

Good Shabbos Everyone. The Torah tells us "So Yakov drew close to Yitzchok his father who felt him and said: The voice is the voice of Yakov, but the hands are the hands of Eisav." (Bereishis 27:22) The Midrash explains this powerful verse in an interesting way. The power of Yakov (who represents the Nation of Yisroel) is in its voice with prayer and Torah study, while the power of Eisav and the nations is in its physical strength. (Midrash Eicha Pesichta, Aleph,Beis) As the Prophet tells us "Fear not, O' worm of Yakov." (R.Amonon Yitzchok, Shlita, citing Yeshiyahu 41:14)

Why is Yakov - Yisroel compared to a worm? The power of a worm is in its mouth. A tiny worm can bore through the strongest wood with its mouth. So too, the strength of Yisroel is in its mouth with prayer. (Rashi and Metzudas Dovid on Yeshiyahu 41:14) The nations may be bigger and stronger than we are, but we have the power of prayer, which is much stronger than their physical power.

One of the ways we can use prayer is to help others. If we hear that someone is not well, G-d forbid or perhaps someone is looking for a marriage partner, we can help them by davening - praying for them. Sometimes, our prayer can positively affect others without us even realizing it...

Over 150 years ago in Russia there lived a Talmud scholar called Rabbi Yosef. He was an exceptionally gifted man both in mind and in humility. He knew all of the Talmud -- both the Babylonian and Jerusalem versions -- by heart, and was well-versed in the books of Halachah and Kabbalah as well. Now this Rabbi Yosef was considering applying for the post of rabbi in several large cities and, being a chassid of the second Rebbe of Chabad-Lubavitch, Rabbi DovBer, he traveled to Lubavitch to ask for the Rebbe's blessing and advice.

But when he informed the Rebbe of his plan, the latter wasn't so enthusiastic. Rabbi DovBer looked up at Rabbi Yosef from his desk and said solemnly: "Rabbi Yosef, if you're ever offered the opportunity of being an important Rabbi, it's better for you to be a wagon driver."

Even two days later, when he arrived home and told his wife what the Rebbe had said, he himself still hadn't exactly absorbed it. "If so", she said, "You must go down to the wagon drivers and ask their advice." "Advice on what?" he asked. "Advice on what type of carriage to buy. How much it will cost. How long it will take to learn." She answered. "Learn what?"

He just shook his head in agreement every time his wife mentioned it, and went back to studying Talmud or something else and the time passed. Then about a month later a group of distinguished looking Jews knocked at Rabbi Yosef's door and officially offered him the prestigious position of rabbi of the city Minsk. They left with the promise that they would wait a week for his reply.

As soon as they closed the door behind them, Rabbi Yosef's wife reminded him that now he had no choice other than to finally go talk to the wagon drivers. So the next morning Rabbi Yosef put on his fur coat and high boots and made a visit to the stables. At first the drivers thought he was a customer. Then they thought he was joking or crazy. But when they saw he was neither, one of the older drivers agreed to show him around, carefully pointing out how each of the many things that a wagon driver did in the course of his workday was difficult, dirty, or dangerous. After several hours he returned home with a full report to his wife and a conclusion: a wagon and horse cost much more than they could afford, and that was the end of it. "Yosef!" said his wife emphatically. "Are you a chassid or not? The Rebbe wants you to be a wagon driver. I'll sell my jewelry and our silver Shabbat candle sticks, and we'll buy a horse and a wagon." The next day they sold the jewelry, found a driver to teach him the ropes and even bought a wagon and a pair of horses.

Two months later Rabbi Yosef was one of the town's drivers. He accepted his new job with as much joy as he could muster. He took good care of his horses and his carriage, and the other drivers always helped him and tried to give him the easiest trips. He also tried to keep himself as holy as possible. While he was driving he would recite the Talmud he knew by heart, and he never began working until he had devoted one hour to the morning prayer, but nevertheless his heart was broken inside him.

One cold winter morning, as he was feeding his horses and getting the wagon ready for the day's work, a rich-looking, gentile businessman entered the stables and asked him if he was willing to take him to Petersburg. "That's a two-day journey", answered Rabbi Yosef. "I'll gladly take you, but I'm telling you now that I don't begin at the crack of dawn, like the other drivers. I am a Jew that believes in G-d and every morning I must pray for one hour." "Fine, fine,"

The businessman replied. "Maybe on the second day I'll get another driver. The main thing is that I set out immediately. All my baggage is here and I want to leave as soon as possible." Rabbi Yosef wasted no time hitching up the horses and in fifteen minutes they were on their way. "Oy," thought Rabbi Yosef to himself as he was driving some lonely road far from town, "What will become of me? All day I have to look at the backside of these horses. What will become of me?"

That night they stopped at an inn. Before they retired the businessman paid him for the day's journey, saying something about finding another driver that would leave early. They shook hands and the innkeeper showed them to their rooms. Rabbi Yosef woke, as was his custom, at midnight, washed his hands and began to recite the midnight prayer mourning the destruction of the Holy Temple. His heart was broken enough as it was, and when he began thinking of the terrible exile of the Jews the pain was too much to bear, he poured out his emotion into the words of the prayers. When he finished, he opened the volume of Talmud he always took along on his trips and began studying. At daybreak, he put on his tefillin and prayed the morning prayer. He had just put away tefillin back after praying, and was about to sit down and have something to eat, when suddenly the door opened and there stood his passenger. His clothes were disordered as though he hadn't slept all night and it was clear that he had been weeping. "I want to ... put on ... your tefillin," he said as he burst into uncontrollable tears and fell to one knee. "Oh please forgive me!" He wailed "My G-d, please, forgive me!"

He collapsed on the floor with his face in his hands and his entire body shaking with heart-rending sobs. The astounded Rabbi Yosef watched with his mouth open in disbelief. He had never seen anything like this in his life! When the man had calmed down he explained: he was a Jew, but his lifestyle was exactly the opposite. The night before, he was about to go to sleep when he heard through the wall the midnight prayers of Rabbi Yosef. At first he paid no attention, and then he got angry because it was disturbing him; but then, slowly it woke up something inside of him. He remembered that when he was a boy his father used to pray like that. He now had long forgotten his youth but Rabbi Yosef's prayers changed all that. He decided firmly that he wanted to return to his true self -- he wanted to be a Jew again. Two days later they were standing before the Rebbe. Rabbi Yosef was informed that he had fulfilled the purpose of his strange career. For the wagon driver's passenger, the Rebbe wrote a treatise called *Pokeach Ivrim* to guide him on his journey back to Judaism, which is still learned to this very day. **Good Shabbos Everyone**

A Refuah Shleimah to Shusha Malka bas Golda

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