

# Torah Wellsprings

*Collected thoughts  
from  
Rabbi Elimelech  
Biderman  
Shlita*

*Vayishlach*



# Torah WELLSPRINGS

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# Table of Contents

## *Torah Wellsprings - Vayishlach*

<b>Tefillah .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<i>Hishtadlus</i> .....	6
<b>Saying the Words .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<i>Minchah</i> .....	6
<i>Tehillim</i> קי"ט.....	7
<b>Shechem was Conquered with Tefillos .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<i>Kibud Av v'Em</i> .....	9
<b>Growth from Tests .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Hashem's Pleasure .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Keep on Going.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>No Worries.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Brazen.....</b>	<b>16</b>

# Torah Wellsprings - Vayishlach

## Tefillah

Whenever the Torah lists animals, *tzon* (sheep and goats) are mentioned first.

Rabbeinu b'Chayei (32:5) proves this from the way the Torah mentions the wealth of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. Regarding Avraham's wealth, it states (Bereishis 12:16) ולאברם היטיב בעבורה ויהי לו צאן ובקר וחמרים ועבדים ושפחה ואתנת וגמלים, "Avraham...had flocks and cattle and donkeys and servants and maidservants, and female donkeys and camels." *Tzon*, flock, is written first. Regarding Yitzchak's wealth, it states (Bereishis 26:14) ויהי לו צאן רבות ושפחות ועבדים וגמלים וחמרים, "He had possessions of sheep and possessions of cattle." Once again, *tzon* is written first. Also, the pasuk that refers to Yaakov's wealth states (Bereishis 30:43), ויהי לו צאן רבות ושפחות ועבדים וגמלים וחמרים, "He had prolific *tzon*, maidservants and servants, camels and donkey."

The Rabbeinu b'Chayei writes, "It is proper to write צאן, flock, first, for it is the way of pesukim to write *tzon* first because *tzon* is the most honored and preferred type of cattle (מיון הנכבד והנבחר מכל הבהמות)."

There is one exception. In this week's parashah, Yaakov Avinu sent a greeting message to Eisav, and it states there (32:6) ויהי לי שור וחמור וצאן, "I have acquired oxen and donkeys and *tzon*."

צאן, which refers to goat and sheep, is written after the other animals.

Why does the Torah change the order this time?

The Rabbeinu b'Chayei explains that Yaakov didn't want the malachim to begin their conversation with Eisav by telling him about the *tzon* he acquired, for it was with *tzon* (the two goats that Yaakov brought to Yitzchak, see 27:9) that Yaakov received his father's *brachos*. Yaakov didn't want to remind Eisav

of that period, as he feared this could arouse Eisav's anger.

However, a few pesukim later, when Yaakov sent animals as a gift to Eisav, *tzon* is mentioned first, before the other animals (see 32:15). Why wasn't Yaakov afraid that the *tzon* would incite Eisav's anger over there?

The Rabbeinu b'Chayei (32:14) answers that Yaakov prepared the gift after he had davened. He said (32:12), הצילני נא מיד אחי מיד עשו, "Save me from my brother's hand, from the hand of Eisav because I am afraid of him..." After the tefillah, Yaakov wasn't afraid anymore.

From here, we learn the incredible power of tefillah. After a tefillah, there is nothing to fear.

We quote the Rabbeinu b'Chayei:

"Before Yaakov davened, he didn't want the malachim to mention *tzon* first. However, now that Yaakov had davened, he wasn't afraid of Eisav, not at all. [In fact] Yaakov wanted to frighten Eisav. He sent the *tzon* in front to hint, 'If you fight with me, you won't succeed because I received the brachos through *tzon* (the two goats that his mother, Rivkah, prepared for Yitzchak). Yitzchak told me (Bereishis 27:29) הוזה גביר לאחיד, 'You will be your brother's master,' and he told you (Bereishis 27:40) ואת אחיד תעבוד, that you will serve me."

Tefillah can change a situation. Yaakov was no longer afraid of Eisav.

Reb Nechemya Beker told the Chazon Ish zt'l that his wife suffered complications after childbirth, and the doctors recommended surgery. The Chazon Ish replied, "What's the question? Certainly, she should have the surgery. It is *pikuach nefesh*."

The Chazon Ish asked Reb Beker to remain for Minchah. After Minchah, the

Chazon Ish told Reb Beker that he thought it over and decided that his wife didn't need the operation.

Reb Beker asked, "Just a few minutes ago, you said an operation was needed and that it was a matter of life and death, r'l. What changed?"

The Chazon Ish zt'l replied, "I said that before I davened Minchah. But now it is after Minchah..."

Rebbetzin Beker had another eight children, and she lived past the age of eighty.

Later we will discuss the special *eis ratzon* that takes place during Tefillas Minchah, but this story could have happened during any tefillah. We must believe in the *koach haTefillah*. It has the power to change a reality.

It states (Amos 4:13) מַגִּיד לְאָדָם מָה שִׁיחֻוּ, "[Hashem] declares to man what his speech is." The Gemara (Chagigah 5:) says that this pasuk refers to Olam HaBa, when Hashem will reveal to us the power of speech.

We can explain the pasuk as follows:

When a person is niftar, Heaven will reveal to him the power of his speech (מָה שִׁיחֻוּ), and how much he could have accomplished with tefillah. When he was alive, he didn't realize just how powerful his speech was. Had he known, he would have invested much more into tefillah.

Tzaddikim taught that there are three beliefs a person must know regarding Tefillah: (1) Hashem can do anything. (2) Hashem wants to help me. (3) Even my *tefillah* can make a difference.<sup>1</sup>

Regarding the third concept, we shouldn't think that only the great tzaddikim can daven. We can also daven.

The Noam Elimelech (*Haazinu*) writes, "Tzaddikim can bring a person *parnassah* and other bounties with their prayers and pure words. Certainly, this will also happen when one prays from the depths of his own heart."

The Noam Elimelech implies that when one davens for himself from the depths of his heart (because who feels his distress more than he, himself) his tefillah is even more potent than the tefillos of tzaddikim.

It states (Tehillim 100:2) בָּאוּ לִפְנֵי בְרִנָּה, "Come before Hashem with joy." The Malbim explains, "When one comes to a human being to ask him for something, he asks with tears. He is happy when he leaves only if his request is fulfilled. But when one comes to Hashem, he comes joyously because his requests will certainly be answered."

It states in this week's parashah (35:26) אֵלֶּה אֵלֶּם בְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָה לָהּ בְּפָדַן אַרְמִי, "These are Yaakov's [twelve] children who were born to him in Padan Aram." But were Yaakov's twelve children born in Padan Aram? Only eleven of Yaakov's children were born in Padan Aram. Binyamin was born in Beis Lechem (when his mother was niftarah, see 35:18-19). Why does the Torah say that they were all born in Padan Aram?

The Chizkuni (in one approach) answers, "The *pasuk* implies that Binyamin was born through the prayer that Rachel uttered when she was in Padan Aram when she said (Bereishis 30:24) יִסַּף ה' לִי בֵן אַחֵר, 'May Hashem grant me another son.' Therefore, the *pasuk* considers it as though he was born in Padan Aram."

Everything happens through tefillah. Rachel's tefillos in Padan Aram for another son considers it as if he was born there.<sup>2</sup>

1. Someone told the Chazon Ish that he suffers from headaches due to his intense concentration in *tefillah*. The Chazon Ish responded, "What does *tefillah* have to do with the mind? *Tefillah* is with the heart!"

2. Once, on Yom Kippur, a *gabbai* was selling *psichah* for *Ne'ilah* (the privilege to open the *aron kodesh* for *Ne'ilah*). An unlearned man joined the bidding and bought the privilege for a very high price. However, since this

### Hishtadlus

One of the wonders of tefillah is that it can be considered as *hishtadlus b'derech hatevah* (hishtadlus with natural means) because Hashem put into the rules of nature that tefillos help.

Rashi (32:9) writes, התקין עצמו לשלשה דברים, לדורון לתפלה ולמלחמה [for meeting with Eisav] in three ways: with a gift, with tefillah, and with war tactics." Gifts and warfare are hishtadlus within the rules of nature. Tefillah is written among them to tell us that prayer is also considered *hishtadlus* within the laws of nature.

The Midrash says that one can't be idle and trust that he will have parnassah. He must do *something*. He must do hishtadlus, as it states (Devarim 15:18) וברוך... בכל אשר תעשה, "Hashem will bless you...with everything you do," and the Midrash emphasizes that one must *do*, and then he can receive Hashem's bounty. Nevertheless, Rebbe Yitzchak of Neshchiz zt'l said that tefillah is also doing. Tefillah is a hishtadlus for parnassah.

### Saying the Words

Davening with kavanah is very difficult for most people, and this causes many to disregard and disrespect their tefillos. They think, "What value can my tefillos have? They were said without kavanah!"

But we must know that every tefillah is special, including those said without kavanah.

The Torah (32:9) tells us, ויחז את העם אשר אתו... לשני מחנות, ויאמר אם יבוא עשו אל המחנה האחת

והכדו והיה המחנה הנשאר לפליטה "He divided the people who were with him...into two camps. He said, "If Eisav comes to one camp and strikes it down, the remaining camp will escape."

The Chozeh of Lublin zt'l explained that Eisav is the yetzer hara, and the two camps are the heart and speech. The *pasuk* is saying that if the yetzer hara smites the heart, and one cannot daven with *kavanah*, at least salvage the other camp, which is your speech. Say the words of the *tefillah*, even without kavanah, because those tefillos will also be answered.

This is often talked about regarding reciting Tehillim. Tzaddikim have said that one should say *Tehillim*, even without *kavanah*, because just by saying the words, one brings about salvation and blessings.

Reb Chaim Brim zt'l brought a beautiful source that tefillos, without kavanah, are very effective:

If someone says ותן טל ומטר in the summer, he must repeat the Shemonah Esrei because, in Eretz Yisrael, rain is a curse during the summer. This halachah also applies if he said ותן טל ומטר without kavanah.

How much value and power can his words have? He probably has no idea what he said! Yet, it is considered a curse, and he must daven again. We see that all tefillos, including those said without kavanah, accomplish so much!

### Minchah

A couple desperately needed to travel to America for surgery for their child. Unable

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man hardly came to beis kneses, he didn't know what to do. The *gabbai* showed him how to draw the string so that the curtain would open, and how to slide open the doors of the aron kodesh. People asked him why he paid so much for the *psichah* since he obviously didn't know what he was buying. He replied, "My father advised me to see where the wealthy and successful people invest their money and to follow their example. I saw how interested the wealthy people of the beis medresh were in buying *psichah* for Neilah, so I knew it was a good investment."

Tzaddikim of all generations invested in *tefillah*. We should follow their example and invest there, too.

to afford the trip and the expensive procedure, they kept pushing off the trip.

One day, the father said to his chavrusa, "We are going to *ois shrayin a Minchah* (pour out our hearts at Minchah)." They went to a beis medresh where no one knew them (so they wouldn't be embarrassed to act differently than they usually do) and davened Shemonah Esrei for forty-five minutes, with tears and much kavanah. Just as they finished, the father received a phone call from Reb Meilach Firer (who was helping them arrange their medical needs). Reb Firer said, "The doctor from America is coming to Eretz Yisrael next week to teach local doctors how to perform the rare operation that your son needs. If you allow the operation to be videotaped and studied by other doctors, the specialist will perform the surgery in Eretz Yisrael for free."

The parents couldn't believe their good fortune and how it came about through a tefillah davened with kavanah, perhaps particularly because it was said during Minchah time, a very auspicious time for tefillah.

In a *shtiebel* in Yerushalayim, a Yid was davening *Minchah* with immense *kavanah*, and at the end of *Shemoneh Esrei*, he begged Hashem for *parnassah*. A wealthy American Jew was at that minyan. He overheard the poor man's heartfelt *tefillos*, and his plea for *parnassah*.

After the minyan concluded, the wealthy person spoke to him and invited him to his hotel room, where he gave him a large sum of money. His *tefillos* said at *Minchah* were answered.

The Tur (232) writes, "One must be very cautious with *tefillas Minchah*... Eliyahu was answered at *Minchah* time..." The Tur explains that it is difficult to remember to daven *Minchah* because it is in the middle of the workday, and we can easily miss the time. Shacharis and Maariv are easier to remember since they are davened at the beginning and end of the day. But *Minchah* is a hard time to catch. The Tur writes, "He

must pay attention [not to miss the time and must] put aside all his work and daven. If he does so, his reward is very great."

The Magen Avraham of Trisk *zt'l* writes, "I heard from my father *zt'l* [Rebbe Mordechai of Chernobyl] in the name of the Baal Shem Tov *zt'l* that a person who is occupied with his business all day long, in the market, on the streets, he almost forgot that there is a Creator. But when it comes time for *Minchah*, he reminds himself that it's time to daven. He moans deeply and *krechtes* because he realizes the day has passed, solely occupied in material pursuits. He runs to a side street and davens *Minchah*. Although he doesn't know what he's saying, it is special and precious before Hashem. His *krechtes* tore open the heavens."

### ק"ט תהילים

*Tikunei Shabbos* writes that reciting chapter (*Tehillim* 119) ק"ט banishes the *kelipos*. Included in "kelipos" are our enemies and the *yetzer hara*. The *Or Pnei Moshe* (Va'eschanan ד"ה איתא (בתקוני שבת) says that this is hinted at in the *pasuk* (*Devarim* 6:19), להדף את כל אויבך מפניך, "to thrust away all your enemies from before you." The word להדף has a *gematriya* of 119, and ת"א is *roshei teivos* for תמניא אפי, eight phases, and chapter ק"ט of *Tehillim* is called תמניא אפי because it has eight *pesukim* for each letter. The *Or Pnei Moshe* writes, "When one says this chapter often, it causes להדף ת"א כל אויבך, the enemies within us [the *yetzer hara*] to become broken and removed."

The *Imrei Noam* (אות ט"ז או יאמר) says that before Yaakov Avinu met with Eisav, he said this chapter to be protected from Eisav. A hint to this is וישלח יעקב מלאכים לפניו, לפניו is *gematriya* 176, and there are 176 *pesukim* in chapter ק"ט of *Tehillim*. The chapter begins with אשרי תמימי דרך, and Yaakov is called איש, as it states (*Bereishis* 25:27), ויעקב איש תם יושב, תם אהלים.

When Yaakov wrestled with Eisav's malach, it states, ויאבק איש עמו, "a man wrestled with him," and ויאבק is *gematriya* 119. These

are all *remozim*- that Yaakov said this chapter to subjugate Eisav.

Some people say this chapter every day. It would be a good idea to say it at least once a month. It banishes all enemies, the enemies outside us, and the enemies within us, the yetzer hara.

### Shechem was Conquered with Tefillos

It states (34:25) ויבאו אל העיר במטה "They came to the city with *bitachon*..."<sup>3</sup> This tells us that when Shimon and Levi attacked Shechem, they trusted that they would succeed.

In whom did they trust?

Rashi writes, "The Midrash says that they trusted in the strength of the old one (בטוחים היו) (על כהו של זקן)." But who is "the old one"?

Some *meforshim* explain that they trusted in Yaakov Avinu's strength. The Midrash (*Bereishis Rabba* 80) states, "Yaakov Avinu didn't want his children to [fight this war against Shechem]. But after they did so, Yaakov said to himself, 'Will I allow my children to fall into the hands of the goyim?' Yaakov took his sword and his bow and stood at the entrance of Shechem. He said, 'If the nations fight with my children, I will fight with them...'"

Shimon and Levi trusted that Yaakov's great strength would save them.

Others explain that "the old one" refers to Avraham Avinu because Avraham Avinu davened for them. It states (*Bereishis* 12:6), ויעבור אברם בארץ עד מקום שכם, "Avram passed through the land until Shechem," and Rashi writes, "Avram went there to daven for Yaakov's children who will fight a war with Shechem."

Avraham foresaw the future of the Jewish nation and davened for their success in each situation. Shimon and Levi trusted that they would be victorious in the merit of Avraham's tefillos.

The Meor Einayim (*Miketz*) writes, "It is known that the *avos* davened during their lifetime for what will occur in the future up to when Moshiach comes, may it be speedily in our days."

The *avos* davened for every generation. For example, at *akeidas Yitzchak*, Avraham said (*Bereishis* 22:5), ואני והנער נלכה עד כ"ה, and כ"ה hints to כ"ה כסלו, the date of Chanukah. The Meor Einayim explains, "Avraham davened that the Yidden should win the war against the Yevanim in the days of Matisyahu.

"Yosef HaTzaddik spoke to Binyamin and said (*Bereishis* 43:29), אלקים יחנך בני. The word יחנך hints to חנוכה. [Yosef davened] that

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3. The Chazon Ish *zt"l* (*Emunah u'Bitachon* 2:7) writes, "A holy spirit (*ruach hakodesh*) rests upon a person who has *bitachon*. He attains a spirit of courage that assures him that Hashem will surely help him."

*Sefer Ha'Ikrim* writes, "*Bitachon* in Hashem is greater than all praises that one can say to Hashem." This is because one can say that Hashem can do everything, that He loves us and helps us, but it may be that his heart doesn't believe what he is saying. But when one has *bitachon*, that proves he believes in all the above. He believes that Hashem loves him, cares for him, and will help those who rely on Him. *Bitachon* is the greatest praise because he lives and practices what he believes in.

It states (*Tehillim* 65:2), לך דומיה תהלה, "For You, silence is praise." Even when we are silent, if our hearts are filled with *bitachon*, it is the utmost praise.

Similarly, it states (*Tehillim* 71:15), ואני תמיד איחל והוספתי על כל תהלתך, "I always trust in You and that is greater than all Your praises."

The Ramchal (דרוש בענין הקיוו) writes, "When one trusts in Hashem, his *bitachon* will lift him out of Gehinom... *Malachim* will take him out of Gehinom. *Bitachon* purifies like a *mikvah* because *bitachon* elevates the person to a level where there are no sins or blemishes."

Hashem should perform miracles on Chanukah."

The *avos* davened for us, too. The Meor Einayim writes, "Our ability to be strong with Torah and mitzvos is all because our forefathers davened for us..."

### ***Kibud Av v'Em***

The *Chayei Adam* (*siman* 67) writes, "Honoring parents is a mitzvah from the Torah, and it is חמורה שבחמורות, from among the most stringent obligations. A person must honor his father and mother and fear them. One must be very cautious with this mitzvah because honoring and fearing parents is compared to honoring and fearing Hashem."

It is possible to keep this mitzvah anytime and wherever one lives, even if it is distant from his parents.

#### 1] To Honor in Thought

The *Chayei Adam* writes, "The mitzvah of *kibud av v'em* is to honor one's parents with one's thoughts, actions, and words. Honoring with one's thought means that one should consider his parents the most respected people in the world. This is the primary mitzvah of honoring them." This part of the mitzvah can be fulfilled anywhere, whether one lives close or farther away from his parents.

Reb Chaim Shmuelevitz *zt'l* excelled in this form of *kibud av v'em*. He considered his parents to be גדולים ונכבדי ארץ, "from the most important and respected people in the land," as the *Chayei Adam* describes it. And in this way, he kept the mitzvah every day, even when he was distant from his parents. Also, after his parent's demise, he would think about how special his parents were; in

this manner, he performed *kibud av v'em* daily.

#### 2] Acquiring a Good Reputation

The *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* (143:21) writes, "If someone truly desires to honor his father and mother, he should study Torah and do good deeds because that will bring immense honor to his parents. People will say, 'Fortunate is the father and mother who raised this child.' However, if the son doesn't go on the right path, the parents will suffer humiliation due to the child. He is embarrassing his parents terribly."<sup>4</sup>

So, we've found yet another way to honor parents from a distance. When you act properly, you will bring honor to your parents. They will be very proud to hear good reports about you.

#### 3] Giving Reward to your Parents

The *Zohar* (vol.2, 115) says that when people do good deeds and study Torah, their parents are honored in heaven. Chas veshalom, if they act improperly, their parents are disgraced in heaven.

The *Yesod v'Shores HaAvodah* (*Tzavaah Hakdoshah* ch.28) advises that when people do good deeds, they should have in mind that they are performing the mitzvah of *kibud av v'em*, because their parents will be honored in heaven.

It states (32:8), וירא יעקב מאד ויצר לו, "Yaakov was very afraid, and he was distressed." The *Daas Zekenim m'Baalei HaTosfos* writes, ירא היה שיועיל לעשו זכות שכבד אב ואם והוא לא קיים כבר עברו עשרים שנה, "Yaakov was afraid that Eisav would benefit from the mitzvah of *kibud av v'em*, which Yaakov didn't perform for twenty years." Yaakov feared that Eisav's merits of *kibud av v'em* might give Eisav the upper hand, and Eisav might be able to harm him.

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4. *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* adds, "So too, if a father has compassion on his children, he should study Torah and do good deeds, be good to Heaven and man because then his children will be honored that he is their father. But if he doesn't follow the right path, his children are disgraced together with him."

Throughout those twenty years, Yaakov *avinu* certainly performed *kibud av v'em* from a distance in the manner described above. However, Eisav did *kibud av ve'em* with his deeds, and Yaakov Avinu lacked that aspect of the mitzvah for twenty years.

The Or HaChayim (*Shemos* 20:12) writes, "There are mitzvos that have wonderful *segulos* attached to them, in addition to the reward that Hashem will give for those mitzvos. And for this mitzvah [of *kibud av v'em*], the Torah revealed [that its *mesugal* for living a long life]."

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."

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

### Growth from Tests

When you put a raw egg in a fire, it becomes hard. If you throw wax in a fire, it melts. And if you throw paper into a fire, it burns and disintegrates.

Fire does something different for each item, but one thing is sure: change occurs when they are put into the fire.

Fire is an analogy to hard times in life. Difficult situations will change a person. So, we should use these opportunities as a time for growth.

Reb Yechezkel Levenstein *zt'l* was serving as the mashgiach in yeshiva Mir (in Europe), and the Ponovitzer Rav *zt'l* invited him to be the mashgiach of Ponovitz, Bnei Brak.

Reb Yechezkel accepted the offer gladly. In Mir, his paycheck often came late, and he struggled to pay his bills. He figured the Ponovitzer Rav would pay on time; he thought his financial woes were finally over.

However, there was one thing that worried him. In a way, he appreciated the financial struggles because these

circumstances forced him to trust in Hashem. He was concerned that with a comfortable salary, he wouldn't need to work on his bitachon.

One day, in Bnei Brak, a friend saw Reb Yechezkel extremely happy and asked him about that. Reb Yechezkel Leventstein explained that he used to be worried that he wouldn't need to work on his bitachon anymore. But now he also sees that his paycheck comes late in Bnei Brak, which is why he is so happy. He can work and develop his bitachon.

This is an example of a problem forcing a person to reach higher heights, which is how it is for every life struggle. They can be opportunities for attaining spiritual greatness.

The Steipler Gaon *zt'l* once said, "It is easy for a bachur to have good middos. His shtender doesn't disagree with him. But when he marries, and there is another opinion in the home, now it is a test to have good middos."

If he didn't marry *chalilah*, he wouldn't have these challenges that would develop his middos and character. He wouldn't learn traits such as *vitur*, kindness, controlling anger, and the like. The challenges help us grow and become the best people we can be.

It states (35:17), *ויהי בהקשותה בלדתה ותאמר לה*, *המילדת אל תיראי כי זה גם לך בן*, the *Rimzei d'Chachmasa* (written by a student of the Chidushei Harim *zt'l*, Reb Shmuel Leib Zack) explains, *ויהי בהקשותה*, when a person is having a hard time in *avodas Hashem*, we tell him, *אל תירא* don't worry. *כי זה גם לך בן*, You are climbing to higher levels. *בן* means child and alludes to growth and success.

The Gemara (*Menachos* 29:) says, "Reb Akiva will teach many *halachos* קוץ וקוץ, על כל קוץ וקוץ, from each corner of the [letters of the] *sefer Torah*."

The Or LaShamayim (*Lech Lecha* ה' ויאמר ה' השני) says that קוץ can be translated as a thorn, pain, hardships. From every קוץ וקוץ, difficulty in life, Reb Akiva attained higher levels.

The Gemara (*Kiddushin* 81.) says that Rav Amram had a great test and overcame the *yetzer hara*. Rav Amram said to the *yetzer hara*, *הוּי דאת נורא ואנא בישרא ואנא עדיפנא מינך*, "See! You are fire, I am flesh, and I'm greater than you." We can explain that Rav Amram was saying *אנא עדיפא מינך*, "I reached my levels, because of you." Because the challenges you put in my way helped me reach my high levels.

We daven *אל תביאני לידי נסיון*, that we shouldn't be tested because we aren't confident that we will pass the tests. However, when one finds himself in a situation of a test (and we are always in some form of a test), recognize that this is a wonderful opportunity for you. It is an opportunity to grow and develop yourself in ways you couldn't have accomplished without the test.

So, be happy with your tests, embrace them, and pass them. You will grow immensely from these situations.

I heard the following story from the *baal hamaaseh* (from the person to whom the story occurred). He is today a respected *mechanech*:

As a young teenager, at fourteen years old, he learned in a *yeshiva* where a very strict *mashgiach* would punish the students for minor infractions because he wanted to maintain discipline in the school.

Once, for a minor matter, the *mashgiach* suspended the *bachur* for a few hours that day.

In the hallway of the *yeshiva* (as he was getting ready to leave the *yeshiva*), this young *bachur* met with a *bachur* three years older than him. The older *bachur* convinced the young *bachur* to go to a place where *yeshiva bachurim* shouldn't go. "I want to teach the *mashgiach* a lesson," he explained to the younger *bachur*. "He must know the danger of throwing a *bachur* out of the *yeshiva*, so he doesn't continue doing this."

The younger *bachur* had *yiras Shamayim*, and he didn't want to go to that place. But

he felt he couldn't disagree with "an older *bachur*."

The older *bachur* didn't have too much *yiras Shamayim*, and unfortunately, he wanted to take him somewhere that was not allowed.

Before they reached their destination, they passed through a beautiful garden, and the gardener who worked there stopped them and spoke to them.

This gardener told them that he was a Holocaust survivor, and after the war, he dropped religion, *r'l*. He showed them what he does in the garden. He pointed and said, "I trim those shrubs and put fertilizer on those trees. But do you see this field over there? I don't touch that field. Recently I planted seeds there, the seeds are rotting now, and soon they will blossom and grow. The crop is very delicate now; if I touch it, it will be ruined, and nothing will come from it."

And then the gardener gave them a lesson in *mussar* that the younger *bachur* never forgot. He said, "You are young *bachurim*, you learn in *yeshiva*, and sometimes you may do something wrong. You are like the seeds that are rotting. But you must be cautious so that you don't ruin yourselves. You are at a very delicate age, and a wrong move can ruin your future forever. Listen to my counsel and go back to *yeshiva*." The *bachur* returned to the *yeshiva*, and today he is a *talmid chacham*.

This story reminds us that tests are also dangerous. We can grow immensely from tests, but if we fail to pass the tests correctly, we can fall drastically. Therefore, we must be cautious.

### Hashem's Pleasure

The Torah tells us (32:25), *ויאבק איש עמו עד*, עלות השחר, "A man battled with Yaakov until the morning."

Who was this person?

Rashi tells us that this man was שרו של עשו, Eisav's *malach*, the *yetzer hara*. It wasn't a person; it was the *yetzer hara* battling Yaakov Avinu. The wrestle is called ויאבק, which is dust (see Rashi), and it alludes to the dust they raised by their wrestling. ויאבק is *gematriya* כסא הכבוד, Hashem's holy throne, as the Baal HaTurim points out because the dust of this battle rose to Hashem's throne.

Yaakov's struggle with the *yetzer hara* went up to Hashem's throne because Hashem derives much pleasure from these battles.

A king's crown is made from gold, diamonds, and precious gems, but there are empty areas on the crown where there is nothing at all. Those empty spaces add beauty to it. The crown wouldn't be as beautiful if gems covered every inch of the crown without any separations. The empty spots hint at the tests we endure. They seem empty, insignificant, and undesirable, but these tests give our *avodas Hashem* its beauty and splendor.

A *bachur* who had strayed from the *derech* was on his path to return. Once, he said to the *yungerman* who was helping him in his *teshuva*: "I had great tests on Shavuos. The *yetzer hara* told me to go to the pubs I hung out in 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. I'm sure others my age had an inspirational Shavuos, studying Torah all night long, and then they davened Shacharis with *hislahavus*. After Shacharis, they danced with joy. But all I did was read a novel. How can I compare with them?"

This is indeed a good question. How would we answer this *bachur*? Certainly, the young men who spent hours serving Hashem in beis medresh had a better Shavuos.

The wise *yungerman* replied:

"In the Beis HaMikdash, the *levi'im* sang inspirational music while the *kohanim* placed fats and blood on the *mizbeiach*. Who created a greater pleasure for Hashem, the *levi'im* or the *kohanim*? The Torah writes ריח נחוח (a pleasant scent for Hashem) about the *kohanim's* service, but it doesn't state ריח נחוח about the *levi'im's* music. It seems Hashem had more pleasure for the *kohanim's* service, with blood and fats than the wonderful, inspirational singing of the *levi'im*. Similarly, we can feel certain that your struggles against the *yetzer hara* created a greater *nachas ruach* before Hashem than the exalted *avodah* of your peers because you passed a great test, and that is most precious to Hashem."

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 reminds us that Yaakov was smitten by the *malach* in his battle. Wouldn't it be better to commemorate Yaakov winning the battle against the *malach*? Why do we remember specifically that Yaakov was wounded in battle?

It seems that our struggles are most precious to Hashem. More than winning and succeeding, it's the battle we put up against the *yetzer hara* that Hashem so desires.

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, because he battled against the *yetzer hara*. He isn't named for ותוכל, for winning. Why? Isn't winning the battle against the *yetzer hara* a greater acclaim?

Once again, the primary praise, and Hashem's primary *nachas ruach*, is the ושרית, the battle we wage against the *yetzer hara*.<sup>5</sup>

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5. Rebbe Leibele Eiger *zt'l* answers that it is impossible for a person to win the war against the *yetzer hara* on his own. If he wins the war, it is because Hashem helped him. Yaakov was named for ושרית, for standing

### Keep on Going

The Divrei Yisrael (ד"ר אהם יבוא) discusses how the "Polish ganavim" would steal:

They had a technique to get the storeowner out of the store, so they could take whatever they wanted.

The theft begins with a young thief who comes to the store and takes an item off the shelves. He smiles at the storeowner, sticks out his tongue, and then runs off with the item without paying for it.

The incensed storeowner runs after him, but now the store is unattended. Several ganavim come into the store and quickly empty it out.

The Divrei Yisrael writes, "What does a wise merchant do? He says, 'Let the thief have what he grabbed.' He doesn't run after him lest he loses the rest of his money. He guards the store, and that is much wiser."

The Divrei Yisrael explains that the yetzer hara uses the technique of the Polish ganavim. He causes a person to transgress a relatively minor transgression. The person becomes very upset and dejected, and now he is in the yetzer hara's hands.

As the Kotzker zt'l would say, "the yetzer hara doesn't want the aveirah. He wants the depression that comes after the aveirah," because then the person can fall to very low levels.

The lesson is to keep on trying. Even if we lose a battle, we must continue fighting, or we will lose so much more.

We can compare it to an airplane caught in turbulence. The plane is tossing up and down, but it must keep flying. What else can it do? What is the alternative? To stand still? It will spiral downwards.

We can also draw an analogy from business: Someone's business was enduring a financial crisis. The expenses were greater than the income, and the debts kept growing. The store owner had two options: He could give up, close the business, and remain in debt. Or, he could borrow more money to keep the business alive. The tide can turn, and he can be successful again.

When it comes to business, sometimes the first option (of giving up and starting something new) is the wiser one, but when it comes to avodas Hashem, there is only one option. If one falls, he must carry on. He can't mope about the past.

The Divrei Yisrael zt'l said that this lesson is alluded to in this week's parashah (32:9) אהם יבוא עשו אל המחנה האחת והכהו והיה המחנה הנשאר לפליטה, "If Eisav comes to one camp and strikes it down, the remaining camp will escape."

If Eisav, the yetzer hara, wins a battle, don't allow yourselves to fall into his hands. Salvage whatever you can.

Another hint from this week's parashah is in the following words (32:26, 32) וירא כי לא יכל לו ויגע בכף ירכו ותקע כף ירך יעקב בהאבקו עמו... ויזרח לו, "When [the malach] saw that he could not prevail against [Yaakov], he touched the socket of his hip, and the socket of Yaakov's hip became dislocated as he wrestled with him... And the sun rose for him when he passed Penuel, and he limped on his thigh."

The Avodas Yisachar zt'l explains that although Yaakov was hurt, he kept walking. And then Hashem healed him. He writes, "A primary aspect of avodas Hashem is to keep moving. The holy sefarim explain that one must do his obligations and not pay attention to his wounds (aveiros) r'l... Sometimes, there is darkness, and he almost can't say a word

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in battle, because that is the part that man can do, but success comes from Hashem.

When one plays dreidel, he does the first part –spins the dreidel. But where it lands isn't in his hands. Similarly, a person initiates the battle against the *yetzer hara*, and Hashem completes it for him.

of Torah and tefillah. Nevertheless, don't give up. Do whatever you can to be strong."

Another hint is from the pasuk (33:3) וישתחו וירא, ארצה שבע פעמים עד גשתו עד אחיו ahead of them and bowed himself to the ground seven times until he came close to his brother."

The Midrash (Bereishis Rabba 78:8) asks: Why did Yaakov bow specifically seven times? It is to correspond to (Mishlei 24:16) שבע יפול צדיק וקם, "Even if a tzaddik falls seven times, he will get up again."

By bowing down seven times, Yaakov was teaching us that even if one bowed to Eisav seven times (which means he obeyed the yetzer hara and bowed to its influence), he could lift himself and begin again, as if it never happened.

It states (32:29) ויאמר לא יעקב יאמר עוד שמך כי אם ישראל, "The malach] said, 'Your name shall no longer be called Yaakov, but Yisrael, because you have commanding power with [an angel of] Hashem and with men, and you have prevailed."

Rashi writes that אנשים, men, refers to Eisav and Lavan. But we wonder, is this called ותוכל, prevailing and winning the battle? Eisav lamed him, and Lavan tricked him a hundred times. How is that considered winning? The answer is that he continued even after being lamed and misled, and that attitude is a success.

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6. According to the Daas Zekanim the pasuk reads as follows:

וירא יעקב מאד, Yaakov was very afraid, ויצר לו, and his fear caused him distress because he knew that he should trust in Hashem's promise.

7. The Degel Machaneh Efraim writes, "My grandfather (the Baal Shem Tov zt'l) said that he once crossed the Dnieper River without using Hashem's names. He placed his belt on the water and with immense *emunah*, crossed the river. This can be the translation of כי במקלי עברתי... that Yaakov crossed the Yarden with his immense *emunah*."

## No Worries

The Torah (32:8) tells us that when Yaakov Avinu heard that Eisav was coming towards him with an army of four hundred men, וירא יעקב מאד ויצר לו "Yaakov was very afraid and he was distressed." The Daas Zekanim MiBaalei HaTosefos explains that he was distressed that he was afraid because he knew that he shouldn't be scared since Hashem promised him that He would protect him, as it states (28:15) והנה אנכי עמך ושומרתיך בכל אשר תלך, "Behold I am with you, and I will guard you wherever you go."<sup>6</sup>

Yaakov said (32:11), כי במקלי עברתי את הירדן הזה, ועתה הייתי לשתי מחנות, "I crossed this Yarden with my staff, and now I have become two camps."

Reb Chaim Volozhiner zt'l explains that also in this pasuk, Yaakov is bemoaning that he lost his *bitachon*. כי במקלי עברתי את הירדן הזה, Yaakov said, "I used to have *bitachon*, and with my firm trust in Hashem, I put my staff in the Yarden and the waters split.<sup>7</sup> ועתה הייתי לשתי מחנות, but now I've divided my camp into two groups because I am afraid that Eisav might smite one of them."

When one is afraid, he is more liable to fail.

The Gemara (*Brachos* 60.) states:

Reb Yehudah bar Nasan was walking behind Rav Hamnuna, and Rav Hamnuna heard Rav Yehudah moan from fear. Rav Hamnuna said, "You are bringing troubles onto yourself. As it states (*Iyov* 3:25), כי פחד, 'I was afraid, and it happened. The matter I was worried about

came to me." Because fear can cause the issue you are afraid of to happen.

The Riv'a (from the *Baalei HaTosfos*) teaches that Yaakov lost his protection because of his fear, and therefore, the malach was able to smite Yaakov.<sup>8</sup>

The Tanya (ch.26) writes, "There is a great rule that I must tell you: When two people are wrestling, each one trying to throw the other one to the ground, if one of them is lazy and he moves about heavily, he will fall, even if he is the stronger one. The same is with the war against the *yetzer hara*. You can't win this war with laziness and heaviness, which are the product of sadness and a closed heart - hard like a stone. You only win the battle with *zrizus*, which comes from an open, pure heart, clear from all worldly worries and sadness."

So, it isn't always the one who is stronger that wins a war. The *zrizus* and the courage are major factors in the battle's outcome.<sup>9</sup>

*Shulchan Aruch* begins בבקר לעמוד בבקר, "Be mighty like a lion to awaken in the morning."

Also, in *Pirkei Avos* (5:20) it states הוי... גבור, "Be mighty like a lion to do the will of your Father in heaven."

What is unique about a lion? It isn't its strength. There are animals stronger than a lion. The lion's strength is its courage.

The Taz (*Orach Chaim* 1:1) writes, "Naturally, the lion isn't afraid of any animal, as it states (*Yeshaya* 31:4) 'מקולם לא ירת', '[The lion] isn't afraid of their shouts.' So too, a person shouldn't be afraid of the *yetzer hara*, although the *yetzer hara* is stronger than him."<sup>10</sup>

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8. Seforno explains that as long as Yaakov Avinu was thinking about Hashem, he was protected. The moment he lost focus, the *malach* was able to smite him on the thigh. "Because of Yaakov's constant *deveikus* in Hashem through his thoughts and speech, the *malach* couldn't harm him. But when the *malach* told him about the nation's future sins (הודיעו החטא העתיד במדריכי עמו), this upset Yaakov, and his *deveikus* ceased, and [that's when the angel hit him and] his thigh was dislodged."

The Zutchke Rebbe *zt'l* offered another explanation on how Yaakov was wounded, even after Hashem promised to protect him.

He explains that the Sar of Esav didn't harm Yaakov. He couldn't because Hashem was protecting Yaakov. Instead, *Yaakov hurt himself*. Wrestling necessitates strenuous body movements. As Yaakov battled with the angel, his thigh dislodged because of those maneuvers.

The Zutchka Rebbe explains the *pasuk* as follows: וירא כי לא יכול לו, "The *malach* saw that he couldn't harm Yaakov" because Hashem was protecting him. ויגע בכף ירכו, "So he touched Yaakov's thigh." This means that he held onto Yaakov. That he could do. He didn't have permission to harm Yaakov but was permitted to grab Yaakov. If Yaakov had realized that angel couldn't do more than that, he wouldn't have been afraid. However, Yaakov was afraid and struggled and wrestled with the angel, and ותקע כף ירך יעקב בהאבקו עמו, "Yaakov's thigh dislodged, due to his wrestling."

9. Tzaddikim say that a general once told Napoleon that he thought they would lose a particular battle. Napoleon replied, "If you thought we can win, we would. But since you are pessimistic, we will lose." Because to win, you have to be confident in your abilities.

The Maharal (*Chidushei Agodos Bava Metzia* 33) writes, "The Rishonim say: When one is afraid that he might fall, that fear itself can cause him to fall. [We'll prove it.] Place a wooden plank across a river and walk across it. It is likely that you will fall into the river. Now place the plank on the ground and walk over it. You won't fall off. Because when you are above a river, you are afraid of falling, which causes it to happen. This is also true when one is scared of becoming. Thinking about this causes it to happen... As it states in *Iyov* (3:25), 'That which I was afraid of, came to me.'"

10. The *meforshim* on Nach explain that when a lion eats its prey, many shepherds gather around and shout at it, מקולם לא ירת, but the lion isn't afraid of their shouts.

### Brazen

We are also told to be like brazen leopards. Chazal (*Avos* 5:20) tell us, הוֹי עַז כְּנֹמֵר... וּגְבוּר כְּאֵרִי, "Be brazen like a leopard... and mighty like a lion to do the will of your Father in heaven."

Ra'v Bartenura writes, "The leopard isn't very strong, but it's brazen. You should also have *azus*, brazenness. Don't be embarrassed to ask your teachers when you don't understand. As Chazal say, לֹא הַבִּישָׁן לָמַד, the embarrassed one doesn't learn."

Shulchan Aruch (1:1) describes what it means to be brazen. וְלֹא יִתְבַּיֵּשׁ מִפְּנֵי בְנֵי אָדָם, "Don't feel embarrassed before people who laugh at you in Hashem's service."

Once, the Kedushas Yom Tov was attending a rabbinic meeting with his son,

Reb Yoel (who later became the Satmar Rebbe *zt'l*). Reb Yoel davened with unusual hand gestures that helped him have *kavanah*. One of the rabbanim thought it was funny and said to Reb Yoel, "Is it Purim today?"

The young Reb Yoel replied, "If I knew I would be meeting Haman, I would bring along my *grager*."

Haman and Amalek make fun of *yiras shamayim*. As it states, אֲשֶׁר קָרָךְ בְּדֶרֶךְ, "Who cooled you off when you were traveling on the way." We must serve Hashem with confidence and brazenness. We shouldn't be afraid to serve Hashem with fervor.<sup>11</sup> As it states in the beginning of Shulchan Aruch, וְלֹא יִתְבַּיֵּשׁ מִפְּנֵי בְנֵי אָדָם הַמְלַעֲיָגִים עֲלֵיו בְּעִבּוּדַת ה' יִתְבַּרֵךְ, "Don't be afraid when people make fun of you when you are serving Hashem."

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As a group, the shepherds are certainly stronger than a lion, but the lion isn't afraid of them. It is courageous, and that is its strength.

Reb Chaim Vital *zt'l* taught how to banish a *dibuk*: "Know that the most important factor is that you should strengthen your heart like a fearless warrior. Don't be weak because then the spirit will be strong, and he will not heed your words."

The following story was told by Rebbe Moshe Kobriner *zt'l*, who read it in the *pinkas* (ledger) of a *chevrah kaddishah*:

A *dibuk* became attached to a girl, and people rushed to the Turei Zahav to ask for assistance. The Turei Zahav went to the home of the afflicted girl. As soon as he entered the room, the *dibuk* turned around, faced the wall, and announced, "Baruch haba Rabbeinu Hagadol baal Turei Zahav (welcome, great Rav, author of Turei Zahav)."

People asked the *dibuk*, "Why do you call him 'Rabbeinu Hagadol,' and why did you turn and face the wall?"

The *dibuk* replied, "A *rasha* isn't permitted to look at the face of a tzaddik. Therefore, I turned around. And I know that his name is Rabbeinu Hagadol baal Turei Zahav because that's how he's called in heaven."

The Turei Zahav said, "If this is how I'm called in heaven, then I demand that you leave this girl immediately." The *dibuk* complied and left.

The girl's parents were wealthy and wanted to give a lot of money to the Turei Zahav to express their gratitude, but the Turei Zahav refused to accept the gift.

The Turei Zahav wore a very old, worn-out talis. The father assumed that he would certainly accept a new talis because it's a mitzvah, and he certainly wouldn't turn down the opportunity to wear a more beautiful talis. The Turei Zahav didn't accept the talis. He explained, "I want to continue wearing my old talis and to be buried in that talis, because my talis can testify before the court in heaven that I never uttered a word