ב״ה



A CAPTIVE JEWISH CHILD

A Chassidic discourse addressed the kidnapping of Jewish children and their forcible induction into the Russian army.

The Rebbe explores the contemporary lesson from those painful events.

TEACHER'S MANUAL

JEWISH INSIGHTS

A TASTE OF THE REBBE'S TEACHINGS

PARSHAT VAYISHLACH

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Shluchim of the Rebbe to Mumbai India

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Jacob leaves Charan for Canaan, intending to reunite with his brother Esau. En-route, he encounters Esau's angel and wrestles all night with him, ultimately prevailing, but injuring his leg (Source 1). Commentaries explain that this episode foreshadows the Jewish-Gentile relationship in the future: the nations will hurt the Jews and persecute them, like the angel who struck Jacob's leg, but will not prevail over them, and ultimately they will be saved, just as Jacob was. (Sources 2-4)

B. The Cantonist Decree.....5

The Rebbe cites a discourse from the Mitteler Rebbe where the latter asks what G-d expects from these Cantonist children kidnapped and drafted into the Russian army to be converted to Christianity. How could they ever observe mitzvot? What is their purpose in life? The explanation is that although they cannot perform many mitzvot, in G-d's eyes, those that they can perform are as valuable and cherished as all the mitzvot.

The Rebbe questions whether this principle can be applied to the case of a child kidnapped into a non-Jewish society, or modern applications thereof. How did their soul benefit from being born?

At some point, they will have the opportunity to do a mitzvah, and despite the challenges, they will do so with self-sacrifice. That is incredibly precious to G-d, and it was worth their soul being born for that one mitzvah alone.

The application of this for every Jew is that when we sin, we are considered like a "captive child" and it can be difficult to mend our ways. The message is: This sacrifice to return to G-d is exceedingly valuable to Him!

Introduction

We will explore an impossible spiritual situation faced by the Jewish community in the 19th century and how Rabbi Dovber of Lubavitch shed new and revolutionary light on the dilemma. Is this relevant to our times as well? All this and more in the class ahead.

השיעור לפרשת וישלח

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בלתי מוגה.

תורת מנחם כרך י"א עמוד 135

The Struggle With the Angel

After Jacob lived in Charan for 22 years and built a large family, he set out on his journey to return to the land of Canaan. Suddenly, he received word that his brother Esau was coming to meet him with an army of 400 men, intending to attack him and his family.

Jacob decided to prepare for this threat in three different ways: First, he divided his people into two camps. If, G-d forbid, one camp was attacked, the other could escape. Second, he prayed to G-d to save him from Esau's evil intentions. Finally, he prepared a gift consisting of cattle and camels and sent it to his brother.

During these preparations, Jacob moved his wives and children across the Yabok River, but he returned to retrieve small vessels that had been left behind. It was then that he encountered a mysterious figure—an angel from Esau's camp—who began to wrestle with him. Jacob bravely wrestled throughout the night, but the angel managed to dislocate Jacob's hip.

As dawn broke, the angel asked Jacob to let him go so he could fulfill his Heavenly tasks for the day. Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you have blessed me." The angel blessed him and declared that his name would henceforth be Israel, "because you have commanding power with an angel of G-d and with men, and you have prevailed."

Commemorating this epic struggle, Jews to this day refrain from eating the sciatic nerve in the hip joint.

Source 1 Genesis 32:25-36

Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. When he saw that he could not prevail against him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip, dislocating it as they wrestled. The man said, "Let me go, for dawn is breaking," but Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

He then asked Jacob, "What is your name?" Jacob answered, "Jacob." The man declared, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, because you have commanding power with an angel of G-d and with men, and you have prevailed."

Jacob asked, "Now tell me your name," but the man responded, "Why do you ask for my name?" He then blessed Jacob there. Jacob named the place Peniel, explaining, "I saw an angel face to face, and my soul was saved."

וַיִּוָּתֵר יַעֲקֹב לְבַדּוֹ וַיֵּאָבֵק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ עַד עֲלוֹת הַשָּׁחַר. וַיַּרְא כִּי לֹא יָכֹל לוֹ וַיִּגַּע בְּכַף יְרֵכוֹ וַתֵּקַע כַּף יֶרֶךְ יַעֲקֹב בְּהֵאָבְקוֹ עִמּוֹ. וַיֹּאמֶר שַׁלְּחֵנִי כִּי עָלָה הַשָּׁחַר וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֲשַׁלֵּחֲךָ כִּי אִם בֵּרַכְתָּנִי.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו מַה שְּׁמֶךָ וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב. וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יַעֲקֹב יֵאָמֵר עוֹד שִׁמְךָ כִּי אִם יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי שָׂרִיתָ עִם אֱלֹקִים וְעִם אֲנָשִׁים וַתּוּכָל.

וַיִּשְׁאַל יַעֲקֹב וַיֹּאמֶר הַגִּידָה נָּא שְׁמֶךָ וַיֹּאמֶר לָמָּה זֶּה תִּשְׁאַל לִשְׁמִי וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתוֹ שָׁם. וַיִּקְרָא יַעֲקֹב שֵׁם הַמָּקוֹם פְּנִיאֵל כִּי רָאִיתִי אֱלֹקִים פָּנִים אֶל פָּנִים וַתִּנָּצֵל נַפְשִׁי.

וַיִּזְרַח לוֹ הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כַּאֲשֶׁר עָבַר
אֶת פְּנוּאֵל וְהוּא צֹלֵעַ עַל יְרֵכוֹ.
עַל כֵּן לֹא יֹאכְלוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
אֶת גִּיד הַנָּשֶׁה אֲשֶׁר עַל כַּף
הַיָּרֵךְ עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה, כִּי נָגַע
בְּכַף יֶרֶךְ יַעֲקֹב בְּגִיד הַנָּשֶׁה.

As the sun rose, Jacob passed Penuel, limping on his thigh. Therefore, the children of Israel do not eat the displaced tendon, which is on the socket of the hip, until this day, for the man had touched the socket of Jacob's hip, in the displaced tendon.

Rabbi Adin Even-Israel's Commentary

Finally, after the entire camp had crossed, Jacob remained alone on the riverbank. There, a mysterious and anonymous man wrestled with him until the break of dawn.

The man saw that he could not overpower Jacob and struck him on the socket of his hip, dislocating it. Despite the severe pain, Jacob stood firm and was not defeated.

The two remained locked together until the man said, “Release me, for dawn is breaking.” He revealed himself as a nocturnal being, not a human attacker but a supernatural entity. Jacob replied, “I will not release you unless you bless me.” He sought neither an apology nor surrender but demanded acknowledgment and acceptance of his authority. The blessing would signify the stranger's reconciliation with Jacob and willingness to act on his behalf.

The man, identified as an angel, asked Jacob, “What is your name?” Jacob replied, “Jacob.” In a typical human exchange, Jacob might have asked, “If you don’t know who I am, why did you attack me?” However, this was no ordinary conversation but a ceremonial event. The angel asked Jacob’s name to address it in the blessing.

The angel declared, “Your name shall no longer be Jacob but Israel, for you have wrestled withan angel, a supreme force, and with men, and you have prevailed.”

Jacob then asked, “Please tell me your name.” His question was likely not out of simple curiosity but to understand the essence and significance of the encounter. Was this figure a representation of Esau’s spirit, a test, or a genuine threat from the forces of darkness? The angel responded, “Why do you ask my name? You don't need to know.” He then blessed Jacob there.

Jacob named the place Peniel, saying, “I have seen an angel, face to face, and yet my soul was saved.” Some who saw angels feared for their lives, but Jacob not only saw one but engaged him face to face and emerged alive.

The angel departed as dawn broke. As Jacob crossed Penuel, the sun rose for him. The encounter with the angel and his injury undoubtedly shook him, and he limped on his hip.

This leads to a halachic note: “Therefore, the children of Israel do not eat the sciatic tendon, which is on the socket of the hip, to this day, because the angel struck Jacob’s hip socket at the sciatic tendon.” This nerve or tendon extends from the upper part of the thigh to the heel. Jacob’s injury led to the prohibition of eating this tendon in animals, a commandment binding upon his descendants for all generations.

Until now, we have explored the straightforward interpretation of the story. However, there is, of course, a deeper interpretation. What does it mean that the angel could not defeat Jacob but was able to cause him pain? And why was a specific prohibition established because of this, lasting to this day?

The Nations' War on the Jews

Source 2 Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 3

The commandment not to eat the slipped sinew:

This commandment serves as a reminder to the Jewish people that although they will endure many troubles in exile at the hands of the nations and the descendants of Esau, they should have faith that they will not perish. Rather, their descendants and name will endure forever, and their redeemer will come to save them from their oppressors. By continually remembering this guarantee through the commandment, they will remain steadfast in their faith and righteousness for all time.

This message is hinted at by the angel who wrestled with our forefather Jacob. According to tradition (Bereshit Rabbah 78), this angel was the guardian angel of Esau. and he sought to eliminate Jacob and his descendants. However, he was unable to defeat him (Genesis 32:26) and instead caused him pain by injuring his thigh. Similarly, the descendants of Esau cause suffering to the descendants of Jacob, but in the end, the descendants of Jacob will be saved from them.

As we see with our forefather, the sun rose to heal him and relieve his pain (Genesis 32:32), so too will the "sun" of the Moshiach shine, healing us from our pain and redeeming us swiftly in our days, Amen!

מִצְוָה ג – לֹא לֶאֱכֹל אֶת גִּיד הַנָּשֶׁה

מְשָׁרְשֵׁי מִצְוָה זוֹ, כְּדֵי שֶׁתִּהְיֶה רָמָז לְיִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁאַף עַל פִּי שֶׁיִּסְבְּלוּ צָרוֹת רַבּוֹת בַּגָּלוּיוֹת מִיַּד הָעַמִּים וּמִיָּד בְּנֵי עֵשָׂו, שֶׁיִּהְיוּ בְּטוּחִים שֶׁלֹּא יֹאבְדוּ, אֶלָּא לְעוֹלָם יַעֲמֹד זַרְעָם וּשְׁמָם, וְיָבוֹא לָהֶם גּוֹאֵל וְיִגְאָלֵם מִיָּד צַר. וּבְזִכְרָם תָּמִיד עִנְיָן זֶה עַל יַד הַמִּצְוָה שֶׁתִּהְיֶה לְזִכָּרוֹן, יַעַמְדוּ בֶּאֱמוּנָתָם וּבְצִדְקָתָם לְעוֹלָם.

וְרָמָז זֶה הוּא לְפִי שֶׁאוֹתוֹ מַלְאָךְ שֶׁנִּלְחַם עִם יַעֲקֹב אָבִינוּ, שֶׁבָּא בַּקַּבָּלָה שֶׁהָיָה שָׂרוֹ שֶׁל עֵשָׂו, רָצָה לְעָקְרוֹ לְיַעֲקֹב מִן הָעוֹלָם הוּא וְזַרְעוֹ וְלֹא יָכוֹל לוֹ, וְצִעֲרוֹ בִּנְגִיעַת הַיָּרֵךְ, וְכֵן זֶרַע עֵשָׂו מְצַעֵר לְזֶרַע יַעֲקֹב, וּלְבַסּוֹף תִּהְיֶה לָהֶם יְשׁוּעָה מֵהֶם,

כְּמוֹ שֶׁמָּצִינוּ בְּאָב שֶׁזָּרְחָה לוֹ הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ לִרְפוּאָתוֹ וְנוֹשָׁע מִן הַצַּעַר, כֵּן יִזְרַח לָנוּ הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ שֶׁל מָשִׁיחַ וְיִרְפָּאֵנוּ מִצַּעֲרֵנוּ וְיִגְאָלֵנוּ, אָמֵן בִּמְהֵרָה בְיָמֵינוּ.

The Sefer Chinuch explains that the story of the struggle between the angel of Esau and Jacob foretells the future of the Jewish people. The nations will always come to fight with them, but they will never be able to completely defeat them; they can only cause them pain. This is something the Jews must remember in difficult times: though the pain is real, the enemy will not be able to completely prevail. After the pain and suffering, the sun of redemption will rise and heal all of our troubles, just as the sun healed Jacob.

Source 3 Nachmanides ad loc.

The angel's touch on Jacob was a strike against all the righteous of all generations, who also suffer from that same affliction. When was this most clearly demonstrated? In the generation of persecution.

וַיַּרְא כִּי לֹא יָכֹל לוֹ: מַלְאָכָיו גִּבֹּרֵי כֹחַ עֹשֵׂי דְבָרוֹ, וְעַל כֵּן לֹא יָכוֹל לוֹ הַמַּלְאָךְ לְהַזִּיקוֹ, כִּי לֹא הֻרְשָׁה רַק בַּמֶּה שֶׁעָשָׂה עִמּוֹ לְהָקֵעַ כַּף יֶרֶכוֹ.

He saw that he could not [prevail against] him: His angels, mighty in strength, fulfill His will, and therefore the angel could not harm Jacob, as he was only permitted to injure him by dislocating his hip.

וְאָמְרוּ בְּבְרֵאשִׁית רַבָּה (בראשית רבה עז, ג), נָגַע בְּכָל הַצַּדִּיקִים שֶׁעֲתִידִין לִהְיוֹת מִמֶּנּוּ, זֶה דּוֹרוֹ שֶׁל שְׁמָד. וְהָעִנְיָן, כִּי הַמְּאֹרָע כֻּלּוֹ רָמָז לְדוֹרוֹתָיו, שֶׁיִּהְיֶה דּוֹר בְּזַרְעוֹ שֶׁל יַעֲקֹב יִתְגַּבֵּר עָשָׂו עֲלֵיהֶם עַד שֶׁיִּהְיֶה קָרוֹב לְקַעְקֵעַ בֵּיצָתָן, וְהָיָה זֶה דּוֹר אֶחָד בִּימֵי חֲכָמֵי הַמִּשְׁנָה, כַּדּוֹר שֶׁל רַבִּי יְהוּדָה בֶּן בָּבָא וַחֲבֵרָיו.

And it is said in Bereishit Rabba (77:3), that this strike touched all the righteous who were destined to descend from him, that is, the generation of persecution. The meaning is that this event is an allusion to future generations, in which the descendants of Jacob will suffer from Esau's descendants until it will seem as though they will be completely destroyed. This occurred in a generation of sages, like the generation of Rabbi Yehuda ben Baba and his colleagues.

כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמְרוּ (שיר השירים רבה ב, ז), אָמַר רַבִּי חִיָּא בַּר אַבָּא, אִם יֹאמַר לִי אָדָם תֵּן נַפְשְׁךָ עַל קִדֻּשַּׁת שְׁמוֹ שֶׁל הקב"ה, אֲנִי נוֹתֵן, וּבִלְבַד שֶׁיַּהַרְגוּנִי מִיָּד, אֲבָל בְּדוֹרוֹ שֶׁל שְׁמָד אֵינִי יָכוֹל לִסְבֹּל. וּמָה הָיוּ עוֹשִׂים בְּדוֹרוֹ שֶׁל שְׁמָד? הָיוּ מְבִיאִין כַּדּוּרִיּוֹת שֶׁל בַּרְזֶל וּמְלַבְּנִין אוֹתָן בָּאוּר וְנוֹתְנִין אוֹתָן תַּחַת שָׁחְיֵיהֶן וּמַשְׁיִרִין נַפְשׁוֹתֵיהֶן מֵהֶן. וְיֵשׁ דּוֹרוֹת אֲחֵרִים שֶׁעָשׂוּ עִמָּנוּ כָּזֶה וְיוֹתֵר רַע מִזֶּה, וְהַכֹּל סָבַלְנוּ וְעָבַר עָלֵינוּ, כְּמוֹ שֶׁרָמַז וַיָּבֹא יַעֲקֹב שָׁלֵם.

As it is said (Song of Songs Rabba 2:7), Rabbi Chiya bar Abba said, "If a person were to ask me to give my life for the sanctification of G-d's name, I would give it, provided that they kill me immediately. But in a generation of persecution, I could not bear it." In the generation of persecution, what would they do? They would bring iron balls, heat them in fire, and place them under the arms of the people, drawing their souls from them. There have been other generations in which they did even worse to us, and all of it we endured and passed through, just as Jacob came through safely.

Nachmanides provides context for the great suffering that befell the children of Israel in their time of persecution. However, we must recognize that the survival of Jacob and the sun that healed him indicate to us that even in difficult times, all that our enemies can do to us is cause us pain, but they cannot defeat us. In the end, the sun will shine and heal us.

*

In this lesson, we will learn about one of the most difficult chapters in Jewish history—a bitter and difficult struggle with one of the harshest decrees imposed on our people, and a surprising statement made by the Mitteler Rebbe in relation to that decree

B. The Cantonist Decree

The Cantonist decree was a horrific decree in Czarist Russia, which mandated the forced conscription of children and young men from Jewish communities in Russia. This conscription was part of a policy aimed at influencing the Jewish population through the 're-education' of the younger generation and the forced conversion of the conscripts. The Jewish soldiers recruited in this way to the Czar's army were called "Nikolai's soldiers."

At the beginning of the summer of the year 1827, the Russian government published the Czar's new decree, which required a quota of Jewish boys 12 years of age and older to enlist in the Czar's army. According to the government order, the responsibility for recruitment fell on the leadership of the Jewish communities, and they were required to enlist Jewish boys and send the designated quota to the Russian army. A community that failed to meet its quota would face severe punishments, and the army would come to the town and carry out severe reprisals.

Since Jewish parents were terrified of their sons ending up in the army and facing spiritual and physical death, they would hide them when conscription dates arrived hoping to protect them, at least in the short term. With no volunteers, some community leaders resorted to kidnapping Jewish children in order to fill the recruitment quota and protect the community from even more severe punishments. For this purpose, they hired kidnappers ('chappers'), whose job was to kidnap children against the will of their parents and deliver them to the Russian authorities.

When the kidnappers were unable to capture young boys destined for conscription, they would also kidnap children under the age of 12 and declare them to be older. These children were sent for education and service in the Russian army for twenty-five years, during which time their commanders would torture them, and many of them would be maimed for life due to the brutal tortures practiced in the Russian training camps of that time.

However, the main aspect of military service for the Jews was a process of forced conversion, during which they were coerced into eating non-kosher food, desecrating Shabbat, and entering a foreign non-Jewish environment, something worse to them than death. When the children were separated from their mothers, the mothers would cry out, asking their children to swear that they would endure the trials and suffer all the torments for the sanctification of G-d's name.

Over the years, the soldiers were kept away from all contact with Judaism. They were forbidden from receiving letters in Yiddish and were required to communicate only in Russian. They were also forced to participate in Christian rituals and "educational lectures" by priests. As a result, an estimated twenty-five thousand soldiers converted to Christianity.

The decree lasted for thirty years and became engraved in the history of our people as one of its most painful periods. Then too, Jews asked: Why? Where is our G-d? Why does He allow this to happen?

This decree was enacted during the later years of the life of the Mitteler Rebbe, the second Rebbe of Chabad. Some say that pain over this harsh decree caused his passing. A week before then, he delivered an extraordinary Chasidic discourse, addressing this question: "To understand the

matter of taking Jewish soldiers by foreign hands," how is it possible that divine providence would send such obstacles to a person in fulfilling the Torah and mitzvot?

Before delivering this discourse, he expressed: "I knew about this seven years ago. when I was at the grave of my father, and I saw a great accusation against the young Jewish men. My spirit was broken within me, for I understood and knew that this would certainly happen over time."

>> The Rebbe

What Was Expected of the Cantonists?

In the later years of the Mitteler Rebbe of Lubavitch the cantonist decree of seizing Jewish children for army service began. The Mitteler Rebbe addressed this matter in a Chassidic discourse titled, "to understand the seizing of Jews by non-Jews to serve as soldiers."

בשנותיו האחרונות של אדמו"ר האמצעי - התחילה כבר הגזירה של חטיפת ילדים יהודיים לצבא. ובענין זה ישנו מאמר מאדמו"ר האמצעי - דיבור המתחיל "להבין ענין לקיחת אנשי חיל מישראל ביד נכרים"[1].

The discourse doesn't attempt to explain why G-d allowed such a decree. Such matters are Divine calculations that are beyond our grasp. Only when Moshiach comes will we be able to understand G-d's ways, and then we will say "I thank you G-d for you were angry with me."

Our primary question is what does G-d expect from these children. They are under the Czar's iron fist, and the authorities are doing everything they can to separate them from their heritage. They have no matzot on Pesach, no Tefillin, and no one to teach them Torah. What does G-d want from them?!

The Mitteler Rebbe explains that even though they are unable to fulfill many mitzvot, the few mitzvot they can observe with self-sacrifice are so precious and dear to G-d that they outweigh everything that they can't do. (Most mitzvot were simply impossible for them to observe, even with self-sacrifice. Only a minority of mitzvot could be observed through self-sacrifice.)

ושם מבאר, שאף שאין ביכולתם לקיים מצוות רבות, מכל מקום, היוקר שיש למעלה מאותן מצוות מועטות שהם מקיימים במסירות נפש [שהרי בנוגע לשאר המצוות לא תועיל אפילו מסירת נפש, כיון שאין זה בגדר האפשרות כלל, ורק מצוות מעטות מקיימים הם במסירות נפש], הרי זה שוקל ומכריע את כל שאר הענינים שאינם מקיימים.

The difficulty level for a cantonist child to observe a single mitzvah was extraordinary. As a result, the smallest mitzvah he observed was so valuable to G-d that it outweighed all of the other mitzvot he was unable to do.

Expectations of a "Captive Child"

This is also relevant to "captive children"—people who were raised without Jewish knowledge.

ועניין זה הוא תירוץ גם בנוגע ל"תינוק שנשבה לבין עובדי כוכבים ומזלות"[2]:

The question can be asked: Since these people don't observe Torah and mitzvot, their descent to this physical world seems pointless. Why did their souls come down into the world?

לכאורה אינו מובן: כיון ש"תינוק שנשבה" אינו מקיים תורה ומצוות, הרי ירידתו לעולם הזה היא לכאורה ללא תכלית, ואם כן, למה ירדה נשמתו לעולם הזה?

Let's take, for example, a Jewish child during the Holocaust who was saved by nuns in a Catholic convent, while their parents were killed in the Holocaust. This child has no chance of learning Torah or fulfilling commandments. So, what is the purpose of their soul coming into the world? After all, every Jew has a purpose, and this child also has a purpose. If that is the case, why would a soul be brought into the world in a situation where it has no chance of fulfilling its purpose?

This question can't be asked about regular Jews, even if they don't observe Torah and mitzvot properly. When such a Jew doesn't observe mitzvot it is because they made a choice not to do so, this doesn't affect the purpose of their descent to the world in order to actually observe the mitzvot. But for the uneducated Jew who knows nothing about Judaism, they can't be expected to observe mitzvot at all. What then is the purpose of their soul's descent?

בנוגע ליהודי סתם - הרי אפילו אם אינו מקיים תורה ומצוות כראוי, אין מקום לשאול למה ירדה נשמתו לעולם, כי, מה שאינו מקיים תורה ומצוות הרי זה מפני שיש לו בחירה, וכך הוא עושה בבחירתו, אבל כוונת ירידת נשמתו לעולם היא כדי שאכן יקיים תורה ומצוות; מה שאין כן "תינוק שנשבה לבין עובדי כוכבים ומזלות" ואינו יודע מאומה - הרי אי אפשר לדרוש ממנו לקיים תורה ומצוות, ואם כן אינו מובן, למה ירדה נשמתו לעולם?

When a person chooses not to follow the Torah, that is their choice. But when a child is born into a situation where they have no clue about Judaism, they don't even have a chance to choose correctly!

One Mitzvah With Ultimate Sacrifice

והתירוץ הוא:

במשך הזמן - בוודאי יזמינו לו מלמעלה לכל הפחות ענין אחד שייוודע לו אודותיו ותהיה לו היכולת לקיימו. וכיון שכל ימיו (עד אז) לא ידע אודות שום מצווה, וגם מצווה זו (שעתה נודע לו עליה) יעשנה מתוך מסירות נפש, כיון שיהיה קשה לו כו' - הרי בוודאי יעשה את המצווה מתוך חיות ביותר. וענין זה הוא יקר ביותר למעלה - שכדאי להוריד נשמה לעולם הזה למשך כמה וכמה שנים, מצד היוקר באותה מצווה יחידה שיקיים בחיות ובמסירות נפש.

This question can be answered based on the aforementioned discourse of the Mitteler Rebbe.

Over the course of time the uneducated Jew will certainly be presented with at least one opportunity to fulfill a mitzvah that they learned about. Since this person didn't know about this mitzvah their entire lives until now, and now they are going to do it with self-sacrifice, because it is hard for them, they will certainly fulfill the mitzvah with great passion. This passion is so precious to G-d that it is worth sending this soul down to the world for all those years, all for the sake of a single mitzvah they will observe with passion and self-sacrifice.

When a child is born into a situation far removed from Judaism, goes through life unawares, suddenly discovers that they are Jewish, and then performs a single commandment, like putting on tefillin or lighting Shabbat candles, that one commandment demands great self-sacrifice from them, considering their knowledge and lifestyle. That one commandment which they perform in their life, with self-sacrifice and spiritual awakening, is the very purpose for which their soul descended into the world.

The Universal Lesson

ענין זה נוגע לא רק ל"תינוק שנשבה", אלא נוגע גם לכל אחד ואחד מישראל:

כיון ש"אין צדיק בארץ אשר יעשה טוב ולא יחטא"[3] - אפילו לפירוש בתורת החסידות[4] ש"יחטא" הוא מלשון חסרון, ובפרט שאצל חלק גדול מבני ישראל הפירוש הוא כפשוטו... - הרי כל אחד ואחד הוא בבחינת "תינוק שנשבה".

This idea is relevant to every Jew, not only those who didn't receive any Jewish education.

The verse states: "There are no righteous people who never transgress." Chassidut interprets "transgress" here as doing something in a less-than-complete way, but the point still stands. At any rate, for many Jews transgression is a reality of life in the literal sense. As a result, every Jew is somewhat of an uneducated "captive child."

כבוד קדושת מורי וחמי אדמו"ר אומר[5], ששנותיו של יהודי אינן נמנות לפי הדרכון; יתכן שבדרכון נרשם שהוא בן שבעים שנה, אבל לפי שנותיו האמיתיות (השנים שהשתמש בהן לעניני תורה ומצוות) אינו אלא "תינוק".

ועל זה אומרים ליהודי שאין לו להתייאש.

הן אמת שלא מדובר כאן אודות "תינוק שנשבה" בגשמיות, אלא אודות מי שהביא את עצמו - בבחירתו - למעמד ומצב של "תינוק שנשבה", אבל אף על פי כן, הרי מה שעבר כבר עבר, ומה שנוגע הוא רק מכאן ולהבא, דהיינו ההווה והעתיד, ובנוגע מכאן ולהבא, עליו ליקח מהעבר רק את המעלה והצד הטוב שבו - שמצד היותו במצב של "תינוק שנשבה", שצריך להתחיל "לקחת את עצמו" ללימוד התורה וקיום המצוות - הרי זה יהיה בריבוי חיות ביותר, כמו בתינוק שנשבה בגשמיות.

The Rebbe Rayatz said that our years aren't counted according to our passport. Our passport can say that we are seventy years old, while in the truest sense of age—the years that we spend engaged in Torah and mitzvot—we are still only children.

The message to every Jew is to never despair.

We are indeed discussing people that aren't uneducated "captive children" in the literal sense, but people who chose to place themselves in circumstances akin to that of the "captive child." But the past belongs to the past, what is important is the present and the future. Looking forward, such a person needs to take with them the positive element from this situation. The positive side of this situation is that since this person needs to pick themselves up and apply themselves to Torah and mitzvot they do so with passion and excitement, like an uneducated "captive child" who first becomes aware of Torah.

A person who has missed some commandments in their life, or even stumbled into sin, should not despair and say, "That's it, I'm already lost." Their situation is like that of a child who was kidnapped, it is harder for them to return to the right path. They have become accustomed to a certain way of life, and now, when they realize they need to behave differently, it is very difficult for them to overcome the past and make the change.

Regarding this, they are told: On the contrary! Precisely because it is harder, and requires self-sacrifice, it is more precious and dear in the eyes of G-d.

The bottom line is that a person should never despair, no matter what their situation is.

The Sages discuss the halachic concept of "despair without conscious knowledge" in relation to lost objects. Based on this there is a saying that "despair only occurs without knowledge," because when a person knows and understands the situation they will never despair.

The answer is to study Torah, one passage after another, and observe one mitzvah after another, "one mitzvah leads to another mitzvah" until we achieve perfection in all of the 248 positive mitzvot.

ונקודת הדברים - שבאיזה מצב שרק נמצאים, אין להתייאש,

- ישנו פתגם על דרך הצחות[6] על יסוד לשון חז"ל[7] "יאוש שלא מדעת" - ש"יאוש" הוא "שלא מדעת", שכן, אילו היה בו דעת, לא היה מתייאש... -

אלא צריכים ללמוד תורה, עוד פסוק ועוד פסוק כו', וכן לקיים מצווה אחת, ו"מצווה גוררת מצווה"[8], עד שיגיע לשלימות בכל רמ"ח המצוות.

משיחת שבת פרשת צו, שושן פורים, ה'תשי"ד, בלתי מוגה.
תורת מנחם כרך י"א עמוד 135.

Imagine a man giving his wife a gift, and she is overjoyed to receive it. But if he tells her that he found it only five minutes ago, her excitement would quickly fade. This is because, when she appreciates the gift, it's not just the item itself that she values, but the effort and attention her husband put into it. The more effort he invests, the deeper the gesture, and the greater the closeness it demonstrates.

The same applies to our relationship with G-d. When we perform a mitzvah casually, without much thought or intention, that is how it appears, and that's its value. But when we sacrifice ourselves to fulfill a mitzvah—despite the challenges—it comes from the depths of our heart and makes a very deep impression Above.

C. הוספה

On Thursday, 26th of Kislev 5724 (1963), immediately after Rabbi Mendel Futerfas left his private audience with the Rebbe, the Rebbe requested that they search for the discourse "Lehavin Inyan Lekichas Anshei Chayil" (Understanding the Matter of Taking Jewish Soldiers) that the Mitteler Rebbe spoke about in connection with the conscription of the Cantonists to the Russian army. The Rebbe asked that they find the discourse that very night, or at the very least by the following day.

After searching, they found a copy of the begining of the discourse, but the second part was still missing. The Rebbe urged his secretaries several times to continue searching for the second part and suggested asking the elder chassidim, but they did not have the missing portion either. Eventually (it seems), they managed to find the second part.

Those who knew about the special efforts the Rebbe put into locating the discourse, right after the conclusion of Rabbi Mendel's audience, did not immediately understand the connection between the two. Only a few weeks later, on Shabbos Parshas Yisro, 18th of Shevat, 5724, the Shabbos prior to Rabbi Mendel's departure from the Rebbe's court, was the secret revealed.

That Shabbos, the Rebbe held a special farbrengen as a Tzeschem LeShalom, a farewell gathering, and explained that the farbrengen was in honor of three guests who had arrived. One of them had just come from the place where our brothers are suffering and in captivity (referring to Rabbi Mendel), another had never been there (referring to Rabbi Zalmon Jaffe), and the third had left Russia many years ago (referring to Reb Foleh Kahn).

The Rebbe instructed that the niggun usually sung before chassidic discourses be sung, and then he began saying a discourse on the verse "Vayedaber Elokim es kol hadvarim ha'eleh lomar" ("And G-d spoke all these words saying").

In the middle of the discourse, the Rebbe began speaking about how most of the positive commandments are no longer possible for us to fulfill in the exile era, and only 87 commandments remain in effect. He continued with deep sorrow in his voice, explaining that even these commandments, which are left for us to perform, are unattainable for many Jews in captivity and hardship (in Russia). These are the Jews

who endure great challenges with self-sacrifice, and despite not being great Torah scholars, they are standing firm in their commitment to the mitzvot even when it is not about the most severe transgressions.

The Rebbe then asked, with a cry and a broken heart, "Why are they being prevented from fulfilling the mitzvot?"

He then explained that the answer can be found in the discourse of the Mitteler Rebbe, "Lehavin Inyan Lekichas Anshei Chayil," which asks a similar question: How is it that Jewish boys are being kidnapped and prevented from living as Jews?

The Mitteler Rebbe explains that the spiritual reason for the destruction of the Temple and the suspension of most of the mitzvot was the lack of enthusiasm the Jewish people showed for the mitzvot. The attribute of judgment later arose and accused the Jewish people, saying that even now they are not fulfilling the mitzvot with joy and pleasure, but rather as habit.

In order to counter this accusation, G-d caused Jewish boys to be sent to war. When they are prevented from fulfilling Torah and mitzvot, they suffer and cry, but afterward, when they succeed in fulfilling a mitzvah with self-sacrifice, it is done with greater passion and joy, and this nullifies the accusation.

The Rebbe concluded with great emotion:

"Based on this, we can understand why there are some Jews today who are unable to fulfill mitzvot—not because of punishment, but as an act of kindness and mercy from Hashem. Through this, the accusation against the Jewish people is annulled, and because of this, we will ultimately merit to fulfill all the mitzvot in the complete and final redemption, with the rebuilding of the Third Beis Hamikdash."

Key Points:

• *The struggle between Jacob and the angel ends with Jacob's hip being dislocated, but not with his defeat. This event foreshadows the power dynamics between Jews and Gentiles in exile—although Jews may suffer persecution and even attempts at genocide, they will never be defeated (Midrash).*

• *The Mitteler Rebbe (second Rebbe of Chabad) asks why the soul of a Cantonist soldier, who cannot fulfill mitzvot, descended to the world. He explains that the fact that the soldier fulfills a few mitzvot, despite great difficulty and self-sacrifice, is very precious in G-d's eyes, and that is the reason for his soul's descent.*

• *This principle also applies to Jews who are considered "captives" and perform a mitzvah despite great hardship and sacrifice: such actions are greatly cherished above, and this is the purpose of their souls' descent to the world.*

• *This concept also applies to any Jew who has sinned and is in a state of "captivity" due to the difficulty they feel in changing their ways. The message is not to despair, and that the very struggle they experience is very precious in G-d's eyes.*

Takeaway:

Just before we "throw in the towel" and despair over a seemingly impossible change in our Jewish practices, we must remind ourselves that this difficulty is very precious in the eyes of the Creator. This very struggle carries deep significance and great potential for us.