



**THE PATH TO FOLLOW**  
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**LEARNING TORAH FOR ITS OWN SAKE (by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita)**

**I**t is written, "Jacob sent messengers [literally 'angels'] before him to Esau his brother, to the land of Seir, the field of Edom. He commanded them, saying: 'Thus shall you say to my lord, to Esau: So says your servant Jacob – I have sojourned with Laban and stayed until now' " (*Bereshith* 32:4-5). Our Sages have said that Jacob sent Esau actual angels (*Bereshith Rabba* 75:4). At first glance, it seems that several things in this passage require an explanation:

1. Could Jacob not have sent human messengers to Esau? Why was he obligated to use angels?
2. If Jacob merited to be served by angels, what could he fear from Esau? In fact why was he so afraid of him, to the point that we read: "Jacob was greatly afraid" (*Bereshith* 32:8)?
3. Why did our Sages teach that Jacob said to Esau, "I have sojourned [*garti*] with Laban, but I observed the 613 [*taryag*] *mitzvot*" (*Midrash Aggadah* on *Bereshith* 32:5)? This is surprising, for what did it matter to Esau if Jacob observed the *mitzvot* with Laban or not?
4. Why does Scripture use the term angels in this account, whereas concerning Abraham, the angels who visited him are described as men, as it is written: "Behold, three men were standing over him" (*Bereshith* 18:2)? The Sages have explained that these were the angels Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael (*Bava Metzia* 86b).
5. After Abraham's three visitors left, the verse explains that they were angels, as it is written: "Two angels came to Sodom" (*Bereshith* 19:1). Now if the Torah wanted to tell us that they were angels instead of men, why did it wait until they had already left? It is also difficult to understand why Jacob thought that it was good to call Esau "my lord."

We may say that our father Jacob's greatness was even superior to that of his fathers, Abraham and Isaac. This emerges from earlier passages. At the beginning of *Parsha Vayeitzei* we read, "He dreamed, and behold: A ladder was set up on earth, and the top of it reached to Heaven. And behold: Angels of G-d ascending and descending on it" (*Bereshith* 28:12). Then at the end of *Parsha Vayeitzei* we read, "Jacob

went on his way, and angels of G-d met him. When he saw them, Jacob said: 'This is the camp of G-d,' and he called the name of the place Mahanaim" (*ibid.* 32:2-3).

From these two passages we learn that Jacob would usually have revelations, for he often saw angels. When he left Eretz Israel to venture into another country, the angels who accompanied him in Eretz Israel departed, and other angels accompanied him in their stead. Therefore when Jacob saw an angel, he immediately knew that it was an angel rather than a man. Such was not the case with Abraham, who was not as accustomed to seeing angels as Jacob, and who did not always know how to distinguish between men and angels.

**A Great Deal of Torah**

We should not be surprised that Jacob reached a higher level than Abraham, for the prophet Isaiah said: "Thus says Hashem, Who redeemed Abraham" (*Isaiah* 29:22). Here the Sages have explained, "Abraham himself was only created for the sake of Jacob" (*Vayikra Rabba* 36:4). Furthermore, the Zohar teaches: "The Patriarch Jacob is the Throne of Glory... as it is written: 'Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob' [*Vayikra* 26:42]. The Holy One, blessed be He, established a covenant with Jacob alone, more than the covenant that He established with all his fathers. He made him a Throne of Glory for His Divine Presence to rest upon, setting him apart from his predecessors" (*Zohar, Va'eira* 22). This teaches us that Jacob's power was greater than that of his fathers, and he merited things that they did not.

We may ask how Jacob managed to reach such a level, one greater than that of the other holy Patriarchs. It is because he studied a great deal of Torah. As our Sages have said in the Midrash, Jacob would go from the Beit HaMidrash of Shem to the Beit HaMidrash of Eber, and from the Beit HaMidrash of Eber to the Beit HaMidrash of Abraham (*Tanhuma, Vayishlach* 9). The Mishnah states, "Whoever occupies himself with the Torah for its own sake merits many things" (*Pirkei Avoth* 6:1), for it makes him grow spiritually and elevates him and all his deeds. Since Jacob was constantly studying Torah for its own sake, he merited what his fathers did not.

Yet in that case, why did Jacob – who possessed all this power of the Torah – fear Esau?

The answer is that Jacob was not afraid that Esau would harm him, for he had faith in Hashem. Furthermore, since Jacob used angels, he could avenge himself on Esau. In fact the Sages say that the angels struck Esau and his men during the night until they uttered Jacob's name, at which point they halted their attack (*Bereshith Rabba* 78:11).

Despite all this, Jacob was afraid of Esau. He was not afraid of death, but of sin, for he sent the following message to Esau: "Be careful. I've observed all the *mitzvot* while I was with Laban, and you cannot harm me because my Torah is protecting me. If you don't fear the Torah, I am sending angels that will strike you, both you and your men. If you fail to fear one or the other, and if you don't change your ways, I will invoke G-d's Name." Jacob mentioned this to Esau by way of allusion, for he said: "to my lord, to Esau," with G-d's Name in mind.

When Jacob realized that this evildoer was hiding his true intentions and coming to meet him along with 400 men – without fearing the Torah, *mitzvot*, angels, punishment, or Hashem – he immediately felt great fear. Actually, such is the way of the *tzaddikim*: When they see someone committing a sin, they immediately begin to examine their own deeds and think, "This is certainly a result of a slight sin that I committed, for if I had watched my every deed, I certainly would not have seen this person commit a sin."

This concept is mentioned by the Sages in the Gemara: "*Jacob was greatly afraid* [*Bereshith* 32:8]. He thought that some sin might cause [G-d's promise to go unfulfilled]" (*Berachot* 4a). When Jacob saw Esau committing a sin and realized that Esau was still intent on doing evil – despite having been warned that angels would strike him and that he (Jacob) would invoke G-d's Name – Jacob immediately began to search his own soul. He wanted to know why the Holy One, blessed be He, had made him see this evildoer acting with scorn towards the Torah and towards G-d. Likewise King David was afraid when he saw evildoers, saying: "Trembling seized me because of the wicked who forsake Your Torah" (*Tehillim* 119:53).

# CONCERNING THE PARSHA

## THE CUSTOM OF SETTING UP A GRAVESTONE

It is written, “Jacob set up a monument upon her grave, which is the monument of Rachel’s grave until this day” (*Bereshith* 35:20).

The Jewish people have always placed stone monuments over graves. The Gemara alludes to this by stating, “Where does the Torah indicate that a grave should be marked? In the instructive text, ‘When they see a human bone, they will set a marker by it’ [Ezekiel 39:15]” (*Moed Katan* 5a). In fact this is a Halachah that was given to Moshe on Sinai, and Ezekiel came and applied it.

The term *matzeva* (“monument”) designates the fact that attention (*hitiatzvut*) is drawn to the grave. It indicates the location of a grave so people can easily come to pray by it for the elevation of the deceased’s soul, or to pray for life by the merit of the deceased who is buried there.

In the section of the prophets, we see that a grave is also called a *tziun*. In fact we read, “What is this gravestone [*tziun*] that I see” (II Kings 23:17), and also: “When they see a human bone, they will set a marker [*tziun*] by it” (Ezekiel 39:15). It is called a *tziun* because it marks (*metzayen*) the location of a grave so people can avoid impurity.

In the Mishnah and Gemara, a gravestone is termed a *nefesh*, as we read: “For building a *nefesh* for him over his grave” (*Shekalim* 2:5), “A solid tomb *nefesh*” (*Ohalot* 7:1), among other examples. The term *nefesh* is used because the soul (*nefesh*) hovers above the resting place of the body even once the soul (*nefesh*) has left it.

### Out of Respect for the *Nefesh*

Three reasons are given for setting up a gravestone:

1. To mark a place of impurity so that *kohanim* and those dealing with sanctified matters will not become impure.
2. To mark the location of a grave so that people can go there and pray.
3. To show respect for the soul of the departed, which hovers above the grave.

Within the strict context of Halachah, the obligation to set up a gravestone exists only to avoid impurity. For that purpose, a marker of some kind is needed. If a grave is surrounded by other graves, however, it is possible that a gravestone is not needed. Be that as it may, a person has an obligation towards his parents, and a man has an obligation towards his wife, to place a gravestone above their grave so as not to detract from the respect owed to the dead. Even if a person dies penniless, his son must set up a gravestone for him.

### No Gravestones for the *Tzaddikim*

In the past, people would make intricately designed gravestones and build magnificent mausoleums for the great figures of the generation. However since Rabban Gamliel decreed in Yavneh that there should be no difference between the burial garments of rich and poor, as well as other decrees aimed at preventing the poor from being humiliated in death (see *Moed Katan* 27a) – and also because the state of the Jewish people has diminished – the practice of building magnificent mausoleums and monuments has stopped. Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said, “Gravestones are not erected for the *tzaddikim*, as their words are their memorials” (*Bereshith Rabba* 82:10).

There are various customs regarding gravestones. Among certain communities, the stone is placed on the grave itself, and in certain

places the stone is placed at the foot of the grave. In most places, however, the stone is placed at the head of the grave. In Jerusalem, the custom is to place a horizontal gravestone upon the grave. There are also different customs regarding *when* a gravestone is to be set up. Some people have the custom of placing it after the seven-day mourning period, while others place it after 30 days. A person who wants to study this entire subject in detail may refer to the book *Gesher HaChaim* by Rabbi Yechiel Tucuzinsky, as well as the seventh section of the work *Yalkut Yosef*.

## THE PARABLE AND ITS MEANING

### *The Primary Objective of the Tzaddikim is to Praise Hashem*

It is written, “You have 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’” (*Bereshith* 32:13).

Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch of Vadislov *Zatzal* used a parable to explain our astonishment upon reading the words of Jacob, who seems to be asking for something for himself and his descendants. He says this despite having Hashem’s explicit promise in hand, which he cites in his prayer: “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.”

We know that children have a habit of always saying thing such as, “Give me some cake,” or “Give me some candy.” The son of a certain wealthy man was always given what he wanted by the household servant, even before asking for it.

The wealthy man was surprised that his son did not act like other children, not even like his own brothers.

He therefore said to his son, “Why do you never ask for anything, like your brothers do?”

The boy replied, “Father, you should know that from the day I’ve been able to understand, I’ve become used to not saying anything that doesn’t correspond to your wishes. Since I’m certain that our servant distributes food according to your orders and wishes, who am I to ask for something that you haven’t ordered, and which is certainly against your wishes?”

Upon hearing these words, the wealthy man rejoiced in his heart and immediately ordered his servant to bring tasty snacks to his son: Buttered bread, with cheese on top of the butter.

One day the servant brought him bread with butter, but without cheese. The boy said to him, “Where is my cheese?” The servant then went to tell the father that his son’s behavior had changed.

The father asked his son, “Why is this day different than other days? Normally you ask for nothing, but now you’re complaining that you didn’t receive more!”

The son replied, “I didn’t ask for cheese because I wanted it. Instead, I asked for the sake of your honor, for you told the servant to put butter and cheese on my bread, and when he neglected to put cheese, he was disobeying your will. That, I couldn’t accept.”

Such is the way of the *tzaddikim*. When they pray and ask for something from Hashem, it is not for themselves that they are asking, for they believe in individual providence and they are used to doing His will and praising His Name. Hence when a misfortune occurs, they are not praying for themselves, but rather for His honor not to be profaned.

Thus Jacob said, “You have 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.’” In other words: For myself I am not complaining. However I am thinking of Your honor, for You have said that You would do good for me, and yet my brother Esau is about to kill me. Thus Your promise will not be fulfilled, and Your Name will be profaned. I therefore ask that You fulfill Your promise to me.

# AT THE SOURCE

## All 613 Mitzvot?

It is written, "I have sojourned with Laban and stayed until now" (*Bereshith* 32:5).

In his book *Pnei David*, the Chida asks a question regarding Rashi's explanation of this verse ("I have observed the 613 *mitzvot*"): How could Jacob have observed all 613 *mitzvot*, since there are some that he could not have possibly carried out?

The Chida replies: We may say that Jacob studied what the Torah says regarding each *mitzvah*, and that this study was regarded as an actual deed. This is because Jacob was ready to act, the only thing missing being the circumstances. Hence Jacob could say, "I have observed the 613 *mitzvot*." This means: I observed to see when I could perform each *mitzvah*, in order to be able to carry them out. I also learned all their general rules, details, and secrets, and as a result it is considered as if I had actually carried them out.

This is what Jacob was alluding to by saying, "This is what Jacob your servant says: I have sojourned with Laban" – I have observed the 613 *mitzvot*.

## Jacob's Gift

It is written, "He took, from what had come into his hand, a gift for Esau his brother" (*Bereshith* 32:14).

Since Jacob wanted to please his brother by sending him this honorable gift, it was preferable for him to choose the best among his flocks, herds, and camels. That being the case, why did he take "from what had come into his hand"?

A marvelous response to this question is found in the book *Kohelet Yitzchak*. It cites Rabbi Moshe Shimon HaCohen of Vilna, who explains things in accordance with the words of Rabbi Moshe Isserles: "I have found in the name of Rabbi Yehudah Chassid that he had to pass his hand over a live animal. If it yielded beneath his hand, it was certainly kosher; otherwise it was *treif*. The sign of this can be taken as, 'A broken and contrite heart, O G-d, You will not despise' [*Tehillim* 51:19]."

This is what the verse is saying here: "From what had come into his hand" – these are the animals that remained firm beneath his hand and did not yield, whereas those that yielded beneath his hand were certainly kosher, and Jacob kept them for himself. Those that remained firm beneath Jacob's hand and did not yield, he sent to Esau as a gift.

## The Gift that Brought Peace

It is written, "He took, from what had come into his hand, a gift for Esau his brother" (*Bereshith* 32:14).

Why did Jacob send his brother such a great gift: Two hundred she-goats, twenty he-goats, and so on? In his book *Yismach Israel*, the *gaon* Rabbi Yaakov Chaim Sofer *Zatzal* said: "It is because Esau certainly paid his 400 men, or he told them, 'We shall kill Jacob, take his money, and share it among ourselves.'"

It would therefore have been difficult for Esau to make peace with Jacob, since he had to pay these 400 men. Yet when Esau received this gift, he could pay them with it. It was in this way that his gift brought peace.

## A Blessing that Cannot be Opposed

It is written, "He said, 'I will not send you away unless you bless me'" (*Bereshith* 32:27).

This is surprising! Why did Jacob need the blessing of Esau's ministering angel?

The book *Gevurot Yaakov* explains that when a blessing comes from a good angel, numerous accusers arise in an attempt to prevent

this blessing from taking effect. However when a blessing comes from an angel which itself is evil, which itself is an accuser – as was the ministering angel of Esau – it takes effect because there is no accuser to oppose it.

Hence Jacob asked for a blessing from Esau's ministering angel. It was a complete blessing, with no accuser to oppose it.

## A Man Who Has No Wife

It is written, "And the days of Isaac were" (*Bereshith* 35:28).

The reason why the word "life" is not mentioned with regards to Isaac, as is the case with Abraham and Jacob (as well as with Joseph, when the Torah states: "Joseph lived") is explained by the holy Rabbi Chaim ben Attar in his book *Ohr HaChaim*.

He writes, "Perhaps from the day of Isaac's birth until the Akeidah, he did not have a wife, and the Sages have said: 'A man who has no wife lives...without life' [*Kohelet Rabba* 9:8]. The Midrash states that from the time of the Akeidah, his eyes began to weaken. Hence the word 'life' is not mentioned."

# IN THE LIGHT OF THE PARSHA FROM THE TEACHINGS OF TZADDIK RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA

## Preventing Him from Accusing

It is written, "He said: 'Let me go, for dawn has broken'" (*Bereshith* 32:27).

The Sages explain: "[Jacob] said to him, 'Are you a thief or a rogue, that you are afraid of the morning?' He replied, 'I am an angel, and from the day that I was created, my time to sing praises [to Hashem] has not come until now'" (*Chullin* 91b).

This is surprising, for what would a person do if he has waited without success to see the king for his entire life, and the king's servants were to suddenly tell him: "Tomorrow the king will come to your home"? He would take a pen and paper and write down what he must do when the king arrives, in order to know what to say and how to say it. Would he venture far from his home, thinking that the king has not yet arrived? He might encounter thieves or wild animals on the road!

Nevertheless, this is what Esau's ministering angel did. Since he knew that he could only sing Hashem's praises on that day, why did he descend to fight Jacob?

From here we learn the extent of Hashem's goodness. From the day that the world was created, He knew that Esau's ministering angel would sing praises before Him on that day only. Hence on that very day, Hashem sent him down to earth to fight Jacob. Since he could not delay in singing praises, he would not have time to accuse the Children of Israel.

Actually, even if Esau's ministering angel would have had enough time to prepare accusations against Israel, he still could not have said anything because he was now pressed for time. He was not ready to utter his prayer, having failed to sufficiently reflect beforehand. He could therefore only sing Hashem's praises.

# GUARD YOUR TONGUE

## When Nothing New is Revealed

The prohibition against gossip applies even when a statement reveals no new information to the listener. If the listener already knows what another person said or did to him, but did not realize that he had harmful intentions in saying or doing what he did, it is prohibited to inform the listener of it.

For example, suppose that the court rules against Reuven, and Shimon meets him and asks about the ruling. If Reuven says, "The court ruled against me," and Shimon replies, "That's not right" (or a similar statement), even that is prohibited. This is because by making such a statement, although nothing new is revealed to Reuven, animosity will be aroused in his heart against the court.

# YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

## RABBI SHABTAI YUDELWITZ – THE MAGGID OF YERUSHALAYIM

Rabbi Shabtai Yudelwitz *Zatzal*, the “Maggid of Yerushalayim,” as people often called him, was a man who possessed many talents. He was a great *gaon* in all realms of Torah, and he combined his service of Hashem with work for the community in spreading the fire of Torah among all classes of the people. His immense library comprised thousands of books, and of himself he said: “I don’t place any book on a shelf unless I have gone through it.” He was extremely knowledgeable in all fields of Torah, especially in the midrashim of the Sages. His understanding also extended to the realm of Kabbalah, for he possessed more than 200 books on the subject in his library, all of which had been thoroughly read. He would take unbound documents and lovingly put them together and place them in his library.

Rabbi Shabtai Yudelwitz also possessed thousands of commentaries in reserve, writings that he himself had penned, but in his great humility had not published. This is because he devoted most of his life to working for the community and spreading Torah among the Jewish people.

The voice of Rabbi Shabtai Yudelwitz resonated in the streets of the city for dozens of years. It is interesting to note that he never prepared his lectures beforehand. Indeed, they spontaneously emerged from his trembling heart. His pleasant voice fascinated everyone who heard it, conveying both understanding and the fear of Hashem. Rabbi Shabtai began his lectures with a few lighthearted words, which he uttered in a low voice. He prepared the heart of his listeners, and at the right time his voice grew to a roar.

Various intonations could be heard in his thunderous voice, the most remarkable of which was warmth. The high decibels could not extinguish the love that was hidden in his words. “I am not capable of hearing the cries of a child,” he said of himself. In fact his family stated that on more than one occasion, small things would bring him to tears.

Rabbi Shabtai once recounted that some American tourists came to Mea Shearim during Tisha B’Av, and they were astonished to see that everyone was crying. When they were told that our great Temple had been destroyed, one of them asked: “Those fools didn’t have any insurance?” When they were told that they did not, the tourists concluded: “Then there really is a reason to cry.” The voice of Rabbi Shabtai then arose, “Don’t be like a horse, like a mule that doesn’t understand!” He wasn’t speaking to these American tourists, but rather to the miniature “American tourist” that is hidden within our hearts, for where is our genuine pain over the destruction of the Temple?

Rabbi Shabtai never asked to be paid for giving a lecture, not even for his transportation expenses. Someone once telephoned him with an invitation to speak in a distant *moshav*. He took a bus that brought him to a main road, located near the *moshav*, and from there he walked. It was very difficult for Rabbi Shabtai, but when he arrived he began to give an enflamed discourse in the local synagogue. Upon finishing, nobody came forward to acknowledge being the one who had invited him. Furthermore, nobody in the *moshav* offered to accompany him to the bus station. He arrived home exactly as he had left.

### The Victory of the Mezuzah

Rabbi Shabtai was a very clever man. Much of his insightfulness and brilliance went to helping the community, to the point that nobody knew where these pearls came from. A great rav from Sefat

once asked him to help settle a dispute that had erupted between a married couple. The woman had done *teshuvah*, but her husband had not yet done so. They decided to continue living together, but they had a disagreement over a *mezuzah*. The husband believed that it would “disfigure” their home, and he was not ready to agree to it. Rabbi Shabtai turned towards the husband and explained that although he was not obligated to agree to all his wife’s wishes, it would still be good on his part to accept some form of “compromise.” When the man asked what he had in mind, Rabbi Shabtai replied: “Place a *mezuzah* on the right side of the door, not on the left!” The man celebrated his partial victory and put up a *mezuzah*, which made everyone happy.

### Confronting a Vicious Dog

On the eve of Shabbat, Rabbi Shabtai would usually go out with others to encourage storeowners to close their shops before sunset. The group consisted of great figures, all under the direction of Rabbi Dov Soloveitchik *Zatzal*. Those who warned others about keeping Shabbat were generally successful in their efforts, until one day they encountered a new foe: A barber who refused to close his barbershop, and who encouraged the other shop-owners to rebel as well. The *avrechim* knew that if they yielded before this barber, their influence among the people would wane. This new Amalek was about to dampen everyone’s enthusiasm, and therefore they continued to stand in front of his barbershop every week.

One Friday, the barber decided to rid himself of them once and for all. Unleashing a vicious dog on the *avrechim*, he stood there, on the doorsteps of his shop, with a big smile on his face. Several *avrechim* fled, but Rabbi Shabtai ordered one of them (Rabbi Avraham Kaufmann) to stay with him. When the dog approached them, Rabbi Shabtai slipped to the side, grabbed it by the jaw, and cut it into pieces. Rabbi Shabtai recounted that afterwards, a group of shop-owners called him a hero, while another group called him a madman. In any case, all their shops remained closed.

The barber still did not close his shop on that Friday. In fact he fled for so long that it took him a while before he could return. Eyewitnesses said that clients left his barbershop half shaven, or even a third or a quarter shaven!

### What’s a Split?

Rabbi Shabtai was once invited to speak in a synagogue located in the Ramoth district of Jerusalem. He arrived and gave a beautiful sermon on the subject of kosher food, beginning with the verse: “And the pig, because its hoof is split...is unclean to you” (*Vayikra* 11:7). At that point he added, as he normally would, some ethical insights and stories. After his sermon, the *Gabbai* came to him and said, quite surprised: “Why did you speak about this subject? Do people suspect the *avrechim* here of eating forbidden food?” Rabbi Shabtai replied with shock, “But you’re the one who asked me to speak about this subject!”

It turned out that the *Gabbai* had asked him to encourage people in the area of modesty, and to protest the wearing of skirts with a “split” in them, a practice that had spread among the wives of the *avrechim*. In his remarks to Rabbi Shabtai, the *Gabbai* had referred to the expression used in the verse (“split”). However Rabbi Shabtai was totally unaware of this practice, and he understood the *Gabbai* in the literal sense. After returning from his speech, Rabbi Shabtai asked his family members with astonishment: “Has anyone ever heard of something called a ‘split’?”