

לעילו נשמת: פייגה בת הרב אהרן ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

לזכות רפואה שלמה: מלכה בת רחל, מיכאל בן שולמית, יעקב משה בן דבורה שירי, ואברהם יהודה בן שרה רבקה.

Torah Wellsprings

Collected thoughts
from
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Vayishlach



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Torah Wellsprings

Vayishlach

The Power of *Tefillah*

Rashi (32:9) writes that Yaakov prepared for his encounter with Eisav in three ways: לדורון, לתפלה, ולמלחמה, "gifts, *tefillah*, and war."¹

Why did Rashi use the order (1) gifts, (2) *tefillah*, (3) war? This isn't the order of the *pesukim*. The correct order (according to how the *pesukim* tell the story) is תפילה, דורון מלחמה, (1)war, (2) *tefillah*, (3) gifts. Why did Rashi change the order?²

We can answer that Rashi is teaching us the following lesson: A gift is *hishtadlus* בדרך הטבע because when you want to earn someone's favor, you give him a gift. Similarly, preparing for war is *hishtadlus* בדרך הטבע, a natural approach. Rashi placed *tefillah* between these two preparations to reveal to us that *tefillah* is also *hishtadlus* בדרך הטבע. It is within the nature of the world that when one davens to Hashem, his requests will be answered.³

1. The דורון, gifts, were sheep, goats, donkeys, and camels that Yaakov gave to Eisav. Yaakov's *tefillah* is (32:12), הציילי נא מיד אחי מיד עשו, etc. Yaakov also prepared for war (see 32:8-9); he divided his camp into two. He said, if Eisav attacks one camp, the other one will escape.

2. If Rashi had written תפילה first, we would explain that Rashi wants to tell us that *tefillah* was Yaakov's primary *hishtadlus*. But Rashi doesn't list *tefillah* first. So, what is the significance of Rashi's order?

3. If Rashi had listed them in the order of the *pesukim*: (1) war, (2)

A miracle is when something occurs that defies and overrides the laws of nature. For example, according to nature, oil that can burn for one day won't burn for eight days. And according to nature, a small army of men can't win a war against a mighty army. The Chanukah miracles defied the rules of nature.

But when it comes to *tefillah*, it is entirely natural. Hashem placed into the laws of nature that when one davens to Him, Hashem will listen. Therefore, *tefillah* can be called בדרך הטבע.

Our source is the Maharsha (*Kiddushin* 29:). The Gemara tells about when Rav Acha's life was in danger, and he was

saved through his *tefillos*. There's a rule: When a miracle occurs to a person, he loses some of his *zechusim*, *chas veshalom*. His good deeds are exchanged for the miracle that occurred. The Maharsha writes that this didn't happen to Rav Acha; he didn't lose his merits; because Rav Acha was saved in the merit of his *tefillos*, ואין זה מיקרי דרך גם, this isn't called miraculous.

The path of *tefillah* isn't supernatural. When a person prays, Hashem listens. It is as simple as that. And just as you engage in other kinds of *hishtadlus* to achieve your needs, don't forget the primary *hishtadlus*, which is *tefillah*.

tefillah, (3) presents, we would say that Rashi is simply listing them as the Torah lists them, and he isn't coming to teach us a specific lesson. But now that Rashi changed the order, this draws our attention to think about the reason, and we find significance in that *tefillah* is placed between two forms of *hishtadlus* בדרך הטבע. This reveals to us that also *tefillah* is a *hishtadlus* בדרך הטבע.

The Magid of Mezritch *zt'l* taught that *bitachon* is *hishtadlus* בדרך הטבע. Hashem placed into the laws of nature that when one trusts in Him, Hashem will help him. It is natural. *Tefillah* is similar. It is within the laws of nature that *tefillos* are answered.

This lesson should inspire us to invest in *tefillah*. Perhaps we feel distant from something miraculous and unearthly, but we feel very attached to matters of this world. We have now discovered that *tefillah* is part and parcel of this world. So just as undertake different forms of *hishtadlus*, we should also daven, which is the primary *hishtadlus* בדרך הטבע.

According to the Rambam, there's a mitzvah from the Torah to daven every day. The Ramban argues and holds that the

mitzvah from the Torah to daven applies only during *עת צרה*, time of distress when one is in pain. But all opinions agree that *tefillah* is a *mitzvah d'Oraysa*. In fact, the mitzvah of *tefillah* is written several times in the Torah. It states (*Devarim* 10:20), ואתו תעבד, "Serve Hashem"; this means to serve Hashem through *tefillah*. Similarly, it says (*Devarim* 11:13), ולעבדו בכל לבבכם, "serve Hashem with all your heart," which is the mitzvah of *tefillah*.

Why do we have this mitzvah? The Chinuch (433) explains: "Hashem taught our nation a method for them to attain all their needs, and that is by requesting their needs from Hakadosh Baruch Hu. Because it is in Hashem's ability to give people everything they need. Hashem answers all those who call to him sincerely..."⁴

4. The Chinuch adds that *tefillah* teaches us several lessons in *emunah*. "It trains us to know that Hashem is the Master, He is

We will explain the concept of *tefillah* with a *mashal*:

Someone asked his friend, "I'm going to country so-and-so for a business trip, and I need a place to sleep there. What do you recommend?"

The friend recommended a particular five-star hotel, and he followed that advice.

He arrived at the hotel and was pleased to see that hotel was luxurious, but he was upset that the staff didn't serve him any meals! When he returned home, his friend asked him whether he enjoyed the hotel.

"It was terrible," he replied. "No one served me a meal."

"Did you ask for a meal?" the friend asked. "Did you call for room service?"

"No."

"Did you go to the dining room to get a meal?"

"No."

"Well, if you didn't request a meal, how do you expect to get it?"

The *nimshal* is related to *tefillah*. Hashem provides us with all our needs; however, not everything is brought to our doorstep (though many things are). The process that Hashem created in the world is that all our needs can be attained, but we must ask for them. Whatever is missing in our life can be gotten by asking for it.⁵

kind, He takes care of us, He always answers our *tefillos*; He is king, He has the power to do what He wants, and nothing can prevent Hashem from performing His will."

5. Reb Shmuel Shapiro *zt'l* (from the Yerushalmi tzaddikim of the previous generation) would daven many hours each day, with an outpouring of the soul. Once, he heard someone give a long, fiery *drashah*

The Torah says that all of Yaakov Avinu's twelve children were born in Padan Aram. As it states (35:22), ויהיו בני יעקב שנים עשר בני לאה... בני רחל יוסף ובנימין... אלה בני יעקב אשר ילד לו בפרדן ארם, "Yaakov had twelve children... Rachel's

children were Yosef and Binyamin... These are Yaakov's children, who were born to him in Padan Aram."

The question is that Binyamin was not born in

about Hashem's greatness. After the *drashah*, Reb Shmuel said to the speaker, "Instead of speaking so much *about* Hashem, why not speak *to* Him."

About sixty years ago, in Bnei Brak, Reb Yosef Dov Rosenstein's daughter was ill with polio *r'l*. One night, her fever shot up very high, and Reb Yosef Dov decided to go to the Chazon Ish to get his *brachah* and *tefillah*. He said, "Even if the Chazon Ish is sleeping, I'll wake him up." There was no time to wait.

When he arrived the Chazon Ish was saying אשר יצר with immense *kavanah*. The Chazon Ish's eyes were closed; he was facing the wall; it was almost like he was saying *Shemonah Esrei*. When he finished the *brachah*, Reb Yosef Dov answered amen loudly. "Yosel," the Chazon Ish said, startled. "Why are you here in the middle of the night?"

Reb Yosef Dov told him about his daughter's illness.

The Chazon Ish said, "Yosel, go home. Your daughter is fine."

Reb Yosef Dov told him, "No, this is serious. My daughter has polio..."

The Chazon Ish said, "Yosel, don't speak foolishness. I said רופא כל בשר ומפליא לעשות and you answered amen. I'm certain your daughter is feeling better."

Reb Yosef came home and saw that the fever went down. (*Maaseh Ish* vol.3, p.225).

Padan Aram; he was born in Beis Lechem (see *Bereishis* 35:18-19)! Why does the Torah say that all twelve children, including Binyamin, were born in Padan Aram?

The Chizkuni answers that when Yosef was born, Rachel said (*Bereishis* 30:24), יקף ה' לי בן אחר, "May Hashem grant me another son." This prayer bore fruit. Some years later, Binyamin was born. Since Binyamin was born by Rachel's *tefillos* that were said in Padan Aram, it is considered as though Binyamin was born in Padan Aram.

In this week's *parashah*, it states (32:8-9) ויחזק את העם אשר, אתו ואת הצאן ואת הבקר והגמלים לשני מהנות ויאמר אם יבוא עשו אל המחנה, האחת והכרתו והיה המחנה הנשאר לפליטה, "Yaakov divided the people who were with him, the flocks, cattle, and camels into two camps. He said, 'If Eisav comes and smites one camp, the other camp will be spared.'" The Chozeh of Lublin *zt'l* said there are two camps in a

man: his thoughts and his speech. The *pasuk* is saying, אם יבוא עשו, if the *yetzer hara* smites one camp - the camp of your thoughts, and you can't daven with *kavanah*, nevertheless, והיה המחנה הנשאר לפליטה, the other camp, the camp of speech, remains. Daven with your words alone, even if it is without *kavanah*, because that, too, can bring salvation.

Reb Yaakov Meir Shechter (אוסף אמרים, תורה) *shlita* writes this *vort* in the name of the Chozeh of Lublin *zt'l*, and he adds the following story: A *chasan* studied *hilchos kiddushin*, the laws of marriage, before his *chasunah*, and he became an expert in the laws. During *sheva brachos*, he thought back to the *chuppah*, and then it dawned upon him that according to one opinion among the *poskim*, he didn't have the correct intention when he gave the ring to his *kallah*. He feared that perhaps the *kiddushin*

wasn't valid. He expressed his worry to a *talmid chacham*, who replied, "Young man, even if you would have thought *הרי את מנורשת*, that you are divorcing her with the ring, she would nevertheless be deemed married to you because you said, *הרי את מקודשת לי*, that you are marrying her, and we follow what you said."

Reb Yaakov Meir said that this is a lesson in tefillah. When we daven, our thoughts are often elsewhere, but nevertheless, we said *ברך עלינו* and *רפאינו*, and all the other words of tefillah, and that is also counted as a tefillah.

Once, the servant of a wealthy man came to Rebbe Nachum Chernobyler *zt'l* to deliver a barrel of wine. (It used to be the custom of the wealthy to send food and drink to *tzaddikim*.) Rebbe Nachum asked the servant, "Did you put on tefillin today?"

The man replied, "I woke up late today, and I had to go straight to work. By the time I had a break, I was hungry, so I ate breakfast. I figured that since I already ate, it is too late to put on tefillin. So, no, I didn't put on tefillin today."

The Rebbe explained to him that it wasn't too late. He should put on tefillin, even though he ate breakfast already.

The man promised he would do so and left the room. The Rebbe said to his chassidim, "This man is clearly unlearned; he didn't even know that he has to put on tefillin today. Who knows what his tefillin look like; how kosher are they? We can also assume that he doesn't have special *kavanah* when he wears the tefillin. Nevertheless, I was able to discern on him that he didn't put on tefillin this morning. This is because even such mitzvos make an imprint on one's *neshamah*..."

Tefillah is similar. Never think your *tefillah* isn't good enough. No matter how it appears, it is special and can bring salvation.

In *lashon hakodesh*, goats and sheep are both called צאן. It is one word that has in it two categories: sheep and goats. With this introduction, we can study a lesson from the Rabbeinu b'Chaya:

Yaakov sent messengers to Eisav to tell him that he is at peace with him. He said (32:6), ויהי לי שור וחמור צאן ועבד, ושפחה ואשלחה להגיד לאדני למצא חן בעיניך, "I have oxen, donkeys, sheep and goats, slaves and maidservants, and I am sending to tell this to my master, to find favor in your eyes."

The Rabbeinu b'Chaya writes, "Yaakov should have said צאן, sheep, and goats, first because the *pesukim* always mention צאן first, because צאן is מין הנכבד והנבחר, the noblest and choicest species among all cattle. For example, it states

(Bereishis 12) ולאברם היטיב בעבורה ויהי לו צאן ובקר 'They did a kindness for Avram...and he had צאן and oxen...' About Yitzchak it states (Bereishis 26), ויהי לו מקנה צאן ומקנה רבה בקר ועבדה רבה 'He had צאן and oxen and many fields.' About Yaakov it says (Bereishis 30), ויהי לו צאן רבות ושפחות, ועבדים וגמלים וחמורים, 'He had a lot of צאן, maidservants and slaves, camels and donkeys.' We see that צאן is always mentioned before all other cattle and animals. This time, however, Yaakov didn't mention צאן first. This is because Eisav lost the *brachos* - and Yaakov received them - due to צאן. As it states, לך נא אל הצאן Rivkah said to Yaakov, 'Go to the צאן so you can give them to your father Yitzchak and receive the *brachos*.'

Eisav hated Yaakov because he received the *brachos*, and Yaakov took those *brachos* with the goats that he fed his father, Yitzchak. Therefore, Yaakov didn't mention צאן at the beginning of the

message he sent to Eisav, so as not to rouse Eisav's anger.

The question is, when Yaakov sent the gifts to Eisav, the goats were first in line,⁶ and behind them were the sheep, slaves, camels, and donkeys. Why did Yaakov place the goats first? Why wasn't he afraid that this would rouse Eisav's wrath, as it would remind him of the goats Yaakov fed Yitzchak to receive the *brachos*?

The answer is that when Yaakov sent his message to Eisav, it was before Yaakov davened. When Yaakov

was preparing the gifts, it was after his *tefillah*. Now that he had already davened, he wasn't afraid of Eisav anymore. He could send the animals in the correct order – the צאן, the noblest of animals, first, because he had already prayed to Hashem, הצילני נא מיד אחי מיד עשו, "Save me from my brother, Eisav."

Focus on the Present

Shimon and Levi slew the entire city Shechem in retribution for the defilement of their sister, Dina. Yaakov rebuked Shimon and Levi because

6. The goats were first, as it states (32:14-15), ויקח מן הבא בידו מנחה לעשו אחיו, "Yaakov sent a gift to Eisav: two hundred female goats, twenty male goats. Two hundred female sheep, twenty male sheep. Camels... Oxen... Donkeys..." The goats are mentioned first.

Yaakov didn't put all the animals into one group. (It wasn't goats, sheep, oxen, camels, donkeys together in one herd.) Rather, the goats were separate, the sheep were separate, etc. As it states, עדר עדר לברו, "Each species was by itself." By the order that Yaakov mentioned the species, it seems that the goats were sent first, and behind them were the other species. So we ask, how could he do that? Why wasn't he afraid of Eisav's wrath?

he feared their attack would rouse the nations' anger that lived in Eretz Canaan (see 35:30, *Rashi*). Shimon and Levi replied (34:31), הכוונה יעשה את אחותינו. They said that they had no choice; they had to respond to the terrible crime committed to their sister.

The Imrei Noam asks, Yaakov also knew that Dinah was disgraced and humiliated, and nevertheless, Yaakov felt that Shimon and Levi didn't act responsibly. What did Shimon and Levi tell Yaakov that he didn't already know? What did they say to their father to try to change his opinion?

The Imrei Noam explains that Shimon and Levi told Yaakov that even if they erred, and they shouldn't have killed the people of Shechem, what purpose is there in discussing it now? What happened, happened. Let bygones be bygones. It is only worthwhile to speak about the past when one

can draw lessons for the future. Shimon and Levi said to Yaakov, "Does your rebuke have implications for the future? Perhaps you think that Dinah might be humiliated again, and you want to warn us that we shouldn't attack and kill an entire city the next time. However, we don't have to worry about that because, הכוונה יעשה את אחותינו, why do you think this will happen again? We learned the hard way that we must protect our sister. We won't let such defilement ever happen again. Therefore, there is no reason to discuss the past."

Generally, there are no gains in thinking about or dwelling on the past. This applies to errors in life, such as financial errors, and it applies to *aveiros*, too. Dwelling on the past throws people into sadness. It is best to ignore what happened. If need be, set aside a time for doing *teshuvah* and implement safeguards to protect you

from sinning in the future. But this reflection should be done solely at set times. For most of the day, don't even think about the past. It should be erased from your consciousness.

As the Tanya (ch.26) writes, "If you are sad regarding spiritual matters...tell yourself, 'This isn't the right time...'. Because one needs to have a set time, with *yishuv hadaas*, when he should think about Hashem's greatness before whom he sinned, so he will have a broken and bitter heart. And then, immediately after he has a broken heart during those set times, he should remove the sadness from his heart entirely, and believe with *emunah sheleimah* that Hashem forgave him because Hashem is רב לעולות. This is

the real joy in Hashem that follows the sadness."

Most people think *teshuvah* means moping over the past. Therefore, Chazal (*Bereishis Rabba* 21:6) say, אין ועתה אלא לשון תשובה, the word ועתה, "now" implies *teshuvah*. *Teshuvah* isn't about moping over the past. *Teshuvah* is about making the present better (see *Tiferes Shlomo*, *Vayichi* ד"ה ויראו אחי יוסף⁷)

Chanukah is approaching. Yavan wanted the Yidden to delve into their past errors and to feel distant from Hashem.

Therefore, they decreed that Yidden must write on their ox's horns, שאין להם חלק, באלקי ישראל, that they don't have a connection with the G-d of Yisrael. The Sfas Emes (*Chanukah* תרל"ו ליל ז' ד"ה איתא) asks that this phrase

7. It states (*Tehillim* 30:6), כי רגע באפו חיים ברצונו, the Beis Aharon of Stolin zt'l explained, someone who focuses only כי רגע, on this moment, he doesn't worry about the future and he doesn't mope about the past, חיים ברצונו, he lives a good life *b'ruchniyus* and *b'gashmiyus*.

contradicts itself because they write that Hashem is אלקי ישראל, the G-d of the Jewish nation. So how in the same sentence can they say that they don't have a share in It?

The Sfas Emes explains that the Yevanim didn't have a problem saying that Hashem is the G-d of the tzaddikim of Bnei Yisrael. But they claimed that the average yid couldn't consider himself connected with Hashem. After one commits *aveiros*, and especially severe ones, they said that he is severed from Hashem.

They, therefore, required people to write, אין לכם חלק, באלקי ישראל, with an emphasis on the word לכם. You don't have a portion in Hashem. You aren't a tzaddik, you commit *aveiros*, and therefore you shouldn't consider yourself unique and precious before Hashem.

The Yevanim decreed that Bnei Yisrael can't keep

rosh *chodesh*. This is because the Yevanim couldn't tolerate the notion that simple people, even people who sin, can control time and be so important in the world.

It states, וחושך על פני תהום, and Chazal say that this refers to Yavan who "darkened the eyes of the Jewish nation with their decrees." Their decrees intended to cause the Jewish nation to believe that they aren't special before Hashem. The eternal message of Chanukah, which repeats itself each year, is that Hashem tells every Yid that he is special to Him, and that his mitzvos can, and do, accomplish so much.

In this week's *parashah*, Yaakov fought with שרו של עשו, Eisav's *malach*, as it states, ויאבק איש עמו. Chazal explain that the אבק, dust, of this battle went all the way up to Hashem's throne. This hints that their debate was regarding the uniqueness of the Jewish

nation. Yaakov won the war and revealed that, indeed, Klal Yisrael's deeds go up very high - all the way to Hashem's throne.

Chazal tell us that we must accept the yoke of Heaven, בשׂוּר לַעֲוִל, like an ox accepts its yoke. Rebbe Bunim of Pshischa *zt'l* asks, why is accepting the yoke of Heaven explicitly compared to an ox carrying its yoke?

Rebbe Bunim of Pshischa *zt'l* explained that when an ox plows a field, its focus is always on the ground in front of it. It never looks back. This is how one should serve Hashem. His focus should always be on the future. He shouldn't turn around to see what he accomplished. Because looking back at his good deeds will lead him to arrogance, and looking back at his evil deeds will lead to depression. Therefore, the focus should be on the future, like the ox

that plows the field, that looks only in front of itself.

We now understand why the Yevanim required the Yidden to write their discouraging message (that they don't have a portion in the G-d of Yisrael) specifically on the ox's horns. They didn't want the Jews to serve Hashem like the ox that only looks forward. They wanted Yidden to focus on their past sins and thereby feel detached from Hashem.

But we must know that even if we have sinned, *chalilah*, this doesn't mean we lost our connection with Hashem. Our *neshamah* is always shining, albeit beneath the concealment of the sins.

A recent invention is the Shabbos lamp. This gadget enables people to turn on and off the light on Shabbos without performing a forbidden *melachah*. This is how the lamp works: The lightbulb of the Shabbos lamp is on the entire Shabbos. When

one wants it to be dark, he covers the light with a plastic or wooden case. The lightbulb is still on, shining; only we don't see it.

This can be used as an analogy to the *neshamah* of a yid. Never think your *neshamah* is extinguished, and never think your *neshamah* isn't yearning for Hashem. Similarly, never think that Hashem isn't interested in your *neshamah*. A yid's *neshamah* always shines brightly and beautifully, but the *aveiros* cover it and conceal its brilliance. When you do *teshuvah* and remove the *aveiros*, the *neshamah*'s light, that was always there, will shine brightly.

Reb Yeruchem of Mir *zt'l* said to a student, "Please bring me the *mussar sefer* that is on the shelf."

The student went to the shelf that Reb Yeruchem was referring to and returned empty-handed. He said, "The only thing

that's on that shelf is an orange."

Reb Yeruchem said once again, "Bring that *mussar sefer*." The student brought the orange.

Reb Yeruchem asked the student, "Is the orange dry or juicy?"

"It's juicy."

Reb Yeruchem removed the peel and showed it to the student. "Does this look juicy to you? It's a dry peel."

Then Reb Yeruchem showed him the white peel that covers over the orange. "This is also dry. But beneath it all, there's a juicy orange. The same is with a yid. Sometimes he seems dry, and there are *kelipos* all around him. But seek deeper, and you will find a shining bright and vibrant *neshamah* beneath.

Hashem's Pleasure

The Torah tells us (32:25),
ויותר יעקב לבדו ויאבק איש עמו עד עלות

השחר, "Yaakov was left alone, and a man battled with him until the morning."

Rashi writes that the man who battled with Yaakov was שרו של עשו, Eisav's *malach*, the *yetzer hara*. It wasn't a person; rather, it was the *yetzer hara* battling with Yaakov Avinu, which is essentially the battle every yid fights every day.

The wrestle is called ויאבק, as it states ויאבק איש עמו. Rashi writes (in one explanation) that אבק means dust. It refers to the dust that was raised by their wrestling.

Chazal say that the battle dust rose to Hashem's throne!

This is hinted at in the word ויאבק because ויאבק is gematriya כסא הכבוד, Hashem's holy throne, as the Baal HaTurim points out. This means the dust raised by their struggle

went all the way up to Hashem's throne.

As said, the battle was with the *yetzer hara*. And when a person battles with the *yetzer hara*, it brings Hashem immense pleasure. This is the meaning that the dust of the struggle goes up before Hashem's throne, so Hashem can take pleasure watching how people strive with all their might to overcome the *yetzer hara*.

We often don't realize the specialness of our struggles. We think we would be better off if we didn't have a *yetzer hara* altogether. We think, why do we need to be tested with our eyes, speech, money, etc.? But our struggles with these tests are very precious to Hashem. They go up before His throne.

The *sefarim* compare these tests to the beauty of a king's crown. The crown is made from gold, diamonds, and precious

gems, but there are also places on the crown where there is nothing. Those empty spaces add beauty to the crown. The crown wouldn't be as beautiful if they weren't there. These empty spots hint at the tests we endure. They seem meaningless, unimportant, unwanted, but these tests give our *avodas Hashem* beauty and splendor.

A *bachur* who had gone off the *derech* was on his path of return. Once, he said to his mentor, who was helping him in his *teshuvah*: "I had very great tests on Shavuos. The *yetzer hara* told me to go to the clubs and pubs where I would hang out when I wasn't religious. Baruch Hashem, I didn't listen. Instead, I stayed home and read a novel. I'm happy about that. But when I compare myself to other young men my age, I feel so far behind. They certainly had an inspirational Shavuos, studying Torah all night

long, and then they davened Shacharis with *hislahavus*. After Shacharis, they danced with the joy of the Torah. How do I compare to them? All I did was read a novel."

His mentor replied, "In the Beis HaMikdash, the *levi'im* sang inspirational music while the *kohanim* put fats and blood on the *mizbeiach*. Whose *avodah* was more precious to Hashem? The Torah writes *ריח נחוח* (a pleasant scent for Hashem) with regards to the *korbanos* that the *kohanim* brought, and it doesn't say *ריח נחוח* about the music the *levi'im* played. The blood, fats, and the meat of the *korbanos* brought Hashem more pleasure than the lofty singing of the *levi'im*. Similarly, your struggles against the *yetzer hara* created a greater *nachas ruach* before Hashem than the exalted *avodah* of your peers because you struggled to serve Hashem."

Keep Trying

The Torah writes (32:33),
 על כן לא יאכלו בני ישראל את גיד הנשה
 אשר על כף הירך עד היום הזה כי נגע בכף
 ירך יעקב בגיד הנשה, "Therefore,
 Bnei Yisrael mustn't eat the
gid hanasheh...until this day
 because the malach struck
 Yaakov on the *gid hanasheh*."
 This prohibition was given
 to us, so we will remember
 that the malach smote
 Yaakov in his battle. We
 wonder, wouldn't it be
 better to have a mitzvah to
 remind us that Yaakov *won*
 the battle against the
malach? Why do we
 remember specifically that
 Yaakov was wounded in
 this battle?

The *meforshim* answer
 that this mitzvah teaches
 us that we should expect to
 lose some battles against
 the *yetzer hara*. We shouldn't
 expect a one-hundred-
 percent success rate. Even
 Yaakov Avinu was harmed

when he battled with the
yetzer hara. But when that
 occurs, we should continue
 fighting. We mustn't give
 up. And that is considered
 a success in the war against
 the *yetzer hara*.

Eisav's *malach* changed
 Yaakov's name to ישראל and
 the *malach* told him that he
 is doing so because, כי שרית...
 ותוכל, "You battled...and
 you won" (32:29). Yaakov is
 called ישראל because כי שרית,
 he battled against the *yetzer
 hara*. He isn't named ותוכל,
 for winning. Why? Isn't
 winning the battle against
 the *yetzer hara* a more
 remarkable feat? Rebbe
 Leibele Eiger *zt'l* answers
 that a person can't win the
 war against the *yetzer hara*
 on his own. When he wins
 the battle, it is because
 Hashem helped him.
 Therefore, Yaakov is named
 for standing in war because
 that is the part that man
 can do.⁸

8. When one plays dreidel, the person does the first part - he spins the dreidel. But where it lands isn't in his hands. Similarly, a

Someone owned a *sefer Torah*, but he wasn't sure whether it was written by an *ehrlicher*, G-d fearing *sofer*. The Chasam Sofer *zt'l* told him to look at the end of the *sefer Torah*. If the letters aren't neat (some letters are larger than others, the letters look shaky, somewhat deformed, etc.) that means that there was a הכנסת ספר תורה (where the custom is that people, not professional scribes, write in the final letters). This is a sign that *ehrlicher* people wrote it because they kept the Jewish nation's customs and traditions. However, if the Torah's end is written beautifully, you have to suspect that perhaps it was

written by non-religious Yidden.

We repeat this to learn the following lesson: When things aren't orderly, and things aren't so beautiful, that is a good sign. Because that is how *avodas Hashem* appears. You win some, and you lose some. As a *tzaddik* once said, "A *potch* for a *potch*, the main thing is that you should give the final *potch*." ⁹ If everything is smooth, something isn't right. This is not how *avodas Hashem* generally appears.

A wise person said: When the echocardiogram registers ups and downs, that's a sign the patient is

person begins the battle against the *yetzer hara* and Hashem completes it for him.

9. Many plane passengers are afraid of of turbulence. But what is the alternative? That the plane should stop flying? If the plane stops flying, it will spiral down to the ground.

The *nimshal* is, when one struggles with the *yetzer hara*, one is tempted to give up. But that isn't an alternative, because if you give up, you will spiral to even lower levels. The only choice is to keep up the battle.

alive. It isn't a good sign when the line is flat.

The *Zohar* teaches that every year on Yom Kippur, a great debate takes place in heaven. Hashem wants to bestow His kindness upon the Jewish nation, as they are His chosen people, but the nations of the world protest and say that they don't deserve it. Who wins the battle? The *Zohar* says that on Succos we take the four *minim*, which represents weapons. The *Zohar* states, "Who carries the weapons? The one who won the war." This is our testimony that we won the war and that we will be inscribed for a good year.

The *meforshim* ask if we won the war, why are we still holding onto the weapons? We should put them down!

The answer is, as long as we are fighting, we are the winners. This is how it is in our war against the *yetzer hara*. Success is to stand in battle, and even if

we fall, to pick ourselves up again.

Growth from the Challenges

The *yetzer hara* and the challenges we endure are for our benefit. We grow from them. Each challenge raises us to higher levels.

It states (35:17), ויהי בהקשותה, בלדתה ותאמר לה המילדת אל תיראי כי זה גם, the Rimzei d'Chachmasa (from Reb Shmuel Leib Zack, student of the Chidushei Harim *zt'l*) explains, ויהי בהקשותה, when a person is having a hard time being successful in *avodas Hashem*, we tell them, אל תיראי כי זה גם לך בן, don't worry. Your struggles and challenges will bring you to higher levels.

The Gemara (*Menachos* 29:) says, "Reb Akiva discovered many halachos on כל קוץ וקוץ, each corner of the letters of the *sefer Torah*." The Or LaShamayim (*Lech Lecha* ר"ה ויאמר ה' השני) says that this means that from every קוץ וקוץ, hardship in life, Reb

Akiva attained higher levels until he was able to teach many halachos of the Torah.

The Ponovitzer Rav *zt'l* gave the following *mashal*:

A wealthy man watched soldiers training on an obstacle course. They had to jump over pits, crawl under barbed wire, swing over a pond, etc.

The wealthy man said to the commander: "I have plenty of money. I want to make life easier for the soldiers. I will hire workers to fill up the pits, drain the pond, remove the barbed wire, etc., so they can pass through the field easily."

The general replied, "If you are so generous with your money, perhaps you will pay the debts we incurred to build these obstacles." The commander explained to the wealthy man that the obstacles help the soldiers train to know how to fight a war in all

situations, under all circumstances.

Similarly, people find many hardships in their attempt to do *avodas Hashem*. It is planned that way so that they can reach their fullest potential.

The Gemara (*Kiddushin* 81.) tells us that Rav Amram once had a great test and overcame the *yetzer hara*. The Gemara says that when the *yetzer hara* left him, Rav Amram said, *חזי דאת גורא ואנא, חזי דאת גורא ואנא* "See: You are fire and I am flesh, and I am greater than you." We can explain that Rav Amram was saying *אנא עדיפא*, "I reached my levels," *מיניך*, "because of you." Because of the obstacles and challenges you placed in my path, I reached very high levels.

By the doctor's order, Mr. B. had to walk an hour each day. So, instead of driving to yeshiva, Mr. B. would walk a half-hour to his yeshiva, and after learning, he walked another

half-hour home. That's how he got in one hour of exercise each day.

Often, friends from yeshiva stop to offer him a ride. "Come into the car," they tell him. "I'll drive you to the yeshiva." Mr. B. turns them down because he needs the walk.

The *nimshal* is, the hardships we go through in life aren't superfluous. They have a purpose. Through them, we reach the highest levels.

The Chasam Sofer (*Shemos* ר"ה ויאמר עור) answers that in a way, *malachim* are greater than human beings because they are pure and holy creations, entirely detached from the decadence of this world. But in a way, people are greater because whatever holiness and purity they attain is accomplished through their own free will.

Yaakov Avinu, however, was greater than all people

and all *malachim*. This is because Yaakov was holy, just like a *malach*, and he reached that level with his free will. This is the meaning of the *pasuk*, כי שרית, עם אלקים ועם אנשים; you are greater than *malachim* and greater man because (a) you became wholly pure and holy, (b) וחובל, you have free will to do otherwise. You achieved those high levels with your own choices. This is the reason he is called ישראֵל; he is a שר, an officer, higher than *malachim* and man.

It states (*Tehillim* 63:3), בן בקודש חזיתך. The Baal Shem Tov *zt'l* explained that Dovid HaMelech davened, בן בקודש, "Halavay in the Beis HaMikdash, חזיתך, I should see You as I see you in *galus*..." Because when one serves Hashem in *galus*, amidst great challenges, the light of his *avodas Hashem* is very bright, as it is achieved through toil. Dovid prayed, בן בקודש חזיתך, may I also merit seeing this light in the Beis HaMikdash.

Advice in Overcoming the Yetzer Hara

In this section, we will discuss some ways to help us overcome the *yetzer hara*.

The first step is to try. Because when you try, Hashem will help you.

As the Kotzker *zt'l* (שש"ק) (ענינים שונים, עבודת ה' מ"ג) says, "When Hakadosh Baruch Hu brings a *neshamah* to this world, Hashem sends it down via a very long ladder that extends from heaven to earth. After the *neshamah* reaches earth, Hakadosh Baruch Hu takes the ladder away and says, "Now climb up again on your own."

He wonders, how can he climb up to heaven without a ladder?

Some *neshamos* give up immediately. Some *neshamos* jump up to reach heaven, but then they fall back down, so they give up. And some jump and jump, again and again, until Hakadosh Baruch Hu

has *rachmanus* on them, and He brings them up to heaven. Because when a person tries, Hashem will help him.

There is another counsel to overcome the *yetzer hara*. The *yetzer hara* doesn't like when people serve Hashem, and he tries with all his might to prevent it. However, if people can show the *yetzer hara* that what they are about to do is for the *yetzer hara's* benefit, the *yetzer hara* won't try to stop them.

An example of this principle is when you wake up early to study Torah. The *yetzer hara* isn't happy about that, so he says, "Go back to sleep. It's cold outside. What's the rush to wake up so early..."

You should respond, "I want to drink a coffee." The *yetzer hara* doesn't mind people drinking coffee. He will let you get out of bed. And once you are awake and drinking

your coffee, you can study Torah.

The Kedushas Levi (ד"ה) (והיה כי יפגשך עשו) says that this lesson is hinted in this week's *parashah* in the words (32:18), כי יפגשך עשו אחי... , ואמרת... מנחה היא שלוחה לאדוני לעשו, "When Eisav, the *yetzer hara* meets you, and he wants to prevent you from serving Hashem, tell him that this is a gift for the *yetzer hara*," tell the *yetzer hara* that it is also for his benefit, and then he will leave you alone.

The *trop* on וימאן (Bereishis 39:8) is a שלשלה. Reb Yitzchak Radviller זת"ל (Or Yitzchak, Vayeishev) teaches that this implies that when one has a test, he should shout three times, "I don't want! I don't want! I don't want!" and he will be rescued.

The Or Pnei Moshe (ד"ה איתא בתקוני שבת Va'eschanan) writes, "The *sefer Tikunei Shabbos* states that saying chapter (Tehillim) 119/ק"ט helps a lot to remove the *kelipos* [and the *yetzer hara*].

Perhaps this is hinted in the *pasuk* (Devarim 6:19), להרף את כל אויבך מפניך [which refers to casting away one's enemies]. להרף is *gematriya* 119 [hinting to chapter 119/ק"ט in Tehillim]. Furthermore, א"ת is *roshei teivos* for תמניא אפי, eight phases [and chapter 119/ק"ט of Tehillim is called תמניא אפי, because it has eight *pesukim* for each letter]. When one says this chapter often, it results with להרף את כל אויבך, that the enemies that are within us [the *kelipos* and the *yetzer hara*] are broken and removed."

The Imrei Noam (אות ט"ז) (או יאמר) takes this one step further and says that reciting this chapter will also remove external *resha'im*. This refers to the *resha'im* of the world who oppress the Jewish nation. The Imrei Noam says that Yaakov Avinu said this chapter to protect himself and his family from Eisav. The *pasuk* says, וישלח יעקב מלאכים לפניו, because לפניו is *gematriya* 176, and there are

176 *pesukim* in chapter 119/ אשרי קי"ט of *Tehillim*. Furthermore, the chapter begins with אשרי דרך, תמימי דרך, and Yaakov is called a תם, as it states (*Bereishis* 25:27), ויעקב איש תם וישוב אהלים. By the battle it states, ויאבק איש עמו and ויאבק is *gematriya* 119. These hint that Yaakov said this chapter to subjugate Eisav.

For our present discussion, saying chapter אשרי קי"ט of *Tehillim* is beneficial to remove the *yetzer hara*, and to enable us to serve Hashem properly

Kibud Av Ve'Em

When Yaakov heard that Eisav was coming to fight him, he became very afraid. As it states (32:8), וירא, "Yaakov was very afraid, and he was distressed." Why was Yaakov afraid?

The Daas Zekenim writes, ירא היה שיועיל לעשו זכות, שכבר אב ואם והוא לא קיים כבר עברו עשרים שנה, "He was afraid that Eisav would benefit from the mitzvah of *kibud*

av va'em that he performed, while Yaakov had not performed this mitzvah for more than twenty years."

The Pela Yoetz writes, "Each mitzvah has its *mazal*. People are ready to spend a lot of money for the merit to open the *aron kodesh* or to be a *sandak*, etc., although these aren't even actual mitzvos – not from the Torah and not from the *rabbanan*... *Ashreihem Yisrael* [they are fortunate]! However, each time one obeys his father or his mother he is doing a mitzvah from the Torah! But the fools transgress this mitzvah and will be punished."

The Gemara (*Kiddushin* 31) tells us that the mitzvah of honoring parents is extremely difficult to keep. Rashi writes, "It is impossible to honor one's parents sufficiently, and he will be punished because of this."

A father said to a *rosh yeshiva*: "Maybe you can

help me. You know that my son is *baruch Hashem* learning well in the yeshiva, and *baruch Hashem*, he has *yiras Shamayim*, too. But at home, he doesn't honor his parents..."

"I will see what I can do," the *rosh yeshiva* promised.

The next day, he asked the *bachur* whether he'd be interested in learning together on Fridays.

"That would be a great honor," the *bachur* replied. "What does the *rosh yeshiva* have in mind?"

"I want to learn *hilchos kibud av va'em*."

The *bachur* replied, "*Kibud av va'em*? Shouldn't we learn halachos that are applicable in our times?"

The *bachur* didn't realize just how applicable these halachos are.

Reb Yechezkel Levinstein *zt'l* would tell the yeshiva *bachurim*, "Just as one must study the

halachos of a *yom tov* thirty days before the *yom tov*, so too, one should study *hilchos kibud av va'em* thirty days before going home."

It is written in *sefarim* that when one doesn't honor his parents, he loses his *yichus*. The uniqueness of Klal Yisrael is our heritage: we are descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, and descendants of the past *tzaddikim*. But when one doesn't honor his parents, he is cutting away from his past, and thereby he loses his *yichus*, which is a tremendous loss.

The Ohr HaChayim (*Shemos* 20:12) writes, "There are mitzvos that have wonderful *segulos* to them in addition to the reward that Hashem gives for each mitzvah. And for this mitzvah [of *kibud av va'em*], the Torah revealed [that the *segulah* is long life]."

The Rabbeinu b'Chaya writes, "We see clearly that those who honor their

parents live long lives, or they have success and serenity in all their ways."

Some people don't honor their parents, and they say, "If my father taught me Torah, I would honor him. If my parents gave me money, I would honor them. But my father doesn't know Torah, and I never heard a *dvar Torah* from him. Furthermore, my parents don't give me money. So why should I honor them?"

The Ksav Sofer *zt'l* teaches that to refute these false claims, Hashem commanded us to honor our parents while still in Marah. It was before *mattan Torah*, so the fathers weren't teaching Torah to their children. No one needed financial help because all their needs were taken care of in the desert by Hashem's gracious hand (the manna, etc.). And even then, Hashem commanded us to honor our parents.

The Beis Ahron of Stolin *zt'l* said that he attained his spiritual levels from the mitzvah of *kibud av ve'em*.

Humility

Reb Yehudah HaChassid (*Sefer Chassidim* תהר"ט) states, "Everything that's written in the Torah carries lessons that are applicable in all generations. That is why we say, *נותן התורה* before and after reading the Torah, even when the *parashah* doesn't have any mitzvos, like *parashas Vayishlach*. This *parasha* only has one mitzvah - the prohibition against eating the *gid hanasheh*. We make a *brachah* because the Torah isn't just stories, *chalilah*, rather it carries lessons, teaching us how we should live our lives. From this *parashah* we learn that a person should be humble before one's brother..."

The Sefer Chassidim is referring to the way Yaakov honored his brother, Eisav. The Torah tells us about it

to teach us how to speak to and honor our siblings.

Towards the end of *parashas Vayeitzei* it states (31:46), וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב לְאָחָיו לְקַטּוּ אֲבָנִים, "Yaakov said to his brothers, gather stones..."

Who were Yaakov's brothers?

Rashi writes, "He was referring to his children who were to him like brothers, for they helped him in times of distress and times of war."

The Chida (*Bris Shalom* 343) explains, "Yaakov Avinu considered his sons to be his brothers, and this is how every father should view his older children – as though they were his brothers. When one does so, there will be peace and tranquility..."

As children get older, the parent-child relationship should become similar to a relationship of friends, almost like brothers. Obviously, children must always

revere and honor their parents, but at the same time, there should be camaraderie between parent and child, almost as though they were brothers.

The Chofetz Chaim's son Reb Aryeh Leib *zt'l* writes that it was difficult for him and his siblings to honor their father, the Chofetz Chaim because the Chofetz Chaim treated them as brothers. Always with pleasantness and without sternness.

Another lesson that we learn from *parashas* וַיִּשְׁלַח is how to speak with one's wife. Yaakov Avinu talked at length with Rachel and Leah, explaining why they must leave their fathers' home and move elsewhere. As the Shlah HaKadosh writes, "When one wants something from his family it isn't proper to force them – even when he rules over them. Instead, he should persuade them – as best as he can – until they agree with him and want the same as he wants. It's

better when they are brought to see things as he does than to force them to obey. See how many words Yaakov Avinu spoke with Rachel and Leah [to convince them to leave their father Lavan's home] so they should agree to his request happily, even after HaKadosh Baruch Hu commanded him to return home."

We learn that one should be humble in his dealings with his siblings, children, and spouse.

The Darkei Moshe (*Yorah Deah* 35) writes, "I found in the name of Reb Yehudah HaChassid that one should move his hand over an animal while it is alive. If the animal lowers itself towards the ground...that's a sign that it is certainly kosher. If doesn't lower itself, it is *treif*. A *siman*: לֹב גִּשְׁבֵּר וְנֹדֶכָה, 'a broken and humble heart...' (*Tehillim* 51:19) and עֵד וּשְׁפֵל רוּחַ לְהַחְיֹת, 'to give life to the humble...' (*Yeshayah* 57:15)."

This test determines that the animal has no internal ailments, which would make it not kosher. We can suggest that this test can also be used to determine the levels of people. When one bows his head humbly towards his fellow man (and towards his family), it's a good sign for him. It's a sign that he's kosher, that he is a holy and proper Yid. But if he raises his head arrogantly, it isn't a good sign.

It states (32:14), וַיִּקַּח מִן הַבָּא, בִּידוֹ מִנְחָה לַעֲשׂוֹ אָחִיו. This *pasuk* is referring to the animals Yaakov chose to give as a present to Eisav. We can explain that Yaakov didn't want to give to Eisav the kosher animals, only the *treifos*. So, he tested them (the test that the Darkei Moshe discusses). As it states, הִבָּא בִּידוֹ, "what came to his hand." Yaakov put his hand out, and the animals passed under it. Any animal that didn't lower its head and it bumped into Yaakov's hand (as implied by

(הבא בידו), Yaakov understood that it was *treifah*, and he, therefore, sent it to Esav, his brother. Because arrogance is the way of Esav, but Yaakov's way, and the way of the Jewish nation, is humility.

Once, someone lifted one of Rebbe Aharon Chernobyler's *zt'l* grandsons, and the child's head bumped on the

ceiling. Rebbe Aharon Chernobyler said to his grandson, "If you rise too high, you can get hurt." He was hinting to his grandson that one shouldn't raise himself too high, with arrogance, because one only loses.

Years later, this grandson became the renowned Rebbe Yisrael of Chortkov *zt'l*.

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