

The Path To Follow

Vayecki

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The Final Redemption Will Come Through Jewish Unity and Love

Concerning the verse found in this week's *parsha*, "Jacob called his sons and said, 'Gather yourselves together, and I will tell you what will happen at the end of days'" (*Bereshith* 49:1), the Sages have explained: "Jacob wished to reveal the end of days to his sons, at which point the *Shechinah* left him" (*Pesachim* 56a).

Before leaving this world, Jacob revealed to his sons the secret of the Jewish people's existence in exile among the nations. It consists of complete unity and boundless love among Jews. This is the secret of the Final Redemption, for when Jews will be united and connected to one another, they will merit to emerge from exile. Yet as long as they are divided and quarrel with one another, they will not be rescued. They were not driven into slavery in Egypt until they quarreled among themselves, and the informers among them – Dathan and Abiram – rose up against one another. At that point, Moshe immediately realized that "surely the thing is known" (*Shemot* 2:14), namely the reason for their enslavement in Egypt.

The Children of Israel were not rescued from Egypt before there was unity and a sense of brotherhood among them. Although the Egyptians struck the Jewish foremen, they in turn did not strike their brothers. Also, the Sea of Reeds did not split before them until Nachshon ben Amminadav demonstrated selfless love by jumping into the sea. On the other hand, Amalek could not do anything against the Children of Israel until disputes arose among them, and we know that the Temple was destroyed only on account of baseless hatred.

Loving Your Fellow Whatever May Happen

The Ramban explains the verse, "You shall love *l'rei'acha* [literally: to your fellow] as yourself" (*Vayikra* 19:18) by stating: "[This] Torah *mitzvah* means that one is to love one's fellow in all circumstances, just as one loves all good things for oneself. It is possible that since it does *not* say, 'you shall love *et rei'acha* [your fellow] as yourself,' but instead it likened them in the term *l'rei'acha* [to your fellow] – just as it states with reference to the proselyte, 'You shall love *lo* [to him] as yourself' [ibid. 19:34] – it means to equate the love of both in his mind."

From these words, we learn that the great power of the *mitzvah* of loving one's fellow resides in not growing proud over others. When the evil inclination wants to introduce strife among Jews, it starts by infusing pride into the heart of one Jew against another, increasing a person's importance in his own eyes. At the same time, it diminishes the importance of others in his eyes, until finally a dispute arises among them and unity suffers as a result.

The holy Torah states, "You shall love your fellow as yourself." It uses the term *l'rei'acha* in order to tell us that even when your fellow acts with evil (*ra*) towards you, you must still love him. Even when you see that he does not love you, you must still love him, as the Ramban makes clear: You must love your fellow in all circumstances, just as you love yourself. If you detest your fellow, there will never be peace among you, and the foundation upon which the Torah rests will collapse.

Yet even in regards to humility, we must be careful not to let the evil inclination lead us into false humility, which is nothing but pride disguised as humility. Sometimes the evil inclination confuses a person's perception and gives him the impression of great humility, just as when the Children of Israel said: "Is

Hashem with us or not?" (*Shemot* 17:7). The evil inclination tells man, "Do you deserve Hashem's Presence dwelling in you? You're so insignificant! You were created from a putrid drop, and Hashem certainly doesn't pay attention to your deeds!"

In this way, the evil inclination tries to entice a person and turn him away from G-d. However if he were to reflect upon the fact that his soul was taken from beneath the Throne of Glory, and that it is a Divine spark, he would have no doubts that Hashem will indeed make His Presence dwell in him.

On the verse, "Let them make Me a Sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" (*Shemot* 25:8), the commentators (Rabbeinu Ephraim) notes that it says "among them," meaning among each of them. Each person is a miniature Sanctuary in which Hashem makes His *Shechinah* dwell. In other words, He makes it dwell in the heart of a person who has prepared himself for it. The evil inclination, however, tries to infuse a false sense of humility in man's heart ("Is Hashem with us or not?").

The term *yesh* ("there is") can be divided into two parts: *yud-hei* and *shin*. The first part (*yud-hei*) relates to Hashem, and Y-H has the same numerical value as the term *ga'avah* ("pride"). This tells us that pride only befits G-d, as it is written: "Hashem has reigned; He has donned grandeur" (*Tehillim* 93:1). The second part (*shin*) has the same numerical value as the term *kar* ("cold"), which relates to the expression *asher karcha baderech* (*Devarim* 25:18), an allusion to the cold introduced by Amalek. Now the evil inclination is Amalek, which infuses man's heart with resentment against his fellow. How? Through a false sense of humility, as in the expression: "Is Hashem with us or not?" In this way, a person's service of Hashem is cooled and he dons the garment of the King – pride – which befits Hashem alone. Now one who wears the garment of a king is liable to death, as the Midrash states: If someone dons the coat of a human king, can he live? How much less if he dons the coat of the King of kings (Midrash cited in *Ma'alot HaMiddot, Middah* 5).

Thus the Aggadah states, "Once He gave them everything they needed, they began to ask: 'Is Hashem among us or not?' The Holy One, blessed be He, said to them: 'You have doubted Me? By your life, I shall make you sense My Presence: The dog will come and bit you.' What does this refer to? To Amalek, as it is written: 'And Amalek came' [*Shemot* 17:8]" (*Pesikta D'Rav Kahana* 3:1).

The Holy One, blessed be He, said: "For the hand is on the Throne of G-d: Hashem maintains a war against Amalek from generation to generation" (*Shemot* 17:16). Since the Torah uses the name Y-H, which as we have said alludes to pride, Amalek (the evil inclination) constantly seeks to infuse pride into man under the guise of humility; that is: "Is Hashem with us or not." This is why the war against Amalek is from generation to generation, for as long as the Satan has not been destroyed, there is still a danger that a person will fall into its trap. Therefore Hashem fights against Amalek through the Name Y-H, which alludes to pride, one thing corresponding to the other.

By the hidden pride which the evil inclination tries to infuse in man, a person will neglect the *mitzvah* of loving his fellow as himself. This, as we have said, is the foundation of the entire Torah, for personal honor is all important in a person's eyes.

The Paralyzed Hand and the Halachot of Netilat Yadayim

It is written, “His bow was established in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong” (*Bereshith* 49:24).

In his commentary on the Torah, the Rashbam explains the words of this verse in the following way: His arms bend by stretching out the bowstring, and he launches arrows at them, for he is a strong man who draws his bow with strength. We also find several other places where the term *zeroa* is used with regards to bow and arrow.

Everyone realizes that the Torah is holy. It is the best remedy for all illnesses, and one who observes its *mitzvot* acquires the best form of “insurance” against all kinds of misfortunes. Be that as it may, an unusual story appears in the Torah book *Barchi Nafshi* by the *gaon* Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein *Shlita*. The main character in this story is Moshe G., a student from a yeshiva near the Ramat Elchanan neighborhood in Bnei Brak. This is his account:

“One day during the last *Bein Hazemanim*, I went with a friend to stretch out a little and relax I could regain my energy for the following *zeman*. I decided to climb up on something, upon which I was lifting myself up using only my hands, when suddenly my hands gave way and I fell to the ground.

“Some other friends of mine, who were there, immediately brought me to the hospital. The doctors said that my situation seemed normal, and that *Baruch Hashem* everything was going to be all right. In fact I was told that my pain would subside after a few hours. Yet 24 hours later, my condition had worsened. I felt a strong pain in my left shoulder, and in one of my hands I felt a kind of paralysis. My hand twitched on its own, without any deliberate action on my part.”

Studying the Halachot of Netilat Yadayim

Moshe G. recounted that he went to see an orthopedic specialist, who prescribed various specific exercises and stretches. When none of them worked, the specialist performed an additional test, after which he told the patient that his hand was completely paralyzed, and that it was completely impossible for him to recover.

“I was in a state of shock when I heard that,” recounts Moshe. “I was young, and to realize that I would never be able to move my hand had the effect of a thunderclap on a clear day. All I could do was get used to the situation and pray for Hashem to show me mercy.

“After a few days, I went to see the *gaon* and *tzaddik* Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky *Shlita*, and I told him the whole story. I also explained the incredible despair that took hold of me since my hand became completely paralyzed. He looked at me, looked at my hand, and then said: ‘Study the *halachot* of *Netilat Yadayim* with the *Mishnah Berurah*, and may you be completely healed.’

“I left him very happy and greatly encouraged, and I immediately began to study the *halachot* of *Netilat Yadayim* with the *Mishnah Berurah*.

“Then, as soon as I began learning, I suddenly felt tremendous relief. I could already begin moving my hand somewhat, and a day later I felt a real improvement in my movement. One day after that, and the situation had completely returned to normal! When I returned to the orthopedist and showed him that I could move my hand, he simply couldn’t believe his eyes. ‘It’s a real miracle!’ he said to me.”

The Paralysis Returns

The story is not yet over. A few weeks later, the young man began to feel some pain in his hand, and his paralysis returned, exactly as at the beginning.

“I can state,” he recounts, “that this happened because two days earlier I had disregarded the instructions of Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky *Shlita* to study the *halachot* of *Netilat Yadayim*. I had barely returned to this learning when my pain completely disappeared, as if it had never existed.”

Such was the story of this young man, from whom we can learn that even in an era such as our own, Hashem sometimes sends people clear signs so they can improve themselves. We also learn that all the events we experience are absolutely tied to our spiritual condition.

Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein adds, “I heard from the *gaon* Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky *Zatzal* that when one of the students from the Slabodka yeshiva began to have pain in his kidneys, the Rosh Yeshiva Rabbi Mordechai Schulman *Zatzal* told him to study the *halachot* concerning kidneys in the *Shulchan Aruch*, *Yoreh Deah*, and he was healed. That is what happened.”

Harming a Child for No Reason

The book *Barchi Nafshi* also cites Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein in recounting another story that involves healing: A woman had gone to a clinic with her baby, who was suffering from a high fever. The doctor examined the baby and believed that no special treatment was necessary.

However the mother didn’t rest easy, and she begged the doctor to perform a blood test. At that point, nothing justified such a test. The Rav said that in his opinion, such a test should not have been performed, and whoever did so would be harming a child for no reason.

Guard Your Tongue!

A Small Area

Because of our many sins, there is a small area in which many people stumble. For example, there are certain people in town who support the poor, who must be given *tzeddakah*. Now if someone were to say that they are not poor at all, but just pretending to be poor so they can deceive people, this would prevent numerous people from giving them what they had always given before.

– Chafetz Chaim

Something That Already Exists

It is written, "I have given you *shechem echad* [one portion] more than your brothers, which I took from the Emorite with my sword and with my bow" (*Bereshith* 48:22).

Some commentators (Ibn Ezra and others) state that Jacob was alluding to the city of Shechem. Others (Rashi, Ramban, and others) explain that the expression *shechem echad* represents the share of the firstborn. [The numerical value of *shechem echad* is the same as *bechelek haberocha* ("the share of the firstborn") – Baal HaTurim.]

In his book *Panim Yafot*, Rabbi Pinchas Halevi Horowitz *Zatzal* notes that in reality, both explanations are correct. We know of the *halachah* which states that "a man cannot acquire something that does not yet exist," unless he also acquires, at the time of the purchase, something that already exists. Therefore when Jacob wanted to give Joseph the birthright – which according to the *din* did not yet exist, since it was before the giving of the Torah – he also had to give him the city of Shechem, which already existed; it was "something that already exists."

Learning or Practice?

It is written, "I have given you *shechem echad* [one portion] more than your brothers" (*Bereshith* 48:22).

In his book *Yismach Israel*, Rabbi Chaim Sofer *Zatzal* writes that the term *shechem* has the same numerical value as *shass* ("Talmud").

This hints to us that learning Talmud is what grants a person a portion more than his fellows, for learning is greater than the fulfillment of *mitzvot*. As the Gemara states, "Rabbi Tarfon and the Elders were once reclining in the upper storey of Nithza's house in Lod, when this question was raised before them: Is learning or practice greater? Rabbi Tarfon answered, saying: 'Practice is greater.' Rabbi Akiva answered, saying: 'Learning is greater, for it leads to practice.' Then they all answered and said: 'Learning is greater, for it leads to practice'" (*Kiddushin* 40b).

Rashi explains: "Both of them are his." In other words, since learning leads to practice, he had both: The reward for learning Torah, and the reward for practicing *mitzvot*.

Of Asher

It is written, "Of Asher, his bread will have richness, and he will provide royal delicacies" (*Bereshith* 49:20).

How is Asher different from the other tribes, such that concerning the other tribes it is not said: "Of Reuven" or "Of Shimon" – using the letter *mem* as a prefix? Yet for Asher we read, *MeAsher* ("Of Asher").

In his book *Tzieda LaDerech*, Rabbi Yechiya Aletsheri *Zatzal* explains that in the previous verse, Gad was given a blessing without it being specified. The only thing mentioned in regards to Gad is warfare: "He shall press upon their heel" (v.19). Although he will conquer whoever attacks him, the source of his sustenance must still be specified, since all of his time is spent in battle.

This is why "of Asher, his bread will have richness" – by either commerce or being employed for the needs of battle, and he will be given sustenance in abundance.

More Natural Deaths

It is written, "Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine by a fountain" (*Bereshith* 49:22).

Our teachers the *Ba'alei HaTosafot* ask the following question (*Bava Metzia* 107a): The Sages have said that the evil eye has no power over the descendants of Joseph. If so, the number of Joseph's descendants should have been greater than that of the other tribes, since the Gemara states that 99 out of 100 people die on account of the evil eye, and the hundredth dies a natural death. Therefore Joseph's descendants, upon whom the evil eye had no power, should have lived much longer than the other tribes.

This is surprising: How did the *Tosafot* know that the number of Joseph's descendants was not greater than that of the other tribes?

The book *Peninei Kedem* replies that the descendants of Manasseh and Ephraim [constituting the descendants of Joseph] numbered 72,700 combined. As for the tribe of Judah, for example, they numbered 74,600, which was greater than the descendants of Manasseh and Ephraim.

If we say that the children of Joseph lived longer than the other tribes, they should have been more numerous than them. Yet Joseph's descendants were not more numerous than the other tribes. Hence the *Ba'alei HaTosafot* explained that they died more from natural causes than did the other tribes.

In the Light of the Parsha

The Power of the Tzaddikim Upon Leaving this World

It is written, "May the angel who redeemed me from all evil bless the lads, and may my name be declared upon them, and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac" (*Bereshith* 48:16).

We read that as Jacob was about to die, "He said, 'Swear to me,' and [Joseph] swore to him. Then Israel prostrated himself towards the head of the bed" (*Bereshith* 47:31). Rashi writes, "He turned around to the side of the *Shechinah*. From here [the Sages] deduced that the *Shechinah* is over the head of a sick person [*Shabbat* 12b]. Another explanation: It was because his offspring were perfect, insofar as not one of them was wicked, as evidenced by the fact that Joseph was a king, and also that [although] he was captured by heathens, he remained steadfast in his righteousness."

Why does Rashi give two explanations?

Jacob said to Joseph: All my life, I distanced myself from sin. My son Reuven is the beginning of my strength [*Bereshith* 49:3], and now I will soon die. I see that my offspring is perfect, and I never succumbed to sin, for an angel protected me from all harm throughout my life. The *Shechinah* is over the head of my bed, and all the blessings that I give you will certainly come true. Even if a person cannot trust in himself up to his dying day, since he must always fear sin [*Pirkei Avot* 2:4], nevertheless on the very day of his death, if he sees that he has not committed any sin, he may trust in himself and bless his children.

Our father Jacob was so certain of himself that he said, "Let my name be called on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac," meaning that he fled from sin throughout his life, and he thereby merited for his offspring to be completely pure.

He placed his own name before those of his fathers, and in the Prophets we read: "Therefore thus says Hashem to the house of Jacob, who redeemed Abraham: Jacob will not be ashamed now, and his face will not pale now" (Isaiah 29:22). Here the Sages state, "Where do we find that Jacob redeemed Abraham? Rav Yehudah answered: It means that he redeemed him from the pains of rearing children" (*Sanhedrin* 19b). Rashi explains that Jacob took this hardship upon himself, for it should normally have gone to Abraham, as it is written: "I will increase your offspring" (*Bereshith* 26:4), thereby saving him from it. Because his descendants were perfect, he fulfilled this promise. Jacob trusted in himself on the day of his death, confident of being worthy of blessing his sons, and the Holy One, blessed be He, agreed with him.

All this happened to Jacob because he devoted himself to Torah for 14 years in the Beit HaMidrash of Shem and Eber, as well as for 20 years with Lavan (*Bereshith Rabba* 68:11). It is also written, "Grant truth to Jacob" (*Micah* 7:20).

How was he protected from all evil? By holiness. Now it is written, "You shall guard against all evil" (*Devarim* 23:10), meaning that when you guard yourself from all evil, your camp will be clean. Therefore Jacob's entire camp – meaning all his children – were holy, for they maintained their righteousness. Why? Because Jacob had conducted himself with holiness and was protected from all evil.

Times for the Sedarim are Sacred!

In the Midrash (*Tanchuma, Ki Tisa*), it is explicitly stated that a Heavenly voice goes out from Mount Horev every day and says: "Woe to those who neglect the study of Torah, for whosoever does not continually study Torah is reprehensible in the eyes of Hashem, as it is said: 'The Tablets were the work of G-d' [*Shemot* 32:16]. It is like a man who tells his friend, 'What is the occupation of that person? He is a goldsmith.' Likewise, what is the occupation of the King of kings? He studies Torah."

In his book *Ohr LeTzion*, Rabbi Ben Tzion Abba Shaul *Zatzal* states: "The times for the *sedarim* at yeshiva are sacred. We must never abandon the regular fixed times for learning Torah, even in cases of extreme fatigue. If a person sees that he is tired and cannot continue learning, he should sleep on the table or the like, for he has no permission to cancel the fixed time for learning Torah, and he must comply with the *sedarim*. If the end is scheduled for one o'clock, it means 'one' – not two minutes before one. If the start of the *sefer* is scheduled for nine o'clock, it means 'nine' – not one minute past nine. On the contrary, a person should arrive early, and one who does so demonstrates his respect for Torah. We see the same thing in regards to business matters: When we have to attend an important meeting, we leave early in case there are delays on the way. Should we not grant more importance to the *kohenet* than to the innkeeper?"

What to Choose and What to Give Up?

Rabbi Chaim Friedlander *Zatzal*, the *Mashgiach* of the Ponevezh yeshiva, possessed great peace of mind and self-control. It was only due to these characteristics that he was able to pursue so many different activities in so short a time. Every week, he gave more than 20 *va'adim* and eight classes. His use of time was consistent and measured, even when one thing after another would suddenly pile up.

What should we choose, and what should we give up? These are weighty issues, and in this regard the *Mashgiach* was special. He found time for everything by considering each of his steps.

The wedding of one of his sons was scheduled for 7:00 pm, and on the same day he had a meeting at El HaMekorot, which he attended until 7:00 pm!

At an engagement party that took place in his home, Rabbi Chaim suddenly disappeared, and at that time as well people learned that he had a meeting at El HaMekorot: A young man who had missed a counseling session asked the *Mashgiach* to help him catch up, and the time that Rabbi Chaim found was before his son's engagement!

On the day that he learned he had cancer, he first went to see Rabbi Eliezer Menachem Man Shach, the Rosh Yeshiva

of Ponevezh, to receive his advice. He then went to the yeshiva to study Mussar and pray *Arvit*, and only then did he go home, where a couple was waiting to speak to him about peace in the home. He sat down to talk with them for about an hour, and only then did he speak to his family about his condition.

What is the secret to peace of mind? Someone once had the courage to ask Rabbi Chaim about this subject, and he replied as follows: "Very simply, when you are busy with prayer, you must be immersed solely in prayer. And when you are busy with learning, you must be focused only on learning. That is how you achieve inner peace."

One of his acquaintances said of him, "Whoever understood the variety of his endeavors thought that the *Mashgiach* had dozens of things to deal with every day. Not so. He had only one thing to deal with – and after that, he had another – without one thing encroaching on the other in any way."

When You Fix Something, it Must be Firm!

Rabbi Meir Chadash *Zatzal*, the *Mashgiach* of the Hevron yeshiva, had a fixed schedule of learning every day. During the first years, his learning encompassed numerous pages of Gemara each day. Yet over the course of the years, as he devoted much more time to guiding the yeshiva students, this decreased to a single page per day, in the tractate that the students were studying in the yeshiva at the time. He would also give a regular half-hour course of *Mishnah Berurah*, as well as *Yalkut Shimoni* on the Torah, which he literally knew by heart.

To maintain this fixed schedule of learning, Rabbi Meir devoted several hours a day to study. He never deviated from this learning schedule, and he never forsook it for even a single day. If it ever happened that, due to problems at the yeshiva arising from students or for any other reason, he was unable to finish what he had set out to learn on that day, he would be careful to complete it that night. He did this even if it was very late, or he would get up very early the next morning.

He once told his students, "Because of something that involved a potential risk to life, I was forced to cancel my fixed schedule of learning, but I completed it by learning early the next morning, so as not to be in debt on that day."

In his eyes, it was worth every effort to finish what he had set out to do for a given day, without leaving that debt until the following day. Nor did he study in advance. In fact one of his students once told him that he wanted to study a day in advance, for he would not have enough time to study on the following day. Rabbi Meir said to him, "When you fix something, it must be firm!"