



“Yaakov sent malachim before him”

Rabeinu HaKadosh a Spark of Yaakov Avinu Learned from Yaakov How to Devote All of His Actions to HKB”H

This week's parsha is parshas Vayishlach. It is fitting that we focus on the mission Yaakov Avinu assigns to the malachim at the beginning of the parsha (Bereishis 32, 4): **“וישלח יעקב מלאכים לפניו אל עשו אחיו ארצה שעיר: שדה אדום, ויצו אותם לאמר כה תאמרון לאדני לעשו כה אמר עבדך יעקב עם לבן גרתי ואחר עד עתה, ויהי לי שור וחמור צאן ועבד ושפחה ואשלחה להגיד לאדני למצוא חן בעיניך.”** **Yaakov sent malachim (emissaries) ahead of him to his brother Eisav to the land of Seir, the field of Edom. He commanded them, saying, “Thus shall you say to my lord, to Eisav, ‘So said your servant Yaakov: I have sojourned with Lavan and have lingered until now. I have acquired oxen, donkeys, flocks of sheep, servant and maidservants; I am sending to inform my lord to find favor in your eyes.’”**

We will begin to shed some light on the subject by looking at the commentary of the Ramban. He teaches us a vital principle pertaining to all future generations of Yisrael. We, the descendants of Yaakov, are presently in galus under the reign of the descendants of his brother Eisav. To navigate our way and survive, it is imperative that we follow in the footsteps of our forefather Yaakov. Here are his sacred words (beginning of parshas Vayishlach):

This parsha was written to inform us that HKB”H rescued His servant and redeemed him from a hand more powerful than his own. “He sent a malach and saved him.” And to also teach us that he (Yaakov) did not rely on his own righteousness; instead, he made every effort to achieve salvation

with all of his abilities. Additionally, there is an inferred lesson for future generations: Everything that happened to our father with his brother Eisav will happen to us constantly (repeatedly) with Eisav’s offspring. Hence, it is fitting for us to adopt the methods of this tzaddik (Yaakov) by preparing ourselves for the three eventualities for which he prepared himself - for tefilah, for presenting (him with) gifts, and for salvation by means of battle, to flee and to be saved.

The Ramban concludes by saying: **Our Rabbis have already drawn this inferred lesson from this parsha.** Apparently, he is referring to a passage in the Midrash (B.R. 78, 15): **When Rebbe would go to the Emperor (of Rome), he would study this parsha.** By studying Yaakov’s strategies, he would know how to approach the Roman Emperor regarding religious matters. Furthermore, the Ramban explains why this parsha was so germane (Bereishis 33, 15): **There was a Rabbinical tradition that this was the parsha of galus. Therefore, when he (Rabbi Yanai) arrived in Rome in the courtyard of the kings of Edom regarding public matters, he would peruse this parsha to follow the advice of the wise patriarch; for it is he that the generations are to see and emulate.**

The Shela hakadosh (Vayishlach, Torah Ohr 6) cites the words of the Ramban and adds his own crucial advice to our current leaders to be brazen and stalwart when confronting the leaders of the other nations. He emphasizes that the strategies employed by Yaakov

in this parsha pertain to all of his descendants, since "ma'aseh Avos siman la'banim" - the deeds of the Avos foreshadow what will happen to their children, and we must learn from their example. Our current strength lies in our tefilos to Hashem - especially in times of crisis. Our Jewish representatives must not back down; they must confront the leaders of the other nations with all of their power - even when they are antagonistic and unwilling to listen. They must be vigilant and adamant; that is how we will survive in galus. This entire parsha is a guide for all generations until the coming of the Mashiach.

The Marvelous Combination of Exerting Oneself and Trusting in Hashem

Thus, it is fitting to examine the vital lesson every Jew must learn from the strategy of Yaakov - which he employed when he was about to confront Eisav - as taught by the Yismach Moshe on the opening passuk of our parsha: "וישלח יעקב מלאכים לפניו אל עשו אחיו". Why was it necessary for the passuk to add the word "לפניו" - **before him?** This seems superfluous.

He explains in his sacred comments that Yaakov merely sent his emissaries as a superficial, outward gesture. This is the implication of the term "לפניו". Deep inside, he did not truly believe that this act would prove helpful. In truth, he placed his trust exclusively in HKB"H, as indicated by his sincere entreaty (ibid. 32, 12): "הצילני נא מידי אחי מיד עשו" - **please save me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Eisav.** Seemingly, Yaakov Avinu wished to impress upon us the important admonition stated in parshas Eikev (Devarim 8, 11):

"השמר לך פן תשכח את ה' אלקיך לבלתי שמר מצותיו... פן תאכל ושבעת ובתים טובים תבנה וישבת, ובקרך וצאנך ירביון וכסף וזהב ירבה לך וכל אשר לך ירבה, ורם לבבך ושכחת את ה' אלקיך המוציאך מארץ מצרים מבית עבדים... ואמרת בלבבך כוחי ועוצם ידי עשה לי את החיל הזה, וזכרת את ה' אלקיך כי הוא הנותן לך כח לעשות חיל".

"Take care lest you forget Hashem, your G-d, by not observing His mitzvos . . . lest you eat and be satisfied, and you build good houses and settle, and your cattle and sheep increase, and you increase silver and gold for yourselves, and everything that you have will increase - and your heart will become haughty and you will forget

Hashem, your G-d, Who took you out of the land of Egypt from the house of slavery . . . And you may say in your heart, - My strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth!' Then you shall remember Hashem, your G-d, that it was He Who gave you strength to make wealth."

Hence, when Yaakov dispatched his emissaries (malachim) to deliver his message to Eisav, he made sure to emphasize that this was merely an outward, superficial gesture, as indicated by the word "לפניו". In reality, man is required to make an effort - "hishtadlut." For, it is written (ibid. 15, 18): "וברכך ה' אלקיך בכל אשר תעשה" - **and Hashem, your G-d, will bless you in everything you do.** They elucidated in the Sifrei there: "וברכך ה' אלקיך, יכול אפילו עומד ובטל, תלמוד לומר בכל אשר תעשה" - **you might think that this means that Hashem will bless you even if you stand around idle. Hence, the passuk emphasizes "in everything you do."** Thus, we learn that it is the Blessed One's will that man strive to do what is necessary by natural means; then, HKB"H will assist him, in keeping with the promise: "וברכך ה' אלקיך בכל אשר תעשה".

Yaakov Sent Eisav the Flocks He Had Earned with His Own Hands as a Gift

Following this line of reasoning, we can now interpret the following passuk very nicely (ibid. 32, 14): "ויקח מן הבא בידו מנחה לעשו אחיו" - **and he took from what was readily available to him ("מן הבא בידו") as a gift for Eisav.** The Be'er Mayim Chaim and the Agra D'Kallah (Shoftim) offer an alternate interpretation of the words "מן הבא בידו". Yaakov Avinu acquired his abundant flocks while working for Lavan in two ways: (1) HKB"H assisted him by sending a malach to intercede on his behalf and increased the number of sheep apportioned to him (see Bereishis 31, 11), and (2) by employing his own clever device (ibid. 30, 38); he peeled rods and placed them in the drinking troughs, so that the sheep would give birth to ringed, speckled, and dappled lambs.

Based on this, they explain that Yaakov Avinu only chose to keep the flocks that he had been given from Heaven. All the flocks that had been produced as a result of his own clever device, he chose not to keep; he gave them all to Eisav. This then is the interpretation of the passuk: "ויקח מן הבא בידו מנחה לעשו" - he took those flocks that he had acquired through his own handiwork - "בידו" - and gave them to his brother Eisav.

We can suggest that due to Yaakov's extreme righteousness and humility, he feared that by employing this device of his own, he displayed a lack of confidence in Hashem. In other words, he considered himself guilty of the misguided notion: **"כוחי ועוצם ידי עשה לי - את החיל הזה" - my strength and the might of my hand made me all this wealth!** Therefore, he did not wish to benefit from those flocks whatsoever; so, he sent them all to Eisav.

Even the Words Yaakov Spoke to Eisav Were Actually a Tefilah to HKB"H

Let us continue our holy pilgrimage with a precious tidbit from the impeccable teachings of the Noam Elimelech. Not only did Yaakov Avinu not rely on his own actions to save him from Eisav - i.e., he relied solely on Hashem - but this is also true of the words he sent to pacify Eisav. They also included entreaties and tefilos to HKB"H.

The Noam Elimelech deduces this important fact from the passuk: **He commanded them, saying, "Thus shall you say, to my lord, to Eisav, 'So said your servant Yaakov: I have sojourned with Lavan and have lingered until now.'"** Clearly, ordering the messengers to say, **"So said your servant Yaakov,"** was aimed at pacifying Eisav. But why did he instruct the messengers themselves, **"Thus shall you say, to my lord, to Eisav"**? It should have sufficed to say, **"Thus shall you say to Eisav, 'so said your servant Yaakov.'"** To Eisav, he referred to himself as his servant; why did he also do so when instructing his own messengers?

The Noam Elimelech explains that the message Yaakov Avinu sent to Eisav can be interpreted in two different ways. Firstly, it was simply an attempt to appease and please Eisav. Secondly, it was meant as an entreaty and tefilah to HKB"H that he wished to conceal from the prosecutorial forces. Hence, Yaakov said to the malachim, **"Thus shall you say, to my lord, to Eisav"** - i.e., deliver this message both to my Lord in heaven and to Eisav HaRasha down on earth.

Then Yaakov goes on to say: **"So said your servant Yaakov: I have sojourned with Lavan and have lingered until now."** Rashi explains this message as follows: **I did not become a dignitary or a notable**

but a mere sojourner. It does not befit you to hate me over the berachah of your father, that he bestowed upon me . . . for it has not been fulfilled in me. Alternatively, the gematria of "גרת" is 613, as if to say, "I sojourned with Lavan HaRasha, yet I observed the 'taryag' (an anagram of 'גרת') mitzvos and did not learn from his evil deeds."

In reality, both of Rashi's interpretations are correct. Yaakov intended to send a double message both to Eisav down below and to HKB"H up above. To put Eisav's mind at ease, assuring him that Yitzchak's Berachos had not been fulfilled, Yaakov said, **"I did not become a dignitary or a notable but a mere sojourner."** Hence, there was no reason for Eisav to resent him and hate him. Yaakov was also praying to Hashem to rescue him from his brother Eisav in the merit of **"sojourning with Lavan HaRasha, yet continuing to observe the taryag mitzvos and not learning from his evil deeds."**

Based on what we learned from the Yismach Moshe, we can understand the matter as follows: All the actions Yaakov Avinu performed to save himself and his family from Eisav were indeed only outward and superficial, even sending the malachim before him. In truth, however, he placed his trust in Hashem wholeheartedly. As explained, this was also true of the verbal message he sent; outwardly, they were designed to appease Eisav; inwardly, they were intended as a heartfelt tefilah to Hashem.

Yaakov Avinu Was Hinting to Rabeinu HaKadosh to Adopt This Strategy in Dealing with Antoninus

It is with immense pleasure that we can apply what we have learned to explain what the Agra D'Kallah writes in relation to Yaakov's instructions to the malachim: **"ויצי אותם לאמר כה תאמרון לאדוני לעשו" - לאמר** Normally, the term **"לאמר"** means to convey what has been said to others - in this case, to Eisav. But that cannot be its meaning here, since the narrative states explicitly: **"Thus shall you say, to my lord, to Eisav."** Hence, the Agra D'Kallah interprets Yaakov's instructions based on a Midrash (B.R. 75, 5):

Rabeinu (Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi) once directed Rabbi Afes to write a letter in his name to the Emperor Antoninus. He (Rabbi Afes) proceeded to

write: **"From Yehudah the Nasi to our sovereign the Emperor Antoninus."** He (Rabeinu HaKadosh) took it, read it, and tore it up (because he felt that it did not convey proper deference). He instructed him to write the following: **"From your servant Yehudah to our sovereign the Emperor Antoninus."** He (Rabbi Afes) responded, **"Rebbe, why are you demeaning your own honor** (by referring to yourself as his servant)?" He (Rebbe) answered him, **"Am I any better than my grandfather (Yaakov)? Did he not say, 'So said your servant Yaakov'?"**

In this vein, the Agra D'Kallah interprets Yaakov's instructions to the malachim: **"ויצו אותם לאמר"**. He employed the term **"לאמר"** to convey a message to all future generations such as Rabeinu HaKadosh to learn from his example. Just as he showed deference to Eisav by saying: **"Thus shall you say to my lord, to Eisav, 'So, said your servant Yaakov'"**; so, too, should Rabeinu HaKadosh show deference to Antoninus by writing: **"From your servant Yehudah to our sovereign the Emperor Antoninus."**

Based on what we learned from the Noam Elimelech, we can add one more point. Yaakov's message had a dual meaning - one meant for Eisav and one for HKB"H. Yaakov was hinting to Rabeinu HaKadosh to do the same. Thus, when Rebbe wrote the words: **"From your servant Yehudah to our sovereign the Emperor Antoninus"** - he was also sending a double message. Firstly, the words **"from Your servant Yehudah"** were addressed as a tefilah to HKB"H to help him succeed in his mission to the **"sovereign the Emperor Antoninus."** Secondly, Rebbe was simply sending a respectful message to Antoninus.

Rabeinu HaKadosh Was a Nitzotz of Yaakov Avinu Antoninus Was a Good Nitzotz of Eisav

Let us add a pleasant tidbit to the words of the Agra D'Kallah. We will explain why Yaakov chose to teach Rabeinu HaKadosh how to conduct himself with the term **"לאמר"**. It is written in parshas Toldos (ibid. 25, 22): **"ויתרוצצו הבנים בקרבה ותאמר אם כן למה זה אנכי ותלך לדרוש את ה' - ויאמר ה' לה שני גוים כבטנך"** - **the boys wreaked havoc inside her. So, she went to inquire of Hashem. And Hashem informed her: "Two nations are in your womb."** Rashi comments: **"Two goyim are in your womb."** Due to its spelling, the word **"goyim"** can

be interpreted as **"גאים"** - **the proud ones** - referring to Antoninus and Rebbe.

According to the Megaleh Amukos on Vaeschanan (83), thus HKB"H hinted to Rivkah Imeinu that Rabeinu HaKadosh was a nitzotz - a spark from the neshamah - of Yaakov Avinu. This is alluded to in his title - **רבי** - **יהודה הנשיא**. For, the term **נשיא** can be interpreted as an acronym for **נציץ של יעקב אבינו** - **a nitzotz of Yaakov Avinu**. Whereas the Roman Emperor Antoninus was a gilgul of Eisav, the good nitzotz within him. This then is what HKB"H informed Rivkah: **"You have two proud nations in your womb," alluding to Antoninus and Rebbe; at that time, the relationship of Yaakov and Eisav will be amended.**

Additionally, the Megaleh Amukos on Vaeschanan (82) presents a "remez" found in the passuk (Devarim 3, 23): **"אתחנן אל ה' בעת ההיא לאמר"** - **I implored Hashem at that time, saying**. He interprets Moshe Rabeinu's prayer as a prayer on behalf of Rabeinu HaKadosh - that he find favor in the eyes of the Roman Emperor Antoninus, which would enable him to fortify the religion and redact Torah she'b'al peh. He interprets the term **לעימות אנטונינוס מלך רומי לאמר** in this passuk as an acronym for **לעימות אנטונינוס מלך רומי לאמר** - **for the times of Antoninus, Emperor of Rome**.

This explains very nicely the "remez" inherent in the message Yaakov Avinu sent to Eisav: **"ויצו אותם לאמר"** - that the term **לאמר** meant that he was conveying a vital lesson to all future generations. Also, since this term can be interpreted as an acronym meaning: **for the times of Antoninus, Emperor of Rome** - he was sending a specific message to his nitzotz, Rabeinu HaKadosh, to show deference to Antoninus just as he had to Eisav by saying: **"So said your servant Yaakov**. As we learned, these words were spoken outwardly down below but were actually being direct heavenward as an entreaty to HKB"H, the King of the World.

Rabeinu HaKadosh Directed His Straightened Fingers toward the Heavens

I had a wonderful idea! Based on what we have learned, we can explain an intriguing depiction of Rabeinu HaKadosh in the Gemara (Kesubos 104a): **"בשעת פטירתו של רבי זקף עשר אצבעותיו כלפי מעלה, אמר רבוננו של עולם, גלוי וידוע לפניך שיגעתי בעשר אצבעותי ולא נהניתי אפילו באצבע קטנה."** **As Rebbe was departing from this world, he straightened his ten**

fingers upwards toward the heavens and declared, "Master of the Universe, it is revealed and known to You that I toiled with my ten fingers in Torah, and I did not derive pleasure even from my little finger!" We will try to explain why Rebbe performed this curious ritual before passing away.

We will begin by first explaining Chazal's rationale for instituting the mitzvah of "netilas yadayim" prior to eating bread. We find two reasons offered by the Gemara for this mitzvah. The first is found in this Gemara (Chullin 106a): **"נטילת ידים לחולין מפני סרך תרומה" - washing hands for bread of chullin** (that is not sacred) **is in order to establish a routine for terumah.** Elsewhere in the Gemara, we find a second reason (Berachos 53b): **"והתקדשתם אלו מים ראשונים" - "and you shall sanctify yourselves"** (Vayikra 11, 44) **refers to the first waters.** The Mishnah Berurah (198, 1) provides us with an explanation in the name of the Semag (Mitzvah 27):

The reason for the institution of washing ("netilah") is twofold. Firstly, because of the conduct of terumah. That is, since hands are active and they touch everything, and during the time that ritual impurity (tumah) and purity (taharah) were observed, and the kohanim ate terumah, they were required to wash their hands, due to an enactment of the sages, prior to eating terumah - so that they would not contaminate it with their touch. In order for the kohanim to grow accustomed to this practice, they imposed a similar decree on every Jew eating bread; it was prohibited to eat until he would wash his hands. Even nowadays when kohanim no longer eat terumah due to concerns of tumah, this institution has not been abolished; so that the Children of Yisrael will be in the habit of eating under conditions of taharah when the Beis HaMikdash will be built, swiftly in our times. An additional reason for the institution of washing is for the sake of cleanliness and kedushah. The Gemara based this practice on the passuk: "And you shall sanctify yourselves and you shall become holy."

At first glance, this is extremely curious! What prompted our blessed sages to impose the washing of hands for the sake of the routine of terumah, which is not at all relevant in these times? Yet, based on what we have discussed, we can suggest an explanation. The

mainstay of our livelihood and sustenance is related to bread, as indicated by the following passuk (Bereishis 3, 19): **"בזעת אפך תאכל לחם" - by the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread.** Now, man's main test and challenge is related to the actions performed with his hands. It is in this arena that the yetzer attempts to trip him up with the false doctrine of **"כחי ועוצם ידי"**. Consequently, Chazal instituted the mitzvah of "netilas yadayim" prior to eating bread, in order to cleanse the hands of any semblance of misguided thoughts.

It Is Imperative to Raise One's Hands after Netilas Yadayim to Elevate All of One's Handiwork to HKB"H

Based on what we have learned, we can begin to comprehend why it is customary to raise one's hands after performing "netilas yadayim." The source for this practice comes from the Responsa of the Rashba (Part 7, 534): **"וכתב רבינו האי גאון בתשובה לשאלה, כי לשון נטילת ידים על שצריך להגביה" - our teacher Hai Gaon wrote in response to a question that the term "netilas yadayim" indicates that it is necessary to raise one's hands upwards after the washing; it comes from the language of the passuk (Yeshayah 63, 9): "והיטלם וינשאם" - He lifted them and bore them.** The Kol Bo (Hilchos Netilas Yadayim 23) provides a similar explanation.

In a similar vein, the Shela hakadosh writes: **I have been taught that after a person washes his hands and elevates them, as described above, before he makes the berachah, he should recite the passuk (Tehillim 134, 2): "Raise your hands in the sanctuary and bless Hashem." And this is not considered an interruption; and the person should have in mind the secret that I alluded to in the gloss: "Rebbe straightened his fingers." The source for this practice comes from the Zohar Chadash (Midrash Ruth 57, column 1): "צריך להגביה ידיו בשעה שמברך לאחר נטילה, ויקדש ידיו דכתיב שאו ידיכם" - a person is required to raise his hands when reciting the berachah after washing; and he will sanctify his hands, as it is written: "Raise your hands in the sanctuary and bless Hashem."**

Let us explain this practice in a manner consistent with this discussion. Since all actions are facilitated by our two hands, there is a concern that the yetzer hara will attempt to inculcate in a person the heretical

belief of: "כחי ועוצם ידי". Therefore, it was instituted that the hands be washed and purified in the waters of chesed and then raised upwards toward heaven. This gesture demonstrates that we believe wholeheartedly - "be'emunah sheleimah" - that all acts that we perform with our hands come only from HKB"H - the One Who gives us the ability and means to succeed.

We can suggest that this is what our blessed sages were hinting at when they instituted the practice of "netilas yadayim" on account of "סדר תרומה" - **establishing a routine for terumah**. They wanted to ensure that the kohanim would be able to fulfill the following directive properly (Devarim 12, 6): "והבאתם שמה עולותיכם וזבחיכם ואת מעשרותיכם ואת תרומת ידכם וגדריכם וגדבותיכם ובכורות בקרכם וצאנכם" - **and there shall you bring your olah-offerings and your sacrifices, and your tithes and that which is elevated with your hand, your vow offerings and your free-will offerings, and the firstborn of your cattle and your flocks**. Rashi explains in the name of the Sifrei that "תרומת ידכם" is a reference to "**bikkurim**" - the first fruits--about which it is said: "**The kohen shall take the basket from your hand.**"

We can suggest that this is why bikkurim are referred to as "תרומת ידכם"; it comes to teach us that it is necessary to elevate all work done with our hands to Hashem. This also explains the reason given for tumah being decreed on the hands - because "ידיים עסקניות הן" - **hands are active (busy)**. Since hands are involved in all sorts of activities, they are susceptible to the tumah of the doctrine of "כחי ועוצם ידי". Therefore, they must be cleansed and purified with water. Thus, the two reasons found in the Gemara for "netilas yadayim"

go hand in hand magnificently: (1) to safeguard the routine of terumah and (2) for the sake of cleanliness and kedushah.

We can now shed some light and comprehend to some degree the profound intent of Rabeinu HaKadosh's gesture - straightening his ten fingers and directing them upwards toward the heavens. The Gemara (Berachos 57b) teaches us that both Antoninus and Rebbe were extremely wealthy: "שלא בסק משלחנם, לא צנון ולא חזרת ולא קשואין, לא בימות החמה ולא בימות הגשמים" - **for neither radish nor horseradish nor cucumbers ceased to be found on their tables neither in summer nor in winter**. Furthermore, they taught (Gittin 59a): "מימות משה ועד רבי לא מצינו תורה וגדולה במקום אחד" - **from the times of Moshe until Rebbe, we do not find Torah and greatness (material wealth or authority) in one place**.

Therefore, being a nitzotz of Yaakov Avinu, he always took great care not to rely on the fruits of his own handiwork. Yaakov demonstrated this when he took all the possessions he had acquired as a result of his own handiwork while living with Lavan and sent them to Eisav. We learned this from the passuk: "ויקח מן הבא בידו מנחה לעשו" - **straightened his ten fingers and directed them toward the heavens**. Thus, he demonstrated that despite his greatness in Torah and his extreme wealth, he did not attribute his success to his own doing - "כחי ועוצם ידי". On the contrary, throughout his life, he raised his ten fingers upwards symbolizing that everything he had accomplished was for Hashem and attributable to Hashem, Who gave him the strength and wherewithal to succeed.

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