

VAYISHLAH 2- ESAV'S OATH AND THE DAMAGE TO YAAKOV'S THIGH

We have often mentioned the fundamental teaching of the mystics that we exist in parallel universes. This means that what may initially occur in a celestial world will ultimately manifest itself below here in the physical world. Likewise there is the impact of man below upon the dynamics of the spiritual worlds above. With this in mind we need to approach the apparent struggle between Yaakov and the angel of Esav as it appears in our parasha. 1 Many of the commentators have taken note that since initially Yaakov had been able to contend successfully with the spiritual counterpart of Esav, he most certainly would then have been able to prevail against the earthly aspect of his brother. It is within this context that we need to investigate what occurred in the physical world between Esav and Yaakov that allowed the angel of the former to damage the spiritual thigh socket Khaf Yerekh of the latter.

FIRST HEAVEN THEN EARTH - ABOVE TO BELOW

R. M. Alshikh writes that it is God's practice to arrange in heaven before hand what is going to happen on earth afterwards. As it is written in Yishaya - It shall be on that day that God will deal with the hosts of Heaven (and then) with their (counterpart) kings on earth. 2 R. A. Ibn Ezra on the verse notes that the guardian angels of the nations will be eliminated (then) their earthly constituents will follow them into oblivion. 3 This follows the doctrine that the fate of nations below are determined by combatants amongst the celestial ministers to whom they have been assigned. In our parasha, we see Yaakov wrestling with the celestial force of Esav. This teaches us that initially Yaakov was to struggle with the heavenly counterpart of Esav; if successful he would thereby triumph over the physical incarnation of this force below. The Torah says concerning these struggles of Yaakov - "You have prevailed before the divine (and thereby will prevail) against man below. 4 R. Alshikh notes that the Torah writes here - vatukhal "You have prevailed" in the past tense. Although the confrontation with Esav on earth had not as of yet taken place; the Torah comes to grammatically indicate that the success above will be reflected by a favorable outcome below. 5

FIRST EARTH THEN HEAVEN - FROM BELOW TO ABOVE

Our Rabbis teach; - When Israel below does the will of the Creator we add strength so to say to the Heavenly powers. 6 This is also true on an individual level, as every action of man below causes a corresponding effect above. With this doctrine we must ask what physical interaction between Yaakov and Esav below allowed the spiritual counterpart of the latter to touch the upper joint of Yaakov's thigh? We know from a previous essay that the eighth blessing associated with the thigh - Hod was given to Yaakov with certain conditions attached. 7 This precipitates that the spiritual thigh or Hod does not belong exclusively to Yaakov but rather was given to him conditionally. Any blemish by Israel can grant access to Hod by the forces of Esav. Our Torah commentators have noted that the accusations above by the angel of Esav was Yaakov's marriage to two sisters. 8 Many commentators have offered various solutions to these accusations - hence, we still might not have sufficient reasons as to why access to the thigh was granted to the angel of Esav. To this query, R.B. Rosenblum cites Sefer Torat Hayyim (Hulin) that access was granted to the angel, as a result of the swearing by Esav to Yaakov that he would grant the latter his firstborn rights. 9

THE SWEARING OF ESAV - ACCESS TO THE THIGH

We learned in an earlier parasha that Abraham had bound his servant Eliezer in an oath to find a proper wife for Yishaq. 10 The method used to accomplish this was “sim na yadekha tahat yerekhi” Eliezer was to place his hand by the thigh of Abraham. This according to early sources was the method used during the biblical era to bind an oath. 11 In fact when Israel realized he would soon die he called for his son Yoseph. He likewise asked - “sim na yadekha tahat yerekhi” - place your hand by my thigh...do not bury me in Egypt. 12 With this Yoseph swore and he was bound by the oath. So when Yaakov asked Esav to sell him his birthright, Yaakov asked Esav to be bound by an oath! Though not written explicitly the Torat Hayyim maintains - that here as well - Esav must have placed his all dangerous hand - “Yad” by the thigh - yerekh of Yaakov. This evidently would be the impetus to grant access for the celestial angel to blemish the associated spiritual thigh of Yaakov.

YAAKOV'S ATTEMPT TO DISCREDIT THE ANGEL

The Mishna rules that an oath cannot be administered to suspected liars such as gamblers or those who perjure themselves. 13 The Rambam writes in the laws of To'en Venitan that this is true even of witnesses who are disqualified due to their wickedness. This ruling is codified as well in Shulhan Arukh 14 -It appears to me that with the support of this ruling - Yaakov attempted to discredit the influence of the oath of Esav which granted access to the spiritual thigh by his celestial minister above. For once Yishaq said regarding the blessing and birthright “gam barukh yihiye” - 15 the oath and its perils were no longer necessary and can therefore be revoked; As Yishaq - the owner of the blessings had granted the birthright and blessing independent of this knowledge. Hence we can understand the Talmudic teaching that Yaakov had inquired of the Angel during the struggle "Are you are a thief or a gambler?" 16 If so - the oath of Esav as it relates to you is inadmissible and access given to you to my thigh should also be nullified! To this the angel responded that he was an angel and not a thief or gambler whose swearing is inadmissible. Yaakov retorted that he will not let him go unless he at least first receive an acknowledgement of the propriety of the blessing as was agreed via a valid oath that had been bound by his counterpart earlier on earth. 17

Shabbat Shalom

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