

The Path To Follow

Vayishlach

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Rabbi David Pinto Shlita

Esav's Wickedness

It is written, "Jacob sent emissaries [literally: angels] ahead of him to Esav his brother to the land of Seir, the field of Edom" (*Bereshith* 32:4). Here the Sages have said, "This means real angels" (*Bereshith Rabba* 75:4). This is difficult to understand, for Jacob could have sent human emissaries. He did not need to resort to angels, so why was it necessary?

It is also difficult to understand another statement by our Sages in the Midrash: "I have sojourned [*garti*] with Lavan, and I observed the 613 [*taryag*] *mitzvot*. I did not learn from his wicked deeds" (*Midrash Aggadah, Bereshith* 32:5). This is surprising, for why did Jacob feel the need to tell Esav all this, that he had remained a *tzaddik* while living with Lavan? In reality, the verse itself states: "I am sending to tell my lord to find favor in your eyes" (*Bereshith* 32:6), meaning that Jacob sent them to say all this so he could find favor in Esav's eyes. What did he say? "I have sojourned with Lavan...and I acquired ox and donkey." Would he find favor in Lavan's eyes with such words?

The Sages also say in the Midrash, "*I acquired ox and donkey*. 'Ox' alludes to Joseph, as it says: 'His firstling ox, majesty is his' [*Devarim* 33:17]. 'Donkey' alludes to Issachar, for it is written: 'Issachar is a large-boned donkey' [*Bereshith* 49:14]" (*Bereshith Rabba* 75:12). It is difficult to understand what Jacob wanted to tell Esav by saying these things.

We may explain this by saying that Jacob was afraid of Esav because it is written in his regard: "Game was in his mouth" (*Bereshith* 25:28), and we know how this has been explained. Esav may have hunted wild animals and oxen, but the hunt mentioned here is the way in which he deceived people with his words. In that case, the verse is telling us that he deceived (*i.e.*, "hunted") people by drawing them into sin with his words. Esav was fundamentally evil and committed every conceivable crime (*Tanchuma, Toldot* 8), which is why Jacob sent him real angels. He was afraid that this evildoer would draw human emissaries – who possess freewill – into sin by allowing themselves to be enticed by Esav and not fulfill their mission. By sending Esav real angels, Jacob was certain that he would be unable to lead them astray with his words. They would therefore be able to transmit Jacob's message to Esav, appeasing him so he would not kill Jacob.

Jacob Wanted Him to Repent

Jacob was afraid of sending human beings to Esav, lest they be drawn into sin. Even *tzaddikim* can sin as a result of what they hear, which is why Jacob sent him angels, which are not influenced by the words of men.

Why did Jacob send emissaries to appease Esav? It was because he wanted Esav to repent (*Bereshith Rabba* 75:11). Such was

Jacob's habit: He brought people, even idolaters, closer to the *Shechinah*. He learned this from his father Isaac, who had learned it from his father Abraham (*ibid.* 84:4). What did he say to Esav? "For your entire life, you have grown up with our father and mother, who were *tzaddikim*. How could you not learn from their good deeds? Furthermore, you deceived our father by pretending to be a *tzaddik* when you were around him. Yet when you left him, you went to commit horrendous deeds, perpetrating every possible sin. I beg you to repent, so that angels of destruction do not take your soul, as they do to those who commit these kinds of deeds. I am sending you these angels as a reminder."

This is why Jacob told Esav: "I have sojourned [*garti*] with Lavan, and I observed the 613 [*taryag*] *mitzvot*" – whereas you lived with our father, you saw him learning Torah and serving his Creator, and yet you didn't learn from his good deeds. I lived with Lavan for 20 years, and I didn't learn from his evil deeds. In fact I observed all the *mitzvot*. If you ask me how I managed not to learn from all of Lavan's wickedness, it was because of the Torah that I absorbed, which I toiled to learn in the Beit HaMidrash of Shem and Eber, where I did not sleep in a bed for numerous years (*Bereshith Rabba* 68:11). Just as you cannot have a bad influence on these angels, nor can you push them into sin, likewise you cannot have a bad influence on me, for I studied a great amount of Torah and I'm like an angel that cannot be enticed. Since I observed the 613 *mitzvot* amidst hardship, I'm certain that you cannot do anything against me.

The Torah Protects and Saves

In general, it is impossible for a person to protect himself from evil influences unless he studies Torah with all his might, in which case it will protect and save him. If a person fails to study it with all his might, it will not protect him. This is why Jacob told Esav, "I acquired ox and donkey," an allusion to Joseph and Issachar, to show Esav that throughout his life, Jacob did not stop advancing in the service of G-d, not being content with what he accomplished on the previous day. Each day he rose to a higher level as he studied with all his might. He was like a donkey upon which people lay many burdens, but which carries them despite being heavy.

What does this refer to? It refers to the Torah that we study when devoting ourselves to learning. If a person does not grow proud of his learning, then the Torah protects him. However if he grows proud of it, thinking that it will earn him a crown and honors, then the Holy One, blessed be He, will not protect him at all, and the Torah that he learned will not save him. Hence Jacob said: "I am too small for all the mercies" (*Bereshith* 32:11) – although I did all these things, having studied Torah without giving my eyes sleep during those many years, I have not yet done anything. It is as if I have done nothing, and I do not deserve a miracle.



Concerning the Parsha

On the Premise of Mitzvot

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

Here Rashi states, "And I observed the 613 [*taryag*] *mitzvot*."

What did it matter to Esav if Jacob observed the 613 *mitzvot* or not? Rabbi Moshe Feinstein explains that since Jacob wanted to make peace with Esav, he started off by telling him: "I am someone who observes the *mitzvot*. If you want to make peace with me on that premise, well and good. However if peace for you means that we must unite, then it is out of the question."

Reason to Fear

It is written, "Jacob was greatly afraid and distressed, and he divided the people who were with him" (*Bereshith* 32:8).

What was Jacob afraid of, and what distressed him?

The great rebbes of Chassidut have explained that it was because Jacob "divided the people" – meaning that his people willingly chose to be divided and separated. Jacob knew that as long as the Children of Israel remained unified, the hand of Esav would have no power over them. However if they divided themselves into several camps, there was reason to fear.

Why Was Jacob Afraid?

It is written, "Jacob was greatly afraid" (*Bereshith* 32:8).

The Gemara states, "One verse reads: 'Behold, I am with you, and I will protect you wherever you go' [*Bereshith* 28:15], and the other verse reads: 'Jacob was greatly afraid.' He thought that some sin might cause [G-d's promise to go unfulfilled]" (*Berachot* 4a). Here the commentators have raised an objection, pointing to the Sages' statement that a promise of good from Hashem is never abolished on account of something evil. In that case, why was Jacob afraid that Hashem's promise would go unfulfilled?

The *gaon* Rabbi Eliezer Gordon of Telz heard a response to this question from his teacher, Rabbi Israel of Salant: To what can this be compared? It is like someone who hires a worker to do some task for him, but he fails to do it. The employer is exempt from paying him.

However if the worker is poor, and the employer takes pity on him and decides to pay him nevertheless, this does not constitute his salary, but rather a donation. Thus if Hashem promises a person something good, but that person is no longer worthy of it, Hashem does not go back on His word. Instead, He gives it to him as a donation, even if the person is not worthy of it.

If a man hires someone to safeguard his money, and not only does the worker not safeguard it, but also loses it, he must reimburse the owner for it. Now it is clear that the owner does not owe the worker a salary. Yet even in this case, if the owner wants to act with compassion, it is enough for him not to seek any compensation for his loss. As such, the worker will have already received something.

Jacob was afraid that sin would come and remove the benefits of Hashem's promise, meaning that if Jacob had transgressed prohibitions and committed tangible sins, he would have to pay for it. As a result, it was possible for Hashem's promise to have already been fulfilled by the fact that Jacob had not been punished. However it would mean that he was no longer protected against Esav.

A Curse on Esav

It is written, "If Esav comes to the one camp and strikes it, then the remaining camp will survive" (*Bereshith* 32:9).

Rashi notes that the term camp (*machaneh*) is used both in the masculine and feminine forms (both forms exist in this verse).

Nevertheless, why does the verse give both forms rather than one?

The book *HaMaggid MiBrisk* notes that we find the following teaching in the Gemara: "It is like a person who, cursing himself, refers his malediction to others" (*Sanhedrin* 106a). Jacob did not want to say that Esav would strike his camp, so he put the curse on Esav by saying: "If Esav comes to the one camp" – in the feminine; "and strikes it" – in the masculine, meaning that Esav would strike himself. This is why the word "camp" is in the feminine, for us to clearly understand that the masculine term "and strike it" refers to Esav himself. Since the *tzaddik* decrees and Hashem executes, the words of Jacob were indeed fulfilled. Thus in explaining the verse, "Esav ran to meet him... *vayishakehu* [and kissed him]" (*Bereshith* 33:4), the Midrash states: "Why is this term [*vayishakehu*] dotted? It teaches that he wished to bite him, but Jacob's neck turned to marble and the evildoer's teeth were blunted and loosened" (*Bereshith Rabba* 78:9). In other words, it was Esav who struck himself as he tried to bite Jacob, and as a result his teeth were shattered.

A Gift for Esav

It is written, "From what had come into his hand, a gift for Esav" (*Bereshith* 32:14).

The Seraph, Rabbi Mendel of Kotzk, said that when someone performs a *mitzvah* as it comes – without thinking, without concentration, and in haste – it becomes "a gift for Esav." It strengthens the forces of impurity.

In the Light of the Parsha

The Extent of Hashem's Goodness

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

The Sages have taught: "[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 has not come until now'" (*Chullin* 91b).

If someone has been waiting his entire life to see the king, but without success, what would he do if the king's servants were to suddenly tell him: "Get ready, for tomorrow the king will come to see you"? He would take out pen and paper, and he would write down everything pertaining to the king's arrival so he would know exactly what to do and say. Would he go on a far-off journey, telling himself that it was all right because the king had not yet arrived? He could encounter thieves or wild animals on the way, and not return on time to see the king, who he has waited for all of his life! This is similar to what Esav's ministering angel did. Since he knew that he could only sing praises on a certain day, why did he go and fight Jacob? Did he not consider the fact that he had to sing praises on the upcoming day?

From here we learn of Hashem's tremendous goodness. In fact from the day that the world was created until then, Hashem knew that Esav's ministering angel was to sing praises before Him on that day only. Hence it was on that very day that He made the angel descend to earth to fight against Jacob. As such the angel did not have time to think before singing praises, nor could he raise accusations against the Children of Israel. If Esav's ministering angel had reflected, he would certainly have accused them. Yet because he descended to earth, he did not have enough time to prepare and could not say anything, for he was not ready to speak, and he could only sing praises.

Content with Little

It is written, "Because G-d has favored me, and because I have everything" (*Bereshith* 33:11).

The book *Yerushalayim Shel Malah* recounts a story which illustrates the extent to which the residents of the old *yeshuv* of Jerusalem were content with little, having attained the heights of spirituality in this regard. The *gaon* Rabbi Pesach Trocker *Zatzal* was among the great *talmidei chachamim* of Jerusalem, and he cleaved to the Torah scholars who lived in the holy city from the day he arrived in Jerusalem from Kovno. He was especially close to the *tzaddik* Rabbi Chaim Yitzchak, better known as the Maggid of Vilkomir, who lived to be more than a hundred years old. Every night, they recited *Tikkun Chatzot* at the Kotel together, and at the break of dawn they studied Talmud together in the *Churvat Yehudah HeChassid*. After the *Vatikin* prayers, they studied the *Tur*, *Orach Chaim* and the *Shulchan Aruch*, continuing in this way throughout the day, with only short interruptions for meals and the like.

One day, Rabbi Pesach felt that the Maggid's attitude towards him had changed. Furthermore, each day the Maggid was citing teachings from the Sages and lessons in Mussar that criticized luxuries and the things of this world, pointing out how they can make a person lose his head and turn away from G-d. Also, the Maggid often noted that these things are liable to lead to a spiritual catastrophe within the entire holy city.

Rabbi Pesach did not understand what was happening, wondering what connection there was between himself and luxuries. He lived in frightening poverty, with meat and fish being non-existent in his home during the weekday. In fact the furniture in his home was of the simplest kind, and his children were dressed in tatters. So what luxuries did he have?

The Silk Tablecloth

One day, Rabbi Pesach could no longer contain his curiosity. When the Maggid began to hurl reprimands his way, he interrupted him and asked: "Excuse me, my teacher, but what luxuries are there in my home? Please show me, that's all I'm asking for, and I'll immediately remove them from there!"

"About fifteen days ago," the Maggid replied, "during Rosh Chodesh, I was at your home and I saw a silk tablecloth covering your table. It begins in this way: Today a silk tablecloth, and tomorrow other luxuries. Imagine the *Chillul Hashem* that can emerge from this!"

Upon hearing the words "*Chillul Hashem*," Rabbi Pesach grew pale, and with a broken heart he began to tell the Maggid the story of the silk tablecloth:

"During my youth in Kovno, one of the leaders of the community, Reb Eliezer Freidin, fell ill. For a long time I volunteered to go to his home each day to read him chapters of *mishnayot*, the weekly *parsha*, and ten psalms. When Reb Freidin recovered, he begged me to accept a reward for visiting him, but I refused. In the meantime, I moved to Eretz Israel and Reb Freidin returned to his business, and I forgot about the whole thing.

About a month ago, I received a small package from Kovno, along with a letter from the sons of Reb Freidin. In the letter, they informed me that their father had died, and that in his will he instructed them to send me his costly silk tablecloth for the kindness that I had shown when he fell ill years earlier.

"His sons asked me to respect the wishes of the deceased by accepting this gift, so that the will of their father would be fulfilled, for he wanted this tablecloth to cover my table in the holy city."

Rabbi Pesach continued his account: "My wife the Rebbetzin absolutely refused to accept such a costly gift. 'Why do we need a silk tablecloth?' she asked. 'Will this add to the fear of Heaven or the Torah wisdom of our sons?' She had fully decided to return the gift to those who had sent it, but I objected: 'How can we possibly bring shame to a family in mourning? How can we not respect the wishes of the deceased, who certainly thought that he was doing something important in this regard?'"

The Maggid listened to Rabbi Pesach's account with great concentration, but he was not yet satisfied. After a long discussion, during which they argued for and against, citing opinions and *halachot*, they both decided to present the problem to the Rav of the city, Rabbi Shemuel Salant *Zatzal*.

The Rav examined the problem for a long time, and he too weighed the pros and cons. On one hand, it was very important for the wishes of the deceased to be respected, and not bringing shame to his family was no less important. If the sons of Reb Eliezer in Kovno learned that Reb Pesach was not using this tablecloth, they would regret it. On the other hand, no luxuries should enter the holy city.

Rabbi Shemuel's great wisdom allowed him to render a proper decision this time as well: "The silk tablecloth will continue to cover the table, but an ordinary tablecloth must be spread over it, which will cover the shame of having a luxury in the holy city."

Bread with Salt, and Water in Small Measure

A book on the life of the *tzaddik* Rabbi Moshe Aharon Pinto *Zatzal*, may his merit protect us all, the father of our teacher Rabbi David Hanania Pinto *Shlita*, states that after Rabbi Moshe Aharon's wedding, tremendous poverty reigned in his home. He was almost unknown at the time, meaning that people gave him absolutely nothing, and he had almost nothing to live on. For himself, Rabbi Moshe Aharon was content with the smallest things, for poverty and lack were his lot, as mentioned by Rebbetzin Pinto (who had grown up in a wealthy home and was used to a life of comfort). The first year after their wedding, they truly lived in poverty, to the point that they had almost no bread or clothes. It was only after great effort that the Rebbetzin was able to bring food home to calm their hunger.

However this life of poverty and want did absolutely nothing to disturb Rabbi Moshe Aharon's service of Hashem, for he continued to study Torah as in the past, according to the teaching of the Sages: "This is the way of Torah: Eat bread with salt, drink water in small measure" (*Pirkei Avot* 6:4). Thus the promise of the Sages, "Happy shall you be in this world, and it shall be well with you in the World to Come" (*ibid*) was fulfilled in him.

On the verse, “The squeezing of milk produces butter” (*Mishlei* 30:33), the Sages have said: “In whom do you find the butter of Torah? In one who vomits forth the milk of his mother’s breasts for its sake” (*Berachot* 63b). They have also said, “Be mindful of the children of the poor, for from them does the Torah emerge, as it is written: ‘Water shall flow from his buckets [*dalyav*, which can also be read as *dalim*, i.e., the poor]’ [*Bamidbar* 24:7]” (*Nedarim* 81a). This is because the children of the wealthy are immersed in pleasures and comfort, and the Torah endures only with restrained living.

Concerning the statement of the Sages, “In one who vomits forth the milk of his mother’s breasts for its sake,” the *gaon* Rabbi Yaakov Hillel *Shlita* notes: “It is frightening to see just to what point the Sages have demanded that we devote ourselves to Torah and the service of Hashem. In fact the first thing that a baby suckles in this world is its mother’s milk. This is what builds and grows its body, the source of its strength and power. From that point on, everything that it eats adds to its growth and strength. Yet we, as servants of Hashem, are asked to reject everything for the sake of Torah, everything to the extreme, to the foundations of what we have absorbed in this world. We must reject and offer even these things for Hashem, placing them entirely upon the altar of Torah study!”

Reb Moshe’s Financial Downfall

The *gaon* Rabbi Aaron Soloveitchik described the origins of his family’s amazing dynasty of Torah scholars, which included the *gaon* Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (the author of *Beit HaLevi*), Rabbi Chaim of Brisk, and their descendants.

During the time of the *gaon* Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin *Zatzal*, there lived a Jew by the name of Reb Moshe Soloveitchik. He was a lumber merchant who owned some forest land, and he was known for his tremendous wealth and generosity in helping everyone in need.

As it turned out, Reb Moshe’s entire fortune vanished almost overnight, something that dismayed all the residents of the city. Upon Rabbi Chaim’s orders, a special *Beit Din* was convened to look into Reb Moshe’s business dealings in order to find a reason for his sudden downfall. After a careful investigation, the *dayanim* concluded that he did nothing dishonest whatsoever in business. The only theory they had was that Reb Moshe had transgressed the Sages’ instruction that one who gives *tzeddakah* should not give more than a fifth. Indeed, Reb Moshe gave even more than a fifth to *tzeddakah*, for he generously distributed his money to everyone who asked and everyone who needed. Rabbi Chaim, however, rejected this conclusion, stating that it was impossible for Reb Moshe to be so severely punished for having given *tzeddakah*.

Since Reb Moshe no longer had any occupation, he went to the Beit HaMidrash and began learning Torah with tremendous energy and great concentration. It quickly became apparent that he was skilled in learning, and he enjoyed great success, elevating himself more and more. In fact he was considered to be one of the best students there. He also brought his sons with him to the Beit HaMidrash, and they gained a reputation as great men of Torah.

A few years after these events, Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin said: “Only now do I understand the meaning of Reb Moshe’s financial ruin. It seems that Heaven wanted to grant him a great dynasty of Torah scholars as a reward for all the *tzeddakah* that he gave. However it was impossible for such a dynasty to emerge from a house of riches, which is why his wealth was taken away. It was in order for him to study Torah in want, and now he can be granted generations of great Torah scholars.”

Inciting the Good Inclination

Rabbi Aryeh Levine *Zatzal* knew a Jew who spent his entire day earning a living, and even at night he found no time to attend a Torah class. Since Rabbi Aryeh wanted to encourage him to study Torah, he said to him: “In tractate *Berachot* we read, ‘A man should always incite the good inclination to fight against the evil inclination’ [*Berachot* 5a]. Tell me, my friend, have you ever thought of the word ‘incite’? How do we incite the good inclination against the evil inclination?”

Rabbi Aryeh explained this with a parable: Two Jews each owned a store, located next door to one another. One store was always filled with clients at all hours of the day, and business was booming. As for the other store, almost no one was interested in shopping there. In fact almost no one entered it, and its owner became extremely poor.

At the end of one particular work day, when clients had already entered the wealthy man’s store, one lone client entered the poor man’s store, which had been empty all day. In seeing this, the wealthy storeowner spoke to that client in order to convince him to come to his store instead of remaining in the poor man’s store.

The poor storeowner, who felt that the wealthy man was trying to steal his meager earnings, began to shout, calling the wealthy storeowner every name in the book: “How dare you try and steal the only client who has come into my store all day? Are your own clients not enough for you, that you need to come and rob me of my one and only client?!”

Whoever hears the words of the poor storeowner can completely relate to him, for his words are so justified that everyone agrees with them. This is called “inciting.” It means that we have such a powerful and compelling complaint against the evil inclination that it flees on its own.

“What happened in this story,” concluded Rabbi Aryeh Levine as he spoke to this Jew, “is exactly what is happening to you. Throughout the day, the evil inclination has managed to control you, enticing you to pursue your business to such an extent that you have no time for Torah study. At the end of the day, when you arrive for *Mincha* and *Ma’ariv*, it finds you and convinces you not to stay in the Beit HaMidrash for a lesson in Gemara. It acts exactly like the wealthy storeowner who tried to take away his competitor’s only client when he came to his store at the end of the day. You must therefore incite the good inclination by telling the evil inclination, ‘Is it not enough that you managed to take me out of the Beit HaMidrash all day long, that now you want to stop me from attending a Torah class at night?!’”

The words of Rabbi Aryeh, which emerged from a loving heart, led to a revolution in the heart of this Jew. In fact he quickly changed his ways and began to attend Torah classes.

Guard Your Tongue!

Still Forbidden to Believe It

Just as we have explained that the *din* forbids a person from believing *Lashon Harah*, he is also forbidden from believing *Rechilus*, even if told about it in the presence of the individual who allegedly said it. This means that if you are told that a certain individual spoke against you, and that individual happens to be present when you are told about him – yet he remains completely silent – you are still forbidden from believing it. You cannot conclude that you are being told the truth because the individual has remained silent, for his silence may be due to other reasons. Even as such, his silence does not constitute a proof that enables you to decide that the statement is true.