

Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts
from
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Vayishlach



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Torah Wellsprings - Vayishlach

Bitachon

The Shevet Mussar writes that the word *bitachon* comes from בטח, which means to be certain. The ideal level of one's *bitachon* is to feel certain that Hashem will save him.¹

It states (Tehillim 22:5) בְּךָ בָטְחוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ וַתַּפְּלֵטמוּ, "Our ancestors trusted in You; they trusted and You rescued them." The word בָּטְחוּ, "trusted" is written twice in this pasuk. Why? It could have stated, בְּךָ בָטְחוּ וַתַּפְּלֵטמוּ, "Our ancestors trusted in You and You rescued them." Why does the *pasuk* write בָּטְחוּ again?

Shevet Mussar replies that the second בָּטְחוּ doesn't imply that Hashem saved them. It describes the level of *bitachon* of our ancestors. The *pasuk* begins, בְּךָ בָטְחוּ אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, "Our ancestors trusted in You." There are many levels of *bitachon*. What type of *bitachon* did they have? The *pasuk* replies, בָּטְחוּ וַתַּפְּלֵטמוּ, their *bitachon* was so strong, they felt like they were already saved.²

The topic of *bitachon* is discussed in this week's parashah when it says (34:25) וַיָּבֹאוּ עַל הָעִיר בָּטָח, "They came upon the city with confidence, with *bitachon*." This refers to Shimon and Levi, who came to wage war against Shechem. Shevet Mussar explains that they came with *bitachon*, without any fear. As it states וַיָּבֹאוּ עַל הָעִיר בָּטָח. Therefore,

Hashem performed miracles for them, and they were able to kill all the people who fought with them.

In this week's parashah, we find that Yaakov was afraid and worried, as it states (32:8), וַיֵּרָא יַעֲקֹב מְאֹד וַיִּצָּר לוֹ, "Yaakov became very afraid and distressed." Daas Zekainim m'Baalei HaTosfos says we should translate the *pasuk* as follows:

וַיִּצָּר, Yaakov was very afraid, וַיֵּרָא יַעֲקֹב מְאֹד, and he was upset with himself for being afraid. Hashem promised that He would protect Yaakov, as it states (28:15) וְהָנָה אֲנִי עִמָּךְ, "Behold I am with you, and I will guard you wherever you go," and now Yaakov was afraid of Eisav. Yaakov asked himself, "Why am I afraid? What happened to my strong *emunah* and *bitachon* that I used to have?"

Rashi (32:11) writes, שִׁמְאָה מִשְׁהִבְטָחָתִי, "The reason I am afraid is that from the time You promised me [to guard me] perhaps I have become soiled with aveiros, and this will cause me to be given over into Eisav's hands."

The Leshem (Vayeitzei, on pasuk 28:20) elaborates that Yaakov Avinu had a special reason to be afraid, this time. It was an exception to the rule (as he explains there). But generally, one

1. Shevet Sofer (quoted in Shaarei Simchah) teaches that a person should trust in Hashem with all his heart, until he feels certain that he will be helped. When one has this *bitachon*, he will always be calm and worry-free. He will feel in his heart as though his salvation has already come.

An important point to remember: *Bitachon* isn't only for people going through very difficult times. It is for all people, no matter what they are dealing with in life. For the major issues, and for the relatively minor ones, one must have *bitachon* and trust that Hashem will certainly help him.

2. Reb Mordechai Benet zt'l (Drashos 2) also tells us that *bitachon* means that we should feel certain that Hashem will help us. He learns this from the *pasuk* (Tehillim 13:6) וַאֲנִי בְחַסְדְּךָ בָטָחְתִּי... "I trusted in Your kindness..." אֲשִׁירָה לָהּ כִּי גָמַל עָלַי, "I will sing to Hashem because He has bestowed it upon me." כִּי גָמַל עָלַי, is in past tense. In Dovid HaMelech's eyes, the salvation had already come. This is how confident he was in Hashem's salvation.

should trust Hashem with certainty that He will help him.

The Leshem writes, "Although it is known that *יראת חטא*, fear of sin, is a very wonderful level as it states (Mishlei 28:14) *אַשְׁרֵי אָדָם מִפְּחָד תָּמִיד*, 'Fortunate is the man who is always afraid' – it means to be fearful not to commit any more aveiros. It doesn't mean that one is afraid that maybe he won't receive good

because of his aveiros. Rather, the way of tzaddikim is (Tehillim 112:7) *לֹא יִירָא נָכוֹן*, 'He will not fear bad news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in Hashem.' He trusts in Hashem, and he has no fears at all."³

Chesed

It states (33:17) *וַיַּעֲקֹב נָסַע סִכְתָּה וַיָּבֹן לוֹ בֵּית וּלְמִקְנֵהוּ* "Yaakov traveled עֲשָׂה סִכְתָּה עַל כֵּן קָרָא שֵׁם הַמָּקוֹם סִכּוֹת

3. Several times, in Shemonah Esrei, we say the word *כי*, and it means "because", and it is used as a reason Hashem should answer our tefillos. For example, we say *וְגִאֲלוּנוּ גְּאוּלוּהָ שְׁלִימָה כִּי א-ל גּוֹאֵל חֹזֶק אַתָּה*, "Redeem us with a complete redemption, *because* You, Hashem, are a strong redeemer." The word *כי* explains the reason Hashem should save us. It is because Hashem is a strong redeemer.

Also, in the brachah *רפאנו ה' ונרפא...*, we say "Heal us Hashem, and we will be healed..." The reason Hashem should save us is *כי א-ל מֶלֶךְ רּוֹפֵא נֶאֱמָן וְרַחוּם אַתָּה* *because* You, Almighty King, are a faithful and merciful Healer." Once again, *כי* is the reason Hashem should heal us.

This brings us to understand an important lesson in bitachon. In the brachah *וְלֹעֲלֵם לֹא יִבּוֹשׁ* we say, *עַל הַצְדִּיקִים* "May we never be abashed because we trust in You." In this brachah, we express that Hashem should help us and spare us from shame *בִּי כִּךְ בְּטָהֲנוּ*, *כי* *בִּי כִּךְ בְּטָהֲנוּ*, because we trust in Him. The bitachon itself is a reason for Hashem to grant us salvation. In other words, we trust and rely on Hashem's kindness. And if we aren't of Hashem's kindness, the merit of the bitachon itself will help, and Hashem will certainly bestow His kindness upon us.

Reb Chaim Kanievsky zt'l in his sefer Orchos Yosher (פחד ודאגה) writes, "Some people are always afraid. They are afraid of all kinds of disasters, such as disease, war, evil people, and so on. Throughout their lives, they are always worried: Maybe this will happen, or maybe that will occur? Some are afraid to travel due to their fears. Some are afraid to leave their homes, r'l. This isn't good. Chazal (Brachos 60a) say, 'There was a student who went after Reb Yishmael b'Reb Yosi in the market of Tzion. Reb Yishmael saw that the student was afraid. He told him, *חטאה את*, 'You are a sinner,' as it states (Yeshayah 33:14) *פָּחַדוּ בְּצִיּוֹן חַטָּאִים*, 'Sinners in Tzion were afraid.'

"The student asked, 'But behold it states (Mishlei 28:14) *אַשְׁרֵי אָדָם מִפְּחָד תָּמִיד*, 'Fortunate is the man who is always afraid'!"

"Reb Yishmael replied, *ההוא בדברי תורה כתיב*, that pasuk refers to Torah study. Rashi explains, 'The pasuk is saying, fortunate is the man who is always afraid that he might forget Torah. Due to his fear, he will constantly review his studies.' This fear is valid and beneficial. But we should cleanse our hearts from all other fears. Besides, fear ruins one's health and causes illnesses, as it states (Sanhedrin 100b), 'Don't bring worries into your heart because worries killed many mighty people.' In general, fear is a sign of a lack of emunah. If he would believe with emunah sheleimah that everything comes from Hakadosh Baruch Hu, and one can't stub his finger if it weren't decreed so in heaven, why would he be afraid? If the decree was made, *chas v'shalom*, there is nothing he can do to avoid it. All clever ideas and strategies won't prevent Hashem's plan from coming to fruition. And if it wasn't decreed in heaven, there is certainly nothing to fear. We are always in Hashem's hands, during war and during peacetime, and Hashem has many ways to perform His will. One shouldn't be afraid of anything but Hakadosh Baruch Hu, as well as having fear of committing an aveirah, *chas v'shalom*, or not properly performing a mitzvah. Other than these matters, there is nothing to fear. Although Chazal (Bava Kama 60b) tell us to make hishtadlus and to be cautious, as it states, 'If there is a plague in the city, stay at home. If there is a famine in the city, travel elsewhere.' This is because we are obligated to make hishtadlus. But there is no reason to be afraid and worried. Chazal (Taanis 22a) praise the people who are always happy and bring happiness to others. Chazal say that they are *בני עולם הבא*, members of Olam Haba."

to Succos, and built himself a house, and for his livestock he made huts (סכות). He therefore called the name of the place Succos." It seems that it would make more sense for him to name the place בֵּית, House, since a house was made for the people. Why was the place named סכות, for the huts which he made for his animals?

The answer is, he built the house for himself, as it states וַיִּבֶן לוֹ בַּיִת, "he built *himself* a house." He built the huts for others, for his animals, as it states וַיִּלְמְקְנֵהוּ עֲשֵׂה סֹכֶת. The most important deeds of a human being are those that he does for others. Therefore, the place was named סכות. (Shevet HaLevi, (ד"ה קטנתי).

Yaakov was left alone when he returned to retrieve the כְּטָנִים, small vessels he left behind, and then someone attacked him, as it states (32:25) וַיִּזְתֶּר יַעֲקֹב לְבָדּוֹ וַיִּנָּאֶבֶק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ, "Yaakov was left alone, and a man wrestled with him." He became lame from this battle, as it states (32:26) וַיִּנָּע בְּכַף יָרְכּוֹ וַתִּקַּע בּוֹ יָרֵךְ יַעֲקֹב בְּהִיאָבֶקוֹ עִמּוֹ, "He struck the socket of his hip, and Yaakov's hip-socket was dislocated as he wrestled with him."

The Torah writes (32:33) עַל כֵּן לֹא יֵאָכְלוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת גִּיד הַנֶּזֶף עַל כֵּף הַיָּרֵךְ עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה כִּי נָגַע בְּכַף יָרֵךְ יַעֲקֹב הַנֶּזֶף אֲשֶׁר עַל כֵּף הַיָּרֵךְ עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה כִּי נָגַע בְּכַף יָרֵךְ, "Therefore, Bnei Yisrael are not to eat the גִּיד הַנֶּזֶף on the hip-socket to this day, because he struck Yaakov's hip-socket on the גִּיד הַנֶּזֶף ... " The Chizkuni writes, "Bnei Yisrael were commanded about this mitzvah to remember what happened to Yaakov Avinu when he was left alone... His sons didn't go with him, and therefore, he returned limping."

This is an essential lesson in chesed. We shouldn't allow our fellow man ever to feel alone. We must be prepared to help him in any way he needs. We should seek to say kind words to our fellow man. The Torah talks about the kind words the midwife said to Rachel when she was suffering a difficult labor while giving birth to Binyamin. It states וַיְהִי בְּהִקְשִׁיתָהּ בְּלִדְתָּהּ וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ הַמִּיִּלְדֶּת אֶל תִּירָאִי, "It was when she had difficulty in her labor that the midwife said to her "Have no fear, for this one, too, is a son for

you." Why is this pasuk written in the Torah? Why do we have to know what the midwife said? It is teaching us that, in Hashem's eyes, it is precious and a great merit when one gives encouragement to his fellow man and helps him overcome his fears and worries.

It is likely that this time, the מִיִּלְדֶּת, midwife didn't accomplish anything with her encouraging words. Rachel certainly knew that she was giving birth to a son, since that was what she was praying for. Her tefillos were (30:24) יִסָּף ה' לִי בֶן אָחֵר, that she should bear a son. Furthermore, the Imahos were *nevios*, so she certainly knew that she was bearing a son. Nevertheless, the מִיִּלְדֶּת kind words are written in the Torah, and we read them every year. About this, we can say the adage of Chazal, "There is a person who acquires Olam HaBa in a moment." With one kind word, see how much she earned!

It states in parashas Vayeitzei (29:10) וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב וַיִּגָּל אֶת הָאָבֶן מֵעַל פִּי הַבְּאֵר וַיִּשְׁקֵן אֶת צֹאן לָבָן אָחִי אִמּוֹ, "Yaakov came forward and rolled the stone off the mouth of the well and he watered the sheep of Lavan his mother's brother." The Torah (29:8, and Rashi) tells that all the shepherds had to gather and push the stone off the well together. It was a very heavy stone. But Yaakov easily took off the stone from the well. Rashi writes that he took off the large stone like someone removing a cork from a bottle. "This is to tell us that he was very strong."

In Tefilas Geshem, we pray that Hashem give us rain in Yaakov Avinu's merit. We say, יִחַד לֵב וּגַל אֶבֶן מִפִּי בֹאֵר מַיִם, בעבורו אל תמנע מים, "He united his heart, and he rolled the stone off the mouth of the well. In his merit, don't refrain from us water." Reb Chaim Shmuelevitz (Sichos Mussar Maamar 51) asks that since it was easy for Yaakov Avinu to remove the stone from the well, why is this merit discussed as a reason that Hashem should give us rain?

He answers that the stone was huge and heavy, even for Yaakov Avinu. But he יִחַד לֵב, united his heart. This means that he united his heart to the mission of helping his fellow

man. His deepest wish, burning in his heart, was to help others. It gave him strength, and he was able to lift the stone easily. We are asking for rain in the merit of Yaakov Avinu's **יחד לב**, deep desire to help others.⁴

The Great Merit of Chesed

The translation of **מַלְאָכִים** can either mean angels or messengers, depending on the context. At the beginning of the parashah, it states (32:4) **וַיִּשְׁלַח יַעֲקֹב מַלְאָכִים לְפָנָיו אֶל עֵשָׂו אָחִיו**, "Yaakov sent malachim ahead of him to Eisav his brother..."

Rashi writes, **מַלְאָכִים ממש**, that **מַלְאָכִים** in this pasuk is literal. He sent actual angels. He

didn't send his servants to be the messengers. But why was that necessary? Why disturb the malachim from their avodas hakodesh?

Rebbe Bunim of Peshischa *zt'l* answers that there is no greater *avodas hakodesh* than to do a favor for Yidden. The malachim were glad to do this *shlichus*, and to help Yaakov Avinu and his family, to save them from *Eisav HaRasha*. This deed is greater than the avodah the malachim perform before Hashem. Yaakov sent **מַלְאָכִים ממש**, literal angels, to teach us this lesson. Chesed is from the highest accomplishments and greatest deeds one can do.⁵

4. We quote the words of Reb Chaim Shmuelevitz: "We have to explain that Yaakov Avinu's deed wasn't a supernatural act at all. Rather, when one has a strong desire to help others, that gives him the strength that he didn't have before. This is because a person's physical strength depends on his spiritual strength. When the spiritual strength is within the person, he can act far above his natural limits. Therefore, because of his **יחד לב**, that he united all of his strength to do chesed with others, we request **אל תמנע מים**, Hashem shouldn't withhold from us water."

5. A poor person came to the home of the rav of a city and showed him a *hamlatzah* (letter of recommendation) he received from the Divrei Chaim of Tzanz *zt'l*. (It was a rare letter because the Divrei Chaim was old at the time and had stopped writing such letters. The Divrei Chaim made an exception for this person because the man was very poor, and he was a person worthy of respect.) The letter meant a lot to the rav of this city because he was a chasid of the Divrei Chaim, and he handed him a very generous donation.

The poor man saw that the rav was going out of his way to help him, so he suggested, "Perhaps the rav can come with me to the homes of the wealthy people in the city? They don't know me. If the rav will accompany me, they will certainly give me more generously."

The rav declined, saying, "I gave you a large sum of money because of my rebbe's *hamlatzah*. However, I can't go with you to people's homes. That would be *bitul Torah* for me."

That year, this rav traveled to the Divrei Chaim for Shavuot. After yom tov, he went to take leave of the Tzanzer Rav. The Tzanzer Rav told him, "The Torah writes **איש** in parashas Vayishlach (32:25) **וַיִּתְּרַם יַעֲקֹב לְבָדּוֹ**, **וַיִּצְלַח יַעֲקֹב אִישׁ עִמּוֹ עַד עֹלֹת הַשָּׁחַר**, "Yaakov was left alone and a man wrestled with him, until daybreak." Rashi writes that this **איש** was the **שרו של עשו**, Eisav's malach.

איש is also written in parashas Vayeshev (37:15) **וַיִּשְׁאַלְהוּ הָאִישׁ לְאָמֹר מָה תִּבְקֹשׁ**, "A man discovered him, and behold! – he was blundering in the field. The man asked him, saying, 'What do you seek?'" Chazal say that this **איש** was malach Gavriel. What is the difference between the two **איש**? Why is one the holy malach Gavriel and the other the **שרו של עשו**, the malach of Eisav?

The difference is that in parashas Vayeshev, the **איש** was offering help. He asked, **מָה תִּבְקֹשׁ**, "What do you seek?" When one seeks to help his fellow man, he is malach Gavriel. In this week's parashah, the **איש** wasn't interested in helping Yaakov. In fact, he said (32:27) **שִׁלְחִי בִי עֵלָה הַשָּׁחַר**, "Let me go for dawn has broken." Rashi writes that the malach wanted to leave because it was the morning, and it was his turn to sing Shirah to Hashem. When one doesn't want to help his fellow man, even if it is because of his devotion to other aspects of avodas Hashem, that is **שרו של עשו**, Eisav's malach.

With this vort, the Tzanzer Rav was offering a subtle rebuke to the rav, teaching him that his devotion to Torah shouldn't get in the way of helping another Yid in need.

The Ahavas Shalom zt'l (parashas Kedoshim, in the הגדה"ה) tells a personal anecdote: "When I was learning Torah, or when I was having deep, holy thoughts, and then I saw a Yid, even a simple Yid, who was sad, and wanted to speak to me for a half-hour to calm down and relieve his distress, I would stop my Torah and all the great things I was occupied in. The main thing is to do a favor for a Yid."

Toras Chaim of Kosov zt'l explains the pasuk (32:29) בִּי שְׂרִיתָ עִם אֱלֹקִים וְעַם אֲנָשִׁים, that even when it is שְׂרִיתָ עִם אֱלֹקִים, which means that he was *davuk* in Hashem, his thoughts remained עִם אֲנָשִׁים, with people, thinking what he can do to help others.

It is known that the Baal Shem Tov zt'l said, "It is worthwhile for a person to live seventy or eighty years, just to do a favor for a Yid, once" (היום יום חב"ד ה' אייר).

It states (Shemos 19:14) וַיֵּרֶד מֹשֶׁה מִן הָהָר אֶל הָעָם, "Moshe descended from the mountain to the people." This hints that Moshe was prepared to leave the mountain, representing extreme closeness with Hashem, אֶל הָעָם, to help the Jewish nation with whatever they needed.

Reb Shalom Schwadron zt'l lived in Yerushalayim, and he often traveled to Bnei Brak to speak with the Chazon Ish zt'l. His friends and neighbors in Yerushalayim heard about this and began asking him to travel to the Chazon Ish on their behalf so

that he could ask the Chazon Ish their questions. After this occurred several times, he asked the Chazon Ish whether he must travel from Yerushalayim to Bnei Brak for their sake, as this resulted in bitul Torah.

The Chazon Ish replied, חסד איז די פינטאלע פון, "Chesed is the innermost point of the neshamah" (written in Maaseh Ish, vol.3 p.188).

Reb Moshe Yehoshua Landau z'l told the Chazon Ish that his involvement in chesed projects occupies a lot of his time. The Chazon Ish replied that Torah is different than all *chochmos*. Most wisdoms have to do with the mind, but Torah is related to the neshamah. "When a person does chesed for his fellow man, his neshamah has an elevation, and now he can understand Torah, more and better than before."

(Nevertheless, one is advised to speak with his Rebbe, and seek *daas Torah*, and not to *pasken* these matters alone. This is because the yetzer hara can use these ideas as an excuse for bitul Torah. But with the proper guidance, he will get a better picture of what Hashem expects from him; how much time to be occupied with performing chesed, and how much time to devote to Torah study.)⁶

In parashas Lech Lecha (12:2) Hashem says to Avraham, וְאָנֹכִי לְגִי גָדוֹל וְאֶבְרָכְךָ וְאֶגְדָּלְךָ שְׁמֶךָ וְהָיָה בְּרָכָה. Rashi writes, "וְאָנֹכִי לְגִי גָדוֹל" this means that we will say [in Shemoneh Esrei] אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם. Then it states וְאֶבְרָכְךָ. This means we will say אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק, and וְאֶגְדָּלְךָ שְׁמֶךָ means we will say אֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב. Perhaps we finish the

6. Reb Naftali Gross Shlita relates that he and his young brother were in Antwerp on a Friday night in the beis medresh of Rebbe Yankele of Antwerp zt'l. There was a shalom zachur in the beis medresh that week, and one of Rebbe Yankele's grandchildren filled up a bag with *arbes* so that he could eat them during the tish.

Rebbe Yankele began the tish, saying Shalom Aleichem, and his grandson was eating from the treasure he had prepared for himself. Reb Naftali's young brother watched with envy as the rebbe's grandson ate *arbes*. He thought, "This boy was wise. He prepared *arbes* for the tish. I wish I had also prepared something to nosh on."

In the middle of Shalom Aleichem, Rebbe Yankele motioned to his grandson that he should share his *arbes* with the Gross boy sitting next to him. The rebbe did this several times during his holy avodah at the tish that night.

The lesson we can learn from this is that even when one is involved in his holy avodos, nevertheless, he shouldn't forget to help his fellow man, to give him what he needs.

brachah with all of them? Therefore, it states וְהָיָה בְרַכָּה. The חתימה, the end of the brachah will be with you [מִגֵּן אַבְרָהָם], and not with them." בְּ חוֹתְמוֹ, at the end of the brachah only say Avraham's name.

The Kotzker, the Divrei Chaim, and other tzaddikim zt'l explain that Rashi is hinting to us that חתימה, the end of galus, will be in Avraham's merit. Each of the Avos had their special qualities. Avraham Avinu excelled in chesed. בְּ חוֹתְמוֹ means that the galus will end in the merit of us going in Avraham Avinu's ways and performing chesed for Yidden.

Several parshios of the Torah discuss Avraham and Yaakov, but only one parashah (Toldos) discusses Yitzchak Avinu. Gedolim explain that this is because the main middos that Hashem wants in the world are the middos that Avraham and Yaakov excelled in, the middos of *chesed* and *rachamim*. Although Yitzchak's middah of *gevurah* is essential and one of the foundations of the world, the Torah elaborates more on Avraham and Yaakov, so we will know where to place their emphasis in avodas Hashem. We must be occupied in doing deeds of chesed and rachamim, to help others, as it states (Tehillim 89:3) עוֹלָם הָקֵד יִבְנֶה, the world was built with chesed.

Escape from the Yetzer HaRa

After Yaakov's children took the spoils from the war against Shechem, Yaakov told them (35:2) הָסְרוּ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי הַגֵּזֶר אֲשֶׁר בְּתוֹכְכֶם וְהַחֲלִיפוּ שְׂמֹלֵתֵיכֶם, "Discard the alien gods that are in your midst; cleanse yourselves and

change your clothes." Rashi explains that he meant that they should discard the avodah zarah items and avodah zarah clothes that they took from the spoils of war.

Kli Yakar teaches that there is another lesson in Yaakov's words. He was telling them to discard the yetzer hara that was within their hearts. This is alluded to in Yaakov's words, הָסְרוּ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי הַגֵּזֶר אֲשֶׁר בְּתוֹכְכֶם, "Discard the alien gods that are in your midst." This refers to the yetzer hara, which is בְּתוֹכְכֶם, within your hearts. As it states in Tehillim (81:10) לֹא יִהְיֶה בְּךָ אֱלֹהֹת אֲחֵרִים, "There shall be no foreign god within you," and Chazal (Shabbos 105b) say, "What is the אֱלֹהֹת אֲחֵרִים, 'foreign god' within man? This is the yetzer hara!" So, the Kli Yakar explains that הָסְרוּ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי הַגֵּזֶר אֲשֶׁר בְּתוֹכְכֶם, "Discard the alien gods that are in your midst," means to cleanse one's thoughts, to be clean and pure, and not stemming from the yetzer hara.⁷

After telling them to cleanse their minds, Yaakov told them to cleanse their deeds from all aveiros. This is the meaning of וְהַחֲלִיפוּ שְׂמֹלֵתֵיכֶם, "Change your clothes." This means to have good deeds, and no aveiros. This alludes to (Koheles 9:8) בְּכָל יֵת יִהְיֶה בְּגָדֶיךָ לָבָן, "Let your garments always be white". This prepared them to come before Hashem.

The first step for kedushah and taharah is when a person tells himself, "I am holy, and therefore, I don't want to be among people who don't have yiras Shamayim. I don't want to become tamei with those who are צרוע זב (alluding to people who lack fear of heaven). Also, I don't want to go to places where the guidelines of kedushah aren't upheld."⁸

7. On a yahrtzeit, there's a custom to study chapters of Mishnayos that the first letter of the chapters spells the name of the niftar. For example, if the niftar's name was שלום, the chapters studied could be Brachos ch.7, which begins with the letter ש (שלשה שאכלו), then Maasar Sheini ch.2, which begins with a ל (לא יאמר), then D'may ch.2, which begins with a ו (ואלו דברים), and then Brachos ch.1, which begins with a מ (מאומתי קורין). The Beis Avraham zt'l said that very few chapters of Mishnayos begin with a צ, and the two that do begin with a צ are in seder Taharos (Parah ch.9 and 12). This hints that to be a tzaddik (צ), one needs to toil on Taharos, purity. He must purify his thoughts and deeds at all times.

8. It is known that the Chofetz Chaim zt'l would travel from city to city to sell his sefarim. In those days, people living in cities distant from Radin often had never heard of the Chofetz Chaim, and they didn't

A hint to this is in Rashi (32:5) on the pasuk "עם לבן גרתי", "I have lived with Lavan." Rashi writes that גרתי is gematria תרי"ג. Yaakov was telling Eisav, "I lived with the rasha Lavan, and I kept the Taryag mitzvos, and I didn't learn from his bad ways." Yaakov was humble. Why did he say this? He was telling Eisav, "Listen, my brother: Even now, when I am making peace with you, I will not tarnish my neshamah and my kedushah for your sake. When I was in Lavan's house, I maintained my kedushah, and I didn't learn from his bad ways. This is because I am not a regular person. I will never copy your ways."

This is a lesson in the path of ויגבה לבו, to have *gaavah d'kedushah*, to have an inner pride, and to refuse to lower oneself to resemble the lower ways of others.

Another hint to this is the pasuk (33:18) וַיָּבֹא יַעֲקֹב שָׁלֵם עִיר שָׁכֶם... וַיֵּחַן אֶת פְּנֵי הָעִיר "Yaakov arrived intact at the city of Shechem... and he encamped the face of the city." The Netziv says that פְּנֵי הָעִיר "face of the city" means that he dwelled outside of the city. He didn't live within the city because the people of Shechem were corrupt and sinful. Yaakov Avinu preferred to live alone, rather than to become chalilah influenced by the goyim.

Yaakov Avinu said (32:5-6) וַיֹּאמֶר לִי... שׂוֹר וְחֻמּוֹר, "I lived with Lavan... I have acquired oxen and donkeys...". A man once said to the Brisker Rav that Yaakov was explaining to Eisav how he was able to maintain his kedushah and to perform the 613 mitzvos, even when he lived with Lavan. It was because he considered Lavan and his friends to be like שׂוֹר וְחֻמּוֹר, animals. No one desires to copy the ways of animals, and he, too, didn't want to copy the ways of Lavan and his friends.

The Brisker Rav praised the vort (adding that although this isn't the meaning of the *pasuk*, the advice is correct. Just as one wouldn't want to emulate the ways of animals, one shouldn't desire to emulate the ways of resha'im).

Making Boundaries

Rashi (32:5) on the pasuk "עם לבן גרתי", writes, "עם לבן הרשע גרתי, ותרי"ג מצות שמרתי, ולא למדתי ממעשיו הרעים", "I lived with the Lavan the rasha and I kept the 613 mitzvos and I didn't learn from his bad ways." Shevet Mishor zt'l teaches that the word שמרתי hints at making safeguards and boundaries. Yaakov was telling Eisav that he managed to maintain his kedushah because he made gedarim, boundaries, to distance himself from aveiros.⁹

know to honor him accordingly. Therefore, he didn't always have the best accommodations.

Once, someone invited him to his home for the Shabbos meals. The Chofetz Chaim asked him who else would be eating there. The man who invited him was shocked when he heard this question. He thought to himself, "You should be happy that I invited you. Why are you checking who will be there?" The Chofetz Chaim told him, "My name is Yisrael Meir from Radin. I wrote the Mishnah Berurah and other sefarim. Therefore, I asked who else would be at the meal because I will only eat with people who are ehrlich and G-d fearing."

9. We quote the Shevet Mishor: "We can explain that Yaakov chose the word שמרתי, 'I guarded the mitzvos' instead of קיימתי, 'I kept the mitzvos', because Yaakov thought that Eisav wouldn't believe him when he tells him that he kept all 613 mitzvos. Eisav would say, 'How can one live in Lavan's house and not be influenced by his ways? Therefore, Yaakov hinted to Eisav the technique he used to be protected from aveiros. He explained that he would erect safeguards and boundaries around each mitzvah and obligation. If he will be tempted to transgress an aveira ch"v, he will only transgress the boundary, and not the mitzvah itself. This is the meaning of תרי"ג מצות שמרתי, 'I guarded the 613 mitzvos.' He meant that he erected safeguards. He said שמרתי, which is from the word משמרת, as it states (Vayikra 18:30) ושמרתם את משמרת, and Chazal (Yevamos 21) say that this means, 'Make safeguards for the Torah.' In this manner, I didn't learn from his evil ways."

Reb Yehudah Tzadka zt'l told a mashal, using the concept of a חפץ חשוד, a suspicious item. (This occurs when

Towards the beginning of the parashah, before Yaakov met with Eisav, he prayed that Hashem protect him. Yaakov said (32:12-13) הַצִּילֵנִי נָא מִיַּד אָחִי מִיָּד יַעֲשֹׂוּ כִּי יָרָא אֶנְכִּי אֹתוֹ... וְאַתָּה אֲמַרְתָּ הַיֵּטֵב אֵיטִיב עִמָּךְ וְשָׁמַרְתִּי אֶת זַרְעֲךָ כְּחֹל הַיָּם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִסְפָּר מֵרֵב "Rescue me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Eisav, for I fear him... For You said, 'I will surely do good with you, and I will make your offspring like the sand of the sea, which is too numerous to count'." Hashem also promised that the Jewish nation would be as numerous as the stars. In this tefillah, why did Yaakov say that Hashem promised that the Jewish people will be numerous like the sand at the seashore, and he didn't mention Hashem's other promise, that they will be numerous like the stars in heaven? (Agra d'Kalah and Haamak Davar ask this question.)

We can explain that Yaakov used the example of sand of the sea because sand is a boundary. It prevents the sea from flooding the world. Yaakov was indicating how Klal Yisrael can protect themselves from being influenced by Eisav's ways to make boundaries.

The yetzer hara knows that he can't convince people to do an aveirah, so he tells them to do something that isn't an actual aveirah, but *almost* an aveirah, or it is a *safek* aveirah (a doubt whether it is an aveirah or not). The Maharam Shik says that this is alluded to in this week's parashah, when the Sar of Eisav, who is the yetzer hara, wrestled with Yaakov. It states (32:26) וַיֵּרָא כִּי לֹא יָכֹל לוֹ וַיִּנְעַע בִּגְדוֹ וַיִּרְכֹּב "When he perceived that he could not overcome him, he touched the socket of his hip..." The yetzer hara knew that he couldn't cause Yaakov to perform an aveirah, so he touched... which means he gave him a touch

of an aveirah. The yetzer hara does this because he cleverly knows that one thing leads to the next, until the person is caught in his net.

Another hint is in the pasuk (32:25) וַיִּאָּבֵק אִישׁ [The Sar of Eisav] wrestled with him until the break of dawn. "עַד עֲלֹת הַשָּׁחַר", This hints that the yetzer hara attacks people when things aren't clear and certain. This is alluded to עֲלֹת הַשָּׁחַר, when it is still dark outside, and it isn't certain whether it is day or night. When a person knows with clarity what is an aveirah and what isn't, he is able to be cautious. But when there isn't clarity, and especially when the yetzer hara tells the person that an aveirah is a mitzvah, it is very hard to be cautious. This is alluded to in the words עַד עֲלֹת הַשָּׁחַר, that the yetzer hara battled with Yaakov at this twilight and uncertain time.

It states (32:32) וַיִּזְכֹּר לוֹ הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כְּאֲשֶׁר עָבַר אֶת פְּנוּאֵל וְהָיָה צֶלַע עַל יָרְכּוֹ "The sun rose for him as he passed Penuel and he was limping on his hip." Rashi writes that the sun's rays healed him. Alluded here is that the yetzer hara attacks people and takes control over them during the twilight zone, when things aren't clear, and when everything is clear, it is easier to overcome the yetzer hara.

Another hint is from the words (32:25) וַיִּאָּבֵק אִישׁ. This alludes to aveiros that are not the actual aveirah, but an offshoot and a slight resemblance of the aveirah. Like there is אֵבֶק רִיבִית and אֵבֶק לֶשׁוֹן הָרַע, from the word אֵבֶק, dust. It is the dust of the mitzvah or the aveirah. The yetzer hara tells people to transgress these matters so that he can bring the person to commit actual aveiros, chalilah.¹⁰

someone leaves a box, suitcase, bag, etc. on the street, and it is suspected that perhaps it contains explosives and was left there by a terrorist.) The police block off the streets around the threat, and everyone has to stand very far away... in case there is a bomb there. This is an example of how distant we must keep ourselves from aveiros, or even a possible aveirah.

10. The Maharitz Dushinsky zt'l was once on a train (in chutz l'aretz), and a clean-shaven gentleman approached him and asked him whether he remembered him. Reb Dushinsky assumed that he was probably once his student, and indeed, it was so. This person told Reb Dushinsky that he owns a large store in Vienna. "What

Finding the Good Among the Troubles

We say in birkas hamazon, כמו שנתברכו, אבותינו אברהם, יצחק ויעקב בכל מכל כל, that Hashem should bless the host, and all of us, בכל מכל כל, as our forefathers Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov were blessed. About Avraham it states (Bereishis 24:1) וה' בירך את אברהם בכל, "Hashem blessed Avraham with everything." About Yitzchak it states (Bereishis 27:33) ואוכל מכל, "I ate of everything," and about Yaakov Avinu it states in this week's parashah (33:11) יש לי כל, "I have everything."

If we delve into the words and learn about when these brachos were given to the Avos, we will notice that they were all given at a time of distress. When it states וה' בירך את אברהם בכל, "Hashem blessed Avraham with everything," it was right after Sarah Imeinu was niftar, and it was before they were able to bring Yitzchak to his chuppah. Chazal tell us that Yitzchak was sitting and crying all this time over his mother's demise until he married Rivkah (see Bereishis 24:67, Siforno and Rashi). Furthermore, Avraham still had a son, a *rasha*, Yishmael, in his home. It doesn't seem like he had "everything". Yet, at this time, even under all these circumstances, it states וה' בירך את אברהם בכל, "Hashem blessed Avraham with everything."

Regarding Yitzchak, the pasuk says ואוכל מכל, "I ate from everything." This also wasn't said at a joyous time for Yitzchak Avinu. At

this time, he was very scared, as it states ויחרד חרדה גדולה, "[Yitzchak] shuddered a great shudder", and he saw the opening of Gehinom opened before him (Bereishis Rabba 67:2). This was when he discovered the truth about his son, Eisav, whom he had so loved. And at that time, it states ואוכל מכל, that he was blessed with "everything." Similarly, regarding Yaakov, when he met Eisav, he said יש לי כל, "I have everything." This was at a time when Eisav wanted to kill him, together with his army of four hundred men. These don't seem to be the best scenarios. So why do we request in birchas hamazon that Hashem should bless us בכל מכל כל as He blessed the avos with these brachos? Why should we want such brachos that come with bitterness and hardship?

Some explain that these brachos were special since the Avos were able to recognize and say that they had everything, even when it seemed that they lacked so much. Their ability to focus on Hashem's kindness and believe that it was all good is a perfect brachah. When we request these brachos (of בכל מכל כל) in birkas hamazon, we call it ברכה שלימה, a complete brachah. It is a complete brachah when one can recognize the good, even amidst the tzaros. We ask כן יברך אותנו שלימה, so we should also have this outlook on life, to focus on the good and to believe that everything is for the good.¹¹

about shemiras Shabbos?" Reb Dushinsky asked. "Do you keep Shabbos?"

"I don't keep Shabbos," he said, "but I want the rebbe to know that it didn't begin with Shabbos. It began when I became 'modern,' and I put on a short jacket. From there matters spiraled downwards, and I fell all the way down." (Obviously, this was for a person who used to wear a long jacket, and that was the custom of his family. For him, putting on a short jacket meant a step down. But the lesson applies to all people, in their own situation and circumstance. Leaving and descending from the mesorah that one received from his parents and rebbes can have unimaginable consequences.)

The Maharitz Dushinsky told his former student that this is alluded to in the pasuk (Eichah 1:9) טְמֵאָתָהּ בְּשׂוּלֶיהָ, "Her impurity is in her hems, she was heedless of her end. She has descended astonishingly..." טְמֵאָתָהּ בְּשׂוּלֶיהָ means the tumah begins when one begins to shorten the hems of his jacket. לֹא זָכְרָה אַחֲרֵיתָהּ, one doesn't realize how low he might fall. וְתָרַד פְּלֵאִים, until one falls astonishingly, r'l.

11. It states (Tehillim 147:8) הַמְכֶסֶה שָׁמַיִם בְּעָבִים הַמְכִין לָאָרֶץ מָטָר, "Who covers the heavens with clouds, Who prepares rain for the earth, Who causes the mountains to sprout grass." When dark clouds are in the sky, representing hard times, rain is being prepared. Be aware that good will come from it.

It states (32:32) ויזרח לו השמש כאשר עבר את פנואל "The sun rose for [Yaakov] when he passed Penuel, and he was limping on his thigh." Rashi writes, "The Midrash explains: The sun rose for him to heal his limp, as it states (Malachi 3:20) שמש צדקה ומרפא, 'The sun of mercy, with healing in its wings'. The sun hastened to set for him when he left Beer Sheva and set a few hours early; now it hastened to rise for him."

Rashi and Chazal explain that the sun rose early that day to heal Yaakov. When Yaakov left Beer-sheva and came to Har HaMoriah (at the beginning of parashas Vayeitzei), the sun set two hours early so Yaakov would sleep there. Now, the sun made up for lost time and rose two hours early to heal Yaakov. The Shevet Sofer writes in the name of the Chasam Sofer, quoting Reb Noson Adler zt'l, that these pesukim give chizuk to those who feel that the sun has set for them. As people say, "There used to be better times, but now the sun has set, and everything is dark." They don't see the light in their lives. They should learn from the Avos. The sun set for Yaakov Avinu in the middle of the day, and it looked like he and the world had lost two hours of daylight. But those two hours of lost sunlight returned twenty-two years later when Yaakov Avinu needed sunlight to heal his wound. We learn from this that even when something seems bad, it is all for our good.¹²

The final brachah (*brachah achrita*) said at a sheva brachos is וכלה חתן ושמוחה חתן וכלה. Kol Bo (siman 75) teaches that this brachah is an overview of the brachos said before it. The first brachah of the sheva brachos is שהכל ברא לכבודו, "Everything was created for His honor." The chosson and kallah must know that the purpose of their marriage is to give honor to Hashem. Their marriage is not for their prestige, pleasure, wealth, or any other gain. The final brachah repeats the concepts of the brachos said before it. The idea of giving honor to Hashem is repeated in the final brachah when we say the words אשר ברא ששון ושמוחה, "Who created joy and happiness." The Kol Bo explains:

"It is Hashem's honor when people are happy because then they can receive His glory. This is because distress closes the soul and creates a barrier that separates the person from Hashem. A person shouldn't be angry but accept Hashem's decree with love... [Chazal tell us that] the Shechinah doesn't reside where there is laziness or sadness, only where there is joy, and this is Hashem's honor."

We learn from the Kol Bo how important it is to be happy and to accept everything that happens to us with love. This enables the Shechinah to reside by him, and this is Hashem's honor.

The renowned chasid Reb Leibel Kutner zt'l (who lived through the Holocaust) would often say the following thought:

Of all the Avos, Yaakov Avinu endured the most hardship. He suffered from Lavan, from Eisav, Dinah's kidnapping, and then losing Yosef. But about Yaakov it states (32:13) ואתה אמרת היטב איטיב עמך "You said, 'I will surely do good with you.'" So we see that we don't know what is good. And indeed, despite all the tzaros Yaakov endured, he established the twelve shevatim.

12. It states (Tehillim 118:5) מן המצר קראתי יי' ענני במרחב יי' "From the straits I called Hashem; Hashem answered me with a vast expanse." The Rokeach (Siddur) explains that when people call out to Hashem and say they are in a מצר, a difficult situation. ענני, Hashem responds and says to the Yid, במרחב, that you are in a good situation. You think it is a bad situation, but it is all for the good.

The Chovos HaLevavos (Introduction to Shaar HaBechinah) writes that we should praise Hashem for the yesurim we suffer because we can be certain that concealed within the yesurim are many *chasadim*.

Growth from Tests

When you put a raw egg into the fire, it becomes hard. If you throw wax into a fire, it melts. And if you throw paper into fire, it burns and disintegrates.

Fire causes transformation, even though each one is different.

This reality is an analogy to the hard times one experiences during his life. Difficult situations bring about change in people. We can take advantage of these opportunities to grow.

Often, when one is going through a crisis, be it small or large, the methods that worked for him in the past don't function now, and he must learn to reconsider his lifestyle and readjust. Hardships are growth opportunities.¹³

It states (35:17), יהי בהקשותה בלדתה ותאמר לה, the *Rimzei d'Chachmasa* (written by a student of the Chidushei Harim zt'l, Reb Shmuel Leib Zack zt'l) explains, יהי בהקשותה, when a person is having a hard time in *avodas Hashem*, we tell him, אל תירא, don't worry. כי זה גם לך בן, You are climbing to higher levels. בן means child, alluding to growth and success.

The Gemara (*Menachos* 29:) says, "Reb Akiva will teach many *halachos* קוץ וקוץ, על כל קוץ וקוץ, from each corner of the [letters of the] *sefer Torah*."

The *Or LaShamayim* (*Lech Lecha* השני ויאמר ה' השני) says that קוץ can be translated as a thorn, pain, hardships. From every קוץ וקוץ, difficulty in life, Reb Akiva attained higher levels.

The Gemara (*Kiddushin* 81:) says that Rav Amram had a great test and overcame the *yetzer hara*. Rav Amram said to the *yetzer hara*, חזי דאת נורא ואנא בישרא ואנא עדיפנא מינך, "See! You are fire, and I am flesh, and I'm greater than you." We can explain that Rav Amram was saying אנא עדיפא, "I reached my levels, מינך, because of you." Because the challenges you put in my way helped me reach my high levels.

We daven אל תביאני לידי נסיון, that we shouldn't be tested, because we aren't confident that we will pass the tests. However, when one finds himself in a situation of a test (and we are constantly facing tests), he must recognize that this is an excellent opportunity for growth. It is an opportunity to develop oneself in ways he wouldn't have accomplished without it.

13. Reb Yechezkel Levenstein zt'l was serving as the mashgiach in yeshivas Mir (in Europe), and the Ponovizher Rav zt'l invited him to be the mashgiach of Ponovizh, Bnei Brak.

Reb Yechezkel happily accepted the position. In Mir, his paycheck often came late, and he struggled to pay his bills. He figured that the Ponovizher Rav would pay on time, and he was sure his financial struggles were finally over.

However, there was one thing that worried him. He was worried that with a comfortable salary, he wouldn't work on his bitachon.

One day, in Bnei Brak, a friend noticed that Reb Yechezkel was extremely happy and asked him about that. Reb Yechezkel explained that he used to be worried that he wouldn't need to work on his bitachon anymore. But now he sees that even in Bnei Brak, his paycheck comes late, which is why he is so happy. Now, he can continue working on his bitachon.

The Steipler Gaon zt'l once said, "It is easy for a bachur to have good middos. His shtender doesn't disagree with him. But when he marries, and there is another opinion in the home, his test on middos begins."

Without marriage, he wouldn't learn traits such as *vitur*, kindness, controlling anger, etc. The challenges help us grow and become the best we can.

So, be happy with your tests, embrace them, and pass them. You will grow immensely from these situations.¹⁴

The Torah tells us (32:25), וַיִּאָבֵק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ עַד עֹלֹת, השחר, "A man battled with Yaakov until the morning."

Who was this person?

Rashi tells us that this man was שְׂרֵי שֵׁל עֵשָׂו, Eisav's *malach*, the *yetzer hara*. It wasn't a person but the *yetzer hara* battling with Yaakov Avinu. The wrestle is called וַיִּאָבֵק, which can also mean dust (see Rashi), and it alludes to the dust they raised by their wrestling. וַיִּאָבֵק is *gematriya* כְּסֵם הַכְּבוֹד, Hashem's holy throne, as the Baal HaTurim

points out, because the dust of this battle rose up to Hashem's throne. Yaakov's struggle with the *yetzer hara* went up to Hashem's throne, because Hashem has immense pleasure from these encounters.

A king's crown is made from gold, diamonds, and precious gems, but there are also areas on the crown where there is nothing at all. Those empty spaces add beauty to the crown. The crown wouldn't be so beautiful if the gems covered each inch of it without any separations. The empty spots hint at the challenges we undergo. They seem empty, insignificant, and undesirable, but these tests give our *avodas Hashem* its beauty and splendor.

14. I heard the following story from the baal hamaaseh (from the person to whom the story occurred). He is today a respected mechanech:

As a fourteen-year-old teenager, he learned in a yeshiva where a very strict mashgiach, wanting to maintain discipline in the school, would punish the students for every minor infraction.

Once, for a minor matter, the mashgiach told the bachur that he was expelled for a few hours that day.

In the hallway of the yeshiva (as he was getting ready to leave the building), this young bachur met a bachur three years older than him. The older bachur convinced the young bachur to go along with him, but it was to a place where yeshiva bachurim didn't belong. "I want to teach the mashgiach a lesson," he explained to the younger bachur. "He must know the danger of throwing a bachur out of the yeshiva, so stop doing so."

The younger bachur had yiras Shamayim and didn't want to go to that place. But he felt he couldn't argue with "an older bachur."

The older bachur didn't have too much yiras Shamayim and, unfortunately, wanted to take him somewhere inappropriate.

Before they got to that place, they passed through a beautiful garden, and the gardener who worked there stopped them and spoke to them.

This gardener told them that he was a Holocaust survivor, and after the war, he dropped religion, r'l. He showed them what he does in the garden. He pointed and said, "I trim those shrubs, and I fertilize those trees. But do you see this field over there? I don't touch that field. Recently, I planted seeds there; the seeds are decomposing now, and soon they will blossom and grow. The crop is very delicate now. If I touch it, it will be ruined, and nothing will come from it."

And then the gardener gave them a lesson in mussar that the younger bachur never forgot. He said, "You are young bachurim, you learn in yeshiva, and sometimes you do something wrong. You are like the seeds that are decomposing. But you must be cautious at this time so that you don't ruin yourselves. You are at a very delicate age, and a wrong move can ruin your future forever. Listen to my counsel and go back to yeshiva." The bachur returned to the yeshiva, and today he is a talmid chacham

Tests are a dangerous and delicate time. We can grow immensely from them, but if we fail the test, we can fall drastically. Therefore, we must be very cautious.