

# THE PATH TO FOLLOW

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## ***The good inclination must always overcome the evil inclination***

*(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)*

It is written, "And Jacob sent messengers before him to Esau to brother" (Gen 32:4). Referring to the Midrash, Rashi explains: "these messengers were literally angels" (Bereshith Rabba 75:4).

Some questions may be asked here:

1. Why did Jacob send messengers to his brother? Couldn't he have approached him directly, even by surprise, and meet him without being preceded by messengers?

2. If he wanted to know about his brother's arrival, why do it through the intermediary of angelic messengers? Why not just use regular messengers? If it was to impress and scare his brother, he could have at first simply sent regular messengers, and then afterwards sent angelic ones to frighten him. Concerning the verse that states, "What do you mean by all this camp that I met?" (Gen 33:8), the Sages say, "The angels struck Esau several times" (Bereshith Rabba 78:11).

3. Before sending messengers, it is stated that Jacob "divided the people that were with him ... into two camps" (Gen 32:8). Why divide the members of his family into two camps? If the angels served and watched over him, surely G-d Himself was with him. What was he afraid of? Moreover, Jacob was afraid of Esau to the point of calling him "my lord", as it is stated, "Thus you shall say to my lord, to Esau" (Gen 32:5). What was Jacob so afraid of that he accorded so much honor to Esau in calling him "my lord"?

It is written, "And the first came out red ... and they called his name Esau. And after that his brother came out, and his hand was holding Esau's heel, and his name was called Jacob" (Gen 25:25-26). Why in coming into the world was Jacob holding Esau by the heel? And why exactly by the heel? It's because the one who wants to overcome his evil inclination must from the moment he is born – from the moment he comes into the world – hold the evil inclination in hand, like a prisoner, as it is written, "When the Children of Israel obey G-d, they dominate their

evil inclination" (Avodah Zarah 5b). In what way? In consecrating a portion of their time every day to the study of Torah. In the next world everyone will be asked, "Did you fix a time for the study of Torah?" (Shabbat 31a).

The directives of the Torah allow people to overcome their evil inclination, for "I created the evil inclination, and I created its remedy, the Torah" (Kiddushin 30b; Bava Batra 16a). The Torah weakens the desires of men and submits them to its will. This is the sense of the expression, "holding Esau by the heel". A man must seize his evil inclination in order that it not escape his control. The word עקב ("heel") is composed of the same letters as the word קבע ("to fix"). When the evil inclination is imprisoned, it tries to escape and save itself. One must catch and tame it, as it is written, "The good inclination must always dominate the evil inclination" (Berachot 5a), and Jacob teaches us how to do this.

What we have said allows us to understand why Jacob sent angels to his brother Esau: He was only doing what the Sages recommend be done. Using an example to illustrate this, imagine that two enemies are at war with one another. Each fight with sophisticated weaponry in order to insure complete victory, and each observes the other in order to detect weakness. Yet is possible to defeat one's enemy even if he is better armed, and this is done by striking first, and by striking decisively. Such an attack doesn't allow the enemy time to react and use his weapons, even if they are more modern and sophisticated.

It is the same in man's war with his evil inclination. If one wants to be sure to conquer this powerfully armed adversary, one must know how to put up one's good inclination against him. And even if one isn't well versed in the art of war, one can strike the evil inclination with a first fatal blow in order to assure victory. It is in this way that the good inclination dominates its evil counterpart.

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## *The good inclination must always overcome the evil inclination(continuation from page 1)*

*(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)*

And this is precisely what Jacob did. He demonstrated to Esau (to the evil inclination) that he dominates it. This is why he first sent Esau celestial beings – angels – not simple messengers. These were not just any angels, but rather those which he created through his good deeds. He sent these because he wanted to let Esau know that he didn't fear him. These angels testified to the fact that Jacob never abandoned the study of Torah, concerning which it is stated, "When the voice of Jacob makes itself heard in the houses of study and the houses of prayer, the hands of Esau cannot grab a hold of him" (Peticha of Eicha Rabba 2; Pesikta Zutah Toldot 27:22). The houses of Jacob therefore have the upper hand, and they take hold of the heel of Esau, of the evil inclination. Jacob demonstrated the power of his weapons (the Torah and its observance), which constitutes a fatal blow to the evil inclination, an inclination for whom these weapons are the most menacing and frightening of all.

Yet we shouldn't think that this is sufficient to conquer the Satan (the evil inclination). We must always fear it, as it is written, "Happy is the man who always fears" (Pr 28:14), for the evil inclination can always gain the upper hand. Even if it has been defeated once, "It gains new strength every day and relentlessly seeks to make us fail" (Sukkah 52b; Kiddushin 30b) since it knows neither rest nor repose. We should always fear it, as the Sages say: "Do not be sure of yourself until the day you die" (Perkei Avoth 2:4). We have as our example Yochanan the High Priest, who served in the Temple for 80 years, yet became a heretic at the end of his life (Berachot 29a; Tanhuma Beshalach 3). Jacob also divided the members of his family into two camps in order to show Esau, to the evil inclination, that he was prepared to wage war against him. "If Esau comes to one camp and destroys it, the camp that is left will escape" (Gen 32:9) and continue in the way of Torah and the service of G-d. In making two camps, he also showed Esau and future generations that men should not be too sure of themselves or think that they've completely mastered their evil inclination, but rather they must always continue to fight it.

This also explains why Jacob sent offerings to Esau. Offerings point to the commandments, and they signify that everyone is obligated to practice

all the commandments (which are a great help in time of need). They should not be content in simply observing a portion of them.

Despite all this, however, Jacob was afraid. He knew that Esau honored their father more resolutely than he did (Bereshith Rabba 82:15), and so Jacob feared Esau's merit. It is possible that Jacob addressed him as "my lord" (which is an allusion to Esau's angel) in order to lessen this merit, thus enabling to gain the upper hand.

This is surprising! Jacob, a man raised by the Patriarchs, a man of integrity, among those for whom the world relies on, feared Esau because he observed a commandment as important as honoring one's parents! He feared him to the point of calling him "my lord", to the point of bribing him with gifts. This teaches all of us that we must do everything in our power to practice the commandments, especially the one concerning loving one's neighbor as oneself (Lev 19:18), which according to the opinion of Rabbi Akiva constitutes "a fundamental principle of the Torah" (Yerushalmi Nedarim 9:4). In this way, the evil inclination will not be able to cause sin and will therefore be totally destroyed.

All this applies only to those who are protected through the observance of the commandments, for this renders a person pure, just as the Sages said, "G-d wanted to make Israel meritorious, which is why he gave them the Torah and so many commandments" (Makot 23b; Avoth d'Rabbi Nathan 4:17). The Sages added: "Israel is loved by G-d, which is why He surrounds them with commandments" (Menachot 43b; Pesikta Zutah Beshalach, near the end). However the one who doesn't get used to performing the commandments becomes weaker, and this weakness becomes part of his nature. This is indicated by the word וישלח ("and he sent"), which is composed of the same letters as the word וירחש ("and he weakened"), for Jacob felt weak concerning the commandment of honoring one's parents, which Esau practiced. This is why he was afraid of Esau and took so many precautions. Everyone must practice all the commandments of the Torah, which allows a person to conquer the evil inclination in all circumstances.

## THE MORAL OF THE STORY

### Hidden Blessings (A teaching of the Maggid of dubno)

"I lived with Laban and I stayed with him up to now. I own oxen, donkeys and flocks, male servant and female servants. And I come to say this to my lord Esau in order to find grace in his eyes."

Thirty-four years had passed since Jacob had fled from Esau his twin. Esau had been determined to kill his brother since he had taken the blessings from his father, the Patriarch Isaac. Jacob knew that Esau retained his resentment and looked to avenge himself, and Jacob had very good reason to hide his riches from his jealous brother. Yet, quite to the contrary, he showed him all his wealth. How can we explain this behavior?

Jacob began to enumerate all his goods by the word *vayehe* ("and there is [for me]"). This word signifies an event that has just occurred. We find the same word used earlier: *vayehe* or "and there was light" (Gen 1:3). There is also another perplexing detail to this: Why did our father Jacob tell Esau that he had stayed with Laban up to that day? How could that interest him?

The Maggid of Dubno answers this by means of the following parable.

Reuven was a distressed businessman. His sales were nil and he was losing a great deal of money week after week. Now he was running out of options and had to make a difficult decision. A friend had spoken to him of an island where vendors came from around the world to sell spices, textiles, and jewels. The merchants liquidated their products at very low prices; they were in such a hurry to get rid of their stock that they didn't care to look for the best deals. His friend had assured him that whoever put in the effort to travel to that island was guaranteed to make a fortune. Thus Reuven decided to go.

He finally arrived on the island and began to sell his merchandise. But things didn't turn out at all like he had expected, and every time he would set a price for an item, twenty other merchants would offer to sell the same thing at a lower price. Whether it be spices, textiles, or jewels, it always ended as a loss for him. Time passed and the years rolled along, but Reuven's wallet remained empty and he continued to live very poorly.

One day Reuven had enough. He got his things together, managed to sell a few trifles, and purchased a ticket to return home. Two days before leaving, however, he was approached by a strange man who looked quite important.

"I'm looking for a salesman, and you have a reputation for honesty. Would you like to earn some money? Here, see this box? It contains diamonds. I would like you to sell them for me in town. I don't have enough time to take care of it myself since I have to stay here, away from town. Come back tomorrow with the money that you made from selling. Half of it will be yours."

And without saying another word, the stranger placed his precious case into Reuven's hands and disappeared. Reuven opened it and stared in blissful content at the contents: Diamonds of a caliber without compare, rubies and sapphires to take one's breathe away. He couldn't believe his eyes. His mind was churning away at the thought of how much money he was going to make.

Having spent so many years on the island, Reuven knew all the vendors of precious jewels. He knew exactly who to approach, and deftly negotiated the price of the merchandise. The jewels brought him a sum of money that was so enormous that he had to pinch himself to make sure that he wasn't dreaming.

As early as the next day, Reuven gave to the stranger what he had made.

Within a day Reuven left for home, replete with magnificent gifts for his family and all his friends. His hand took hold of the stuffed wallet that was inflating his pocket, and a beaming smile lit his face.

He received a tremendous welcome as soon as his feet landed on home soil.

"But look at the clothes he's wearing!" was the cry from all directions.

"Did you see the jewels and the silk that Reuven brought back to his wife and daughters? Where exactly is this island anyways? I'm leaving right now to make my fortune!"

But Reuven interrupted their obvious reaction and said, "Not so fast my friends. Before buying your tickets, let me tell you what happened to me over there. I tried to get rich for many long years. I learned how to buy and sell, and did a little

business. I asked advice of some, observed the habits of others, and eventually learned all there was to know about commerce, yet despite all that I only managed to sustain a meager existence with the few cents that I earned through great hardship. I had lost all hope and had decided to come back home, having to sell the little that I had left in order to purchase my ticket. Everything was ready for my departure when something unexpected and astounding happened to me. I met someone extraordinary. All those years I had worked by the sweat of my brow for nothing! And by the greatest of miracles, a few hours worth of time was all that it took to make me the fabulously rich man that you see before you today. It was a marvelous stroke of luck – a veritable gift from the Heaven!"

And so my dear friends, don't waste your time, or your money, trotting the globe to earn a fortune. Heaven can send you the right star, now, here with you, and in a way that you don't expect. Jacob our father worked 20 years for Laban, yet he remained poor. Despite the blessing that he had purchased from his brother, despite the blessings that he received instead of Esau, Jacob still possessed nothing. Yet he had worked hard during all those years, which is what he told Laban: "Unless the G-d of my father ... surely now you would have sent me away empty" (Gen 31:42).

The wealth of Jacob was a gift from Hashem. It did not come from the blessings that he had received, which is what Jacob was trying to tell his brother, namely that there was no reason for him to be jealous. This is why Jacob told him "I own oxen, donkeys and flocks, male servant and female servants" – it was a miracle that Hashem accomplished – "And I come to say this to my lord Esau in order to find grace in his eyes" – I want you to know that I became rich thanks to Hashem's miracles, not because of the blessings that I took from you.

## Eishet Chayil

### LIGHTING CANDLES ON THE HOLIDAYS

1. It is a mitzvah to light candles on the night of holidays, at which time one recites the following blessing: *Baruch ata Hashem, Elokeinu melech haolam, asher kidishanu bemitzvotav, vetzivanu lehadlic ner shel Yom Tov*. Sephardim always recite the blessing before lighting the candles for the holidays and for Shabbat.

2. Certain women are accustomed to say *Shecheyanu* when they light the candles of Yom Tov. This habit has no basis in Halachah whatsoever, and it is proper to eliminate it. They should have the intention to discharge themselves from saying *Shecheyanu* while listening to the *Kiddush* at night, as our Sages instituted.

3. The candles of Yom Tov should be lit in an area in which they will stay. They should not be lit with the intention of moving them or placing them elsewhere later.

4. Even though the reason for lighting two candles has to do with Shabbat, we customarily light two candles on Yom Tov. When Yom Tov falls on Sunday, the lighting is done *Motzei Shabbat* (since we must wait until nightfall – the end of Shabbat – to light), and the candles must be lit from a pre-existing flame.

5. On Rosh Hashanah we recite the following blessing: *Baruch ata ... lehadlic ner shel Yom Tov* without mentioning *Yom Hazikaron*.

6. The custom of lighting candles on the day before Yom Kippur has become widespread in all Jewish communities. It is quite a beautiful custom, and the blessing for it is: *Baruch ata ... lehadlic ner shel Yom HaKippurim*.

7. On Sukkoth, one should make an effort to light candles in the Sukkah so as to provide better lighting for the meal. Before the beginning of the holiday, a glass protector for the candles should be prepared so as to prevent the wind from blowing them out, as well as to avoid all risk of fire. If this is impossible, we light the candles in the home where the meals are being prepared, and if possible we place them on a windowsill facing the Sukkah so that their light can be seen from people inside.

8. The Friday of Hanukkah, we light the candles of Hanukkah and the candles of Shabbat.

## IN MEMORY OF THE TZADDIKIM

### *Prophet of the Kabbalah: Rabbi Yitzhak Luria Ashkenazi, the Ari z"l*

**R**abbi Yitzhak Halevi Luria, forerunner of the Kabbalah and, more particularly, the school of thought that bears his name, became widely known throughout the Jewish world under the name of the Ari, a name formed by his initials.

As the surname Ashkenazi indicates, the family of Rabbi Yitzhak Luria came from Germany. They then immigrated to the Holy Land and settled in Jerusalem. Born there was a man that was destined to play a defining role in the spiritual development of his generation, an influence that makes itself felt unto today.

Becoming fatherless from his early childhood, the future Rabbi Yitzhak went to Cairo with his mother to meet his uncle, Rabbi Mordechai Parnass. Being a wealthy, learned and generous man, he immediately saw to raising him and lavishing him with the best Jewish education possible. The child was enrolled in the Cairo yeshiva, and had as his teacher the illustrious Rabbi David ben Zimra, better known by his initials, the Ridbaz. As the Chief Rabbi of Egypt, the Ridbaz had already gained great renown from his book of responsa. He made his young and brilliant student one of his protégés, and helped him to arrive at the summit of sacred knowledge.

It was in this way that Rabbi Yitzhak, while still a young man, managed to write a brilliant commentary on the tractate *Zebachim* (Sacrifices).

Aware of having an unusually great sage in the person of his nephew, Rabbi Mordechai Parnass gave him his daughter in marriage and undertook to free him of all material concerns.

Yet Rabbi Yitzhak Luria, whose soul was noticeably at the highest-level possible, did not want to limit himself to the study of Talmud and Halachah. Kabbalah, the science of truth, acquired by the most extensive analysis possible of Torah, exerted an irresistible attraction on him. He therefore decided to devote his life to study and develop it. It was thus that, from his earliest years, he began to isolate himself by the shores of the Nile. Later he withdrew completely from social life to devote himself totally to the key work of Kabbalah, in this case the Zohar of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai.

This period of isolation lasted seven years, during which time Rabbi Yitzhak would come home but once a week to spend Shabbat with his family.

The lofty soul that was his allowed him not only to understand the secrets of the Zohar, but also (and especially) to become familiar with the universe in all its mysteries. Nothing dealing with the ways of nature, of life, or of the world were unfamiliar to him. To arrive at such knowledge, knowledge that was sometimes inaccessible to even the greatest sages of his era, Rabbi Yitzhak didn't hesitate to impose on himself entire days of fasting, of prayer, and of study.

His tireless efforts to penetrate to the depths of Torah allowed him to discover the true meanings of the Jewish faith in all its different aspects. Henceforth was born a new school of Kabbalistic thought that carried the name of the Ari.

This G-d-inspired man set himself the goal of purifying the world by replacing its faulty foundations. In 1569, he left Egypt with his entire family to go to the Holy Land. After a stay in Jerusalem, he left for Sefat with firm intention of making it an important center for the study of Kabbalah.

It wasn't long before the small town in the Galilee became the center of attraction for scholars who wished to drink of the hidden secrets of the Torah. His students didn't stop rushing to be close to the Ari in order to listen to his Kabbalistic interpretations, not only of Torah, but also of every event, large and small, that shook the world, especially in the Holy Land and Sefat.

The students of the Ari, who were becoming ever more numerous, joyfully accepted the way of life of their revered teacher. This was a life of holiness, but also one of mortification, and was the only way to make them malleable to the spiritually elevating knowledge of Kabbalah. Under the influence of the Ari, the smallest gesture, the least word, the slightest thought would from that moment take on a completely different dimension; all the more would public prayer. In fact, what the Ari had discovered and transmitted was the deepest, most authentic and spiritual sense of every word – even every letter – of the Torah.

We therefore have no problem imagining the atmosphere of inspiration, holiness, and fervor that surrounded the services in the Ari's synagogue. It was the same for every Shabbat meal, strewn with words of Kabbalah and sacred songs, many of which came from the pen of the Ari himself. Such Shabbat meals took on the semblance of veritable sacrifices to G-d. As for the *Melaveh Malka* meal, at the end of Shabbat, those who partook of it were left with an indelible impression that lasted the entire week.

Expanding beyond the borders of the Holy Land, the Ari's Kabbalistic teachings spread across the entire world and became a unique point of reference for all Jewish communities, within whom the world of reality and prayer had forever been changed.

The moment has come to make mention of one of the principle students of the Rabbi, a person to whom we owe the credit for spreading his teachings around the world. This person was Rabbi Haim Vital, who alone had the privilege and the authorization of putting the Ari's thoughts into writing. Who is not familiar with his monumental work *Etz Chaim* ("The Tree of Life"), of which new editions have not ceased since the invention of the printing press?

As for Rabbi Israel Saruk, he was another eminent student of the Ari.

A veritable prophet of Kabbalah, the Ari passed away when he was only 39 years old. The entire Jewish people began to mourn this giant of Torah and Kabbalah, a man who in many ways revolutionized the Jewish nation's daily and long-term way of life. Innumerable are the communities that have adopted the Ari's customs, and who, during Chassidic get-togethers, sing songs and melodies created by our revered teacher.

We can thus affirm, without exaggerating, that the teachings of the Ari served as a veritable shield for European Jewish communities that were confronted with the Reform movement, a movement that attacked Judaism during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The Hilloula of the Ari z"l is Av 5.