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This week's Torah portion, Vayishlach, tells us of Jacob's eventual return to Israel after the many years he spent working for Laban, and after the fateful confrontation with his brother Esau on the way back. The Torah states: "And Jacob came whole to the city of Shechem." Rashi explains that Jacob was sound and "whole" in three ways—sound in body, for his limp had healed; perfect in means, as his wealth was still intact; and whole in Torah, for he had not forgotten any of his vast Torah knowledge during his absence.

It would certainly seem that the Torah could have found a more direct way of saying that Jacob emerged unscathed by his experience with Laban. What are we to infer from the Torah's somewhat indirect way of telling us this? Furthermore, in light of the fact that G-d had already promised Jacob that He would protect him from both Laban and Esau, why does the Torah need to tell us that Jacob was indeed unharmed?

Rather, the words "and Jacob came whole" do not refer only to Jacob's escape from the cunning of Laban and the wrath of Esau, but refer to a different type of wholeness entirely.

Our Sages taught that the story of Jacob's sojourn with Laban symbolizes the saga of the Jewish people in exile. Jacob's success in overcoming his own personal experience with Laban has served as an example and source of inspiration for us, his grandchildren, as we pass the long years of spiritual deprivation it was decreed that we suffer prior to the coming of Moshiach.

Not only are the nations of the world unable to destroy the eternity of the Jewish people (just as Jacob was untouched by the schemes of both Laban and Esau), but we are assured by the Torah that the Jewish nation will eventually emerge "whole," in the same three senses of the word, when our exile is over.

"Whole in body"—Although our present exile is characterized by terrible trials and tribulations, their purpose is to arouse the Jew's innate resources and desire for self-sacrifice. G-d has promised that despite all our suffering, the Jewish people will be perfect and uninjured after Moshiach comes to establish the Messianic era.

"Whole in means"—Just as Jacob amassed a great fortune while in the employ of Laban, so too shall the Jews amass great wealth during their years of hardship. The whole purpose of exile is for us to utilize the world's physical assets in the service of G-d, elevating the sparks of holiness which are to be found in even the most lowly and mundane objects we encounter.

Furthermore, we are assured that all the time and energy which was spent in the pursuit of perfecting our worldly affairs will not have been wasted, and will also be elevated and transformed into holiness with the coming of Moshiach.

"Whole in Torah"—Lastly, we are assured that the Jewish people will not lose any of their former spiritual greatness and love of Torah. Just as Jacob's long years of toil did not cause him to forget what he had learned, so too will the Jewish people eventually triumph, untouched by the stark realities of our struggles in exile. (Adapted from the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Sichot, L'Chaim 5753, #245)

I am unworthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which You have shown Your servant (32:11) The meaning of this is that every kindness bestowed by G-d upon a person should cause him to be exceedingly humble. For a Divine kindness is an expression of "His right hand does embrace me"—G-d is literally bringing the person closer to Himself. And the closer a person is to G-d, the greater the humility this should evoke in him; for since "all before Him is as naught," the more "before Him" a person is, the more "as naught" does he perceive himself to be.

This is the manner of Jacob. The very opposite is the case in the contrasting realm of kelipah (evil). There, the greater the kindness shown a person, the more he grows in arrogance and self-satisfaction. (Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi) - chabadonline.com

THE TRUE NATURE OF A JEW

Freely translated from a letter of the Rebbe

The historic day of Yud Tet Kislev (the 19th of Kislev), as is well known, and as explained at length in one of the epistles of my father-in-law of saintly memory (the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe), was more than a personal triumph for the Alter Rebbe, Rabbi Shneur Zalman, the founder of Chabad. For, in regaining his personal freedom on that day, as well as the freedom to continue his teachings and work, he gained a victory for the whole Chasidic movement which had been threatened with suppression and extinction.

For the Alter Rebbe was the chief exponent of the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov who had founded the Chasidic movement about half a century earlier. It is for this reason that he was made the chief target of attack, and his geula (redemption) brought salvation to the numerous followers of the Baal Shem Tov, and to our people as a whole.

One of the great accomplishments of the Baal Shem Tov is that he opened our eyes to the true nature of a Jew. While he dedicated his life to the spreading of the Torah and mitzvot in the fullest measure, he never despaired of any Jew, no matter how much circumstances temporarily overshadowed his Judaism. The Baal Shem Tov taught us—and the Alter Rebbe expounded it at length—that the Jew was essentially, by his very nature, incorruptible and inseparable from G-d; that "no Jew is either able or willing to detach himself from G-dliness." It is often necessary to no more than "scratch the surface," to reveal the Jew's true inner nature.

The Baal Shem Tov introduced a new relationship between Jew and Jew, based on the inner meaning of "Have we not all one Father?" (as interpreted by the Alter Rebbe). By the example of his own dedicated work, he taught us what should be our attitude and approach to our fellow Jews. For, the Baal Shem Tov began his work as an assistant teacher, taking tender care of little children, and teaching them the Shema, blessings, and so on. At the same time he revealed to the more mature minds some of the deepest teachings of the Inner Torah, the Kabbala, and the true way to serve G-d with heart and mind together, a profound philosophy which found its systematic expression and exposition in Chabad.

As in the past, and even more so today, it is the duty and privilege of every Jew to help educate Jewish children—"children" in the literal sense, in age; and "children" in knowledge of Judaism. In a true sense, a person's education is not confined to the school-room; it should continue throughout his life, enabling him to become wiser and better every day. One must be a student and teacher at the same time, and in both cases success depends on mutual affection, on true Ahavat Yisrael.

Let us all open our hearts and minds to the teachings and inspiration of Yud Tet Kislev, through the observance of which we identify ourselves with, and attach ourselves to, the great luminaries of our people, the Alter Rebbe and the Baal Shem Tov. (L'chaim 5752, #190)

A FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF CHABAD PHILOSOPHY IS THAT THE MIND, WHICH BY ITS INNATE NATURE (1) RULES OVER THE HEART, (2) MUST SUBORDINATE THE HEART TO G-D'S SERVICE BY UTILIZING THE INTELLECTUALIZATION, (3) COMPREHENSION (4) AND PROFOUND CONTEMPLATION (5) OF THE GREATNESS OF THE CREATOR OF THE UNIVERSE.

FOOTNOTES: (1) LIT. "FROM BIRTH." (2) SEE TANYA CH. 12, P. 49. (3) HASKALA - THE MIND'S CREATIVE POWER, RELATED TO CHOCHMA. (SEE TRANSLATOR'S NOTES, P. 118). (4) HAVANA - COMPREHENSION, GRASP; FROM BINA, THE SECOND STATE OF INTELLECT. (5) DA'AT - THE THIRD STATE OF INTELLECT. (FROM REBBE'S HAYOM YOM, KISLEV 16)

When you find the Infinite, where will you put it? In your broken vessel? It will not stay. In a new whole one? It will not fit. Let the heart be broken in bitterness for its confines. Let it be whole in the joy of a boundless soul. This is the secret that Man holds over the angels: Only the human heart can be broken and whole at once.

- from the wisdom of the Rebbe condensation & words by Tzvi Freeman