and that Esav was a *rasha*. Therefore, Rivka set into motion a chain of events to ensure that the blessings would go to Yaakov, instead. She told Yaakov to take two goats from the flock so that she could prepare a meal for Yitzchak. She took Esav's special garments and clothed Yaakov in them. She also took the goatskin and placed it on Yaakov's hands and neck so that he would feel hairy, just like Esav, in case Yitzchak would touch him. This was done to allay Yaakov's fears lest Yitzchak realize what was happening and curse Yaakov instead of blessing him. Rivka told a nervous Yaakov not to worry. She said that if Yitzchak would curse Yaakov, the curse would

"And bring it to your father and he will eat it, so that he will bless you before he dies"
(Bereishis 27:10)

be on her and not on Yaakov. [Hashem clearly wanted Yaakov to receive the blessings and not Esav. Yitzchak eventually also came to that realization that the blessings should go to Yaakov. The commentators explain why Yaakov had to receive the blessings in the unusual manner that he did.] The

Midrash Rabbah (Bereishis 65:15) says that Yaakov listened to his mother's directions, even though he was exceedingly uncomfortable and tearful. The **Midrash Rabbah** continues (Bereishis 65:17) that Rivka even escorted Yaakov up to Yitzchak's doorway. She said that up until this point I did what a loving mother should do for her child. From this point on, after you pass through Yitzchak's doorway, Hashem will protect you. The **Yefei Toar** says that Rivka went even one step further! She told Yaakov that she would have liked to help him even more by walking into to Yitzchak's room with him, but she felt that was too much to do. **Rav Henach Leibowitz**

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zt”l pointed out that Rivka helped Yaakov with the plan and even escorted him to Yitzchak’s doorway to infuse Yaakov with additional courage and to show her love for Yaakov. **Rav Henach Leibowitz zt”l** asked, why was it necessary for Rivka to add that she would have even gone into Yitzchak’s room with Yaakov, if she could? **Rav Leibowitz** explained that Rivka’s extra words were vital to Yaakov’s success or failure. **She realized that every bit of help, every added encouragement, could mean the difference between Yaakov’s success or failure.**

Many *tzadikim* have experienced multiple challenges in their lives. Yaakov’s life was full of numerous challenges. He had to run away from home to escape being killed by his brother, Esav. Shortly after Yaakov left, Eliphaz, Esav’s grandson followed him, with instructions from Esav to kill him. Although he did not kill Yaakov, he took all the money and gifts that Yitzchak had given Yaakov. When Yaakov arrived in Charan, he had to deal with

the constant deceit of Lavan. Lavan kept trying to cheat Yaakov financially. He also tricked him into first marrying Leah instead of Rochel. When Yaakov finally left Lavan to return home, he was confronted by Esav and his army who wanted to kill him. Later, Yaakov’s daughter, Dina, was abducted and shortly after, his wife Rochel died in childbirth. He also had to deal with the sorrow of Yosef’s disappearance.

How was Yaakov able to overcome the terrible and almost constant *tzaros*? **Rav Avraham Pam zt”l** (in Rav Pam on Chumash by Rabbi Sholom Smith) answers this question based on the **Midrash Rabbah** (Bereishis 68:7).

Yaakov was able to keep going during these difficult times because he felt that “if I give up, I will forfeit all the energies that my mother invested in me to help me obtain the brachos”. This thought gave Yaakov the inspiration and strength to overcome any feelings of despair that he may have had.

We all have numerous challenges in life. One method to overcome our challenges is to visualize the efforts and energy that our parents, teachers, or mentors put forth on our behalf. That will infuse us with strength since we want their efforts to have been worthwhile.

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Rabbi Yaakov Finestone is the director of JEP Queens. For almost 50 years JEP Queens has been in the forefront of kiruv. JEP has changed the lives of thousands of Jewish children enrolled in public schools and kiruv schools. Many are shomrei Torah and mitzvos today because of JEP.

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