

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of  
Ya'akov Moshe *ben* Hersh *a"h*  
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his *neshamah*

## Presenting Credentials

## PARSHAS VAYISHLACH 5778

(The following is based in large measure on expositions of R' Yeruchem Olshin in the sefer Yerach L'mo'adim, Succos vol. II, 56:3,4, and 45:4.)

This week's *parshah* opens with the lead-up to the long-awaited meeting between Ya'akov and his adversarial brother, Esav. As Ya'akov prepared for this encounter, the threat from Esav obviously loomed large.

In light of this, Ya'akov's initial communication is somewhat hard to understand. The Torah records that he sent the following message to Esav: *כֹּה אָמַר עַבְדְּךָ יַעֲקֹב עִם-לָבוֹן גִּרְתִּי וְאָחֳרַי עַד-עַתָּה* – “So says your servant, Ya'akov: I have dwelt with Lavan, and have delayed until now” (*Bereishis 32:5*). Rashi notes that the numerical value of the word ‘*garti*’ is 613 – equivalent to the number of mitzvos in the Torah, of course. What Ya'akov was conveying, explains Rashi, was that he had managed to keep all the *mitzvos* even while dwelling with the wicked Lavan – “*v'lo lamadeti mi'ma'asav ha'ra'im* – and I did not learn from his evil deeds.” While this is a most happy accomplishment, the question is: what does it have to do with anything? Here it is, Ya'akov was about to meet up with his nemesis after a span of a few decades; he was suspecting that Esav was still seething over Ya'akov's receiving of the blessings, and would finally exact his revenge; why, then, did he see fit to inform Esav about his personal level of religiosity?

As we shall see, we may glean much insight on this matter from our Sages' elaboration of the methods whereby Hashem conducts the affairs of His creations.

### **Two Pessukim, Two Medrashim**

Most enlightening in this regard is a teaching of Chazal which links two *pessukim* which, at first glance, appear quite unrelated. The Torah at the beginning of Parshas Kedoshim states: *קְדוּשִׁים תִּהְיוּ כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם* – “You shall be holy, for I, Hashem your G-d, am holy” (*Vayikra 19:2*). In a somewhat unceremonious manner, the Medrash (*Vayikra Rabbah 24:3*) remarks: “This harmonizes with that which is written: ‘*Yishlach ezrecha mi'kodosh* – He shall send you help from holiness’ (*Tehillim 20:3*).” The obvious question here is: what is the connection?

Another teaching of Chazal to this initial *passuk* may shed much light on the issue. The *passuk* had exhorted Yisrael to adopt a posture of holiness “because I, Hashem your G-d, am holy”. The Medrash elaborates, stating: “If you sanctify yourselves, I will account it to you as if you have sanctified Me” (*Toras Kohanim, Parshas Kedoshim*). This assertion seems to require clarification. Hashem, of course, is inherently holy in and of Himself, sanctified with a limitless magnitude of sanctity. How, then, is it possible for Yisrael to further “sanctify” Hashem?

The Malbim (*Vayikra, ibid.*) understands this Medrash as conveying a most fundamental principle that bears tremendous relevance on the course of our lives. He explains that there are, in effect, two primary modes with which Hashem conducts our affairs. The first is under the auspices of *teva* (nature), that is, subject to the parameters of the natural laws which He established for the functioning of This World. But then there is another *hanhagah* (mode of

conduct), which transcends these natural limitations. It is under the rubric of this latter form of *hanhagah* that miracles and supernatural occurrences begin to come in to play.

Now, how is it determined which form of *hanhagah* will govern the affairs of a particular person or community? The answer, explains the Malbim, is contained in this teaching, which reveals that the matter is really *left up to the individual to decide*. That is, as we know, Hashem employs the overarching maxim of “measure for measure”; and so, the *hanhagah* which will guide a person’s life corresponds to that person’s own personal conduct. If he remains within the confines of his own *teva* – that is, he follows his whims and desires, becoming subservient to his materialistic tendencies – then his life will likewise remain within the confines of the natural order. Oftentimes, this will not work out to his advantage. However, if he fights against and conquers his own *teva*, then Hashem, in kind, will treat him in a manner which transcends *teva*. In other words – if you embrace sanctity, this will determine that Hashem, in turn, will adopt towards you a *hanhagah* which (in the manner of sanctity) transcends the natural and the mundane. This is what is meant by “sanctifying Hashem”.

### **Avoiding Bad Company**

R’ Shmuel Rozovsky (*Zichron Shmuel*) explains, based on the above, the linkage of the two *pessukim*. For as the Malbim explained, the strategy whereby one may merit salvation, even in a miraculous fashion, is by following a path of *kedushah* – fighting against nature. And so, if he attains this *kedushah*, he will earn such salvation. As the *passuk* in Tehillim stated: “He will send your assistance – from (the cultivation of) holiness”.

And this is precisely what Ya’akov Avinu had done. His personal circumstances had thrust him, against his will, into a situation that posed a grave spiritual threat. The Mishnah in Avos (1:7) warns us of the hazards of evil influence:

הִרְחַק מִשָּׂכֵן רָע, וְאַל תִּתְחַבֵּר לְרָשָׁע.

“Keep distance from an evil neighbor, and do not associate with a wicked man.”

And, indeed, the Rambam writes that keeping evil company will inevitably lead to the adoption of their ways: “The natural inclination of a person is to be drawn after the opinions and deeds of his associates... Therefore, he should attach himself to the righteous... and keep far away from the wicked...” (*Hilchos Dei’os 6:1*). But Ya’akov was placed in the unavoidable position of keeping close company with the wicked Lavan for many years. The natural outcome should have been, G-d forbid, that he would be corrupted over time by Lavan’s nefarious influence.

But that is not how things happened. Ya’akov displayed the fortitude whereby he was able to transcend the natural pull towards evil, and remain loyal to Hashem and his Torah despite the spiritual poverty and wicked temptations of his surroundings. This, then, was the message he sought to convey to Esav. He was issuing a warning to his adversary that attempts to inflict harm would fail. Having thus prevailed over *teva*, Ya’akov demonstrated that he had mastered the trait of sanctity. As such, he was deserving of the salvation emanating from the verse “*yishlach ezrecha mi’kodesh* – He will send your assistance from holiness.”

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