

One of the most powerful images in the Torah about Yaakov Avinu is that of Yaakov struggling with a mysterious being, “ish”, before his encounter with his brother Eisav (Bereishit 32:25). The term used to describe this struggle is *Va'yei'avek* ויאבק.

Rashi suggests that the word *avak* relates to *chibbuk* –to embrace intellectually and emotionally. Accordingly, the Torah does not record a physical confrontation but rather a meeting of embrace between Ya'akov and the *ish*,

In reacting to this interpretation, the Ketav Sofer, (1815-1871) Rabbi Avraham (son of the Chatam Sofer, 1762-1839), explains that this idea has resonated throughout our history. There are times when the *ish*, representative of the outside world, who would try to approach and embrace us with the intent of convincing us to assimilate.

Not only did this concern apply in the times of the Ketav Sofer, but it prevailed in the days of Purim (in Persia) during days of Chash'mona'im (Chanukah), and it resonates very strongly today. The *Neshama* (soul) of the Jewish people is at far greater risk in the Diaspora than our physical body; and without a *Neshama*, we will lose our direction and identity.

Ketav Sofer emphasizes that the struggle between Ya'akov and the *ish* concludes with Yaakov Avinu limping as the sun rose (32:32). Precisely when the sun is glowing and the darkness of oppression diminishes, we see ourselves “limping” from our losses to intermarriage. Throughout Jewish history whenever the darkness of anti-Semitism prevailed, the marriage of non-Jews to Jews was *verboten* (forbidden). In America today, intermarriage has become commonplace, and according to the Pew report it goes as high as 80-85% in parts of the country. Baruch HaShem, the figures are no where near that in the Orthodox communities. However, we cannot remain complacent and say “that doesn't concern US”. For *kol Yisrael areivim zeh bazeh* (Sotah 37a), all Jews are responsible for one another, we are one people, and one *Neshama*.

The challenge for our times is to re-focus our priorities solely from Jewish physical defense to Jewish spiritual defenses, to radically reprioritize communal resources to the spiritual and educational spheres. The State of Israel is reaching out to our Jewish brethren throughout the world by spending millions of Shekalim for the Birthright Program and funding large sums of money for Kiruv programs. But all that is still not enough; we are still “limping”. It will take a great deal more imagination and effort

Those Jews who are leaving the fold are not “resha'im” or bad Jews, they are merely “Tinok she'nishba”, non-religious Jews without any knowledge or feeling about Judaism, and we must not consider them as “non-religious”, but “not-yet-religious”.