Zevi Samet
Parshas Vayishlach 2025

Rabbi Yechiel Spero shared an unbelievable vort with me last year, one that I felt was worth sharing again because it is so powerful!

The Pasuk says (Bereishis 32:11) כי במקלי עברתי את הירדן, “Because of my staff, I have crossed the river.”
The Baal Haturim says that the word במקלי is gematria Yaakov.
So Yaakov is saying, “Because of my staff, I have crossed the river.” What exactly is going on here?
The Midrash says that there was oil in Yaakov’s staff. Yaakov wasn’t someone who necessarily learned every second, but he was always prepared to learn. Yes, he learned in Yeshivas Shem V’aver for 14 years, but he worked in the field and he worked for Lavan. Those were definitely kadosh things, but Yaakov didn’t necessarily learn every second. He carried oil in his staff so that whenever it was dark outside or he had some free time, he took the oil and lit a candle so he could learn.
We need to think about - what is our default? What are we running to do when we have free time?
Yes, we need healthy outlets, breaks, we need to eat, we need to sleep, but ultimately we need to always be prepared to do the Ratzon Hashem.
Let’s learn from Yaakov that although you might not always be able to learn and do as many mitzvos as you want to, always be prepared to learn and do mitzvos whenever you are able to.

Yesterday (Thursday) I went to Baltimore, as Rav Spero is sitting shiva for his father zt”l. I went with my teammate Nate Jacobs, who came to keep me company and spend time with me. It was a three-and-a-half-hour drive to Baltimore. We went to sit shiva next to Rav Spero for about an hour, and we got to hear amazing things about his father. His father never davened without a siddur. He wrote notes in his siddur so he could have more kavana when he davened. He was a beautiful chazan and a person who always had a smile that cheered up everyone around him.

When we left the shiva, I reached out to Rabbi Ori Strum, whom I knew lived in Baltimore, as we’ve been in touch over WhatsApp for the past two years and have been seeing each other’s content on the Meaningful Minute app.

So Nate and I went to meet him in person.

After that, Nate and I went to Playa Bowls. When we got back in the car, about to head out of Baltimore, Nate and I recorded a video. I asked him how his day was and what his words of wisdom were for people. He said, “The day was amazing. It started off early after tefillin, and the day just got holier and holier. That’s been the key of the day — holiness. We basically went from Rabbi to Rabbi, and then to shul for Mincha, and then to Playa Bowls. So basically just more and more Jewish stuff.” And then I said, “It’s the famous saying (Tehillim 84:8), מֵחַ֥יִל אֶל־חָ֑יִל — from level to level. That’s what it’s all about.”

This week, on Monday, I shared with the team after Shacharis the Gemara in Kesubos 111b that says: אמר רבי יוחנן: טוב המלבין שיניים לחברו יותר ממשקהו חלב, One who shows the whiteness of his teeth (smiles) to his friend is better than one who gives him milk to drink.

I believe it's because when you give someone a glass of milk, he enjoys it, but the effect only lasts for about an hour or so. Not much longer before he's thirsty again. But when you give a person a smile, it has the potential to lift up their entire day and make them feel happier and empowered. It can give someone the boost they need to go achieve their goals and dreams! Don't get me wrong, giving a person physical things is very important, as it shows גמילת חסדים. But a smile has the power to do so much more!

I quoted in my Dvar Torah a few weeks ago (Parshas Chayei Sarah) the pasuk in Tehillim (89:3) that says, עוֹלָם חֶסֶד יִבָּנֶה — "the world is built on chessed." Giving a person physical objects, or spiritual and emotional support, is all part of chessed.

I once read in a sefer (I can't remember which) that when a person gives their time to others, it is just as much chessed as giving away money. He explained that just as we are supposed to give at least 10% of our money to tzedakah, so too giving 10% of our time is considered chessed in the same way.

And lastly, I shared with the team both before the game in the locker room and after the game in the post game interview - the Pasukim say (Vayishlach 32:17-20) יִתֵּן בְּיַד־עֲבָדָיו עֵדֶר עֵדֶר לְבַדּוֹ…, "Yaakov put his servants in charge of each herd separately…" He then instructed the first, saying: "When Esau my brother meets you and asks you…" Then he went to the second and third Herd and said, "when you find Esav, tell him, 'your servant Yaakov is behind us.'" Perhaps Yaakov wanted everyone to be on the same page. Yaakov wanted that when they all met Esav, they all had the same things to say. I told the guys, we started the season 0-5. But in order to win we need to make sure we're all on the same page offensively, defensively and together as a team!

We might be a sports player, we might be in the workforce, a parent, a sibling, or another Jew in our special nation. We need to make sure we get "our team" on the same page!!

That's how we can IYH be successful at whatever we're doing and ultimately show Hashem that we're ביחד! And IYH He will bring us one step closer to the coming of Mashiach!!!