

Shvilei Pinches

Parshas Toldos

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“His Hand Was Grasping onto Esav’s Heel”

**Teaches Us to Serve Hashem by Learning
from the Ways of Our Enemies**

In our parsha, parshas Toldos, we read (25,25): **“וּיֵצֵא הָרֵאשׁוֹן אֲדָמוֹנִי כֹּלּוֹ כְּאֲדָרֶת שַׁעַר וַיִּקְרָאוּ**—**“The first one emerged red. All of him was like a hairy mantle; so they called his name Esav. After that his brother emerged with his hand grasping onto the heel of Esav; and He called his name Yaakov.”** Rashi explains: **“וַיִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ יַעֲקֹב, הַקֵּב”ה**—HKB”H, Himself, gave Yaakov his name. The fact that the Holy One, Blessed is He, named Yaakov on account of the fact that he emerged while grasping Esav’s heel, suggests that this act carried with it a much greater significance. So much so, that HKB”H chose to call Yaakov and all of us, Yaakov’s descendants, by the name **“יעקב”**--which derives from the Hebrew word for heel. So, let us explore why Yaakov did, indeed, grasp onto Esav’s heel and what is the deeper significance of that act.

Let us begin by introducing an amazing passage in the Talmud Yerushalmi (Nedarim 3,8) pertaining to the wicked Bilam’s prophecy concerning the future redemption (Bamidbar 24,17):

“דֶּרֶךְ כּוֹכַב מֵיעֶקֶב, מִמֵּי דֶרֶךְ כּוֹכַב וְעֵתִיד לְעֵמוֹד מֵיעֶקֶב... עֵתִיד עֲשׂוֹ הַרְשַׁע לְעֵטוֹף טְלִיתוֹ וְלִישֵׁב עִם הַצְּדִיקִים בְּגֵן עֵדֶן לְעֵתִיד לְבוֹא, וְהַקֵּב”ה גּוֹרְרוֹ וּמוֹצִיאוֹ מִשָּׁם, מֵה טַעֲמָא, (עוֹבְדֵי א ד) אִם תִּגְבִּיהַ כְּנִשְׂר וְאִם בֵּין כּוֹכְבִים שִׁים קִנְךָ מִשָּׁם אֹרִידֶךָ נְאוּם ה’, וְאִין כּוֹכְבִים אֵלָא צְדִיקִים כִּמְה דַּאת אִמַר (דְּנִיָּאֵל יב ג) וּמִצְדִּיקֵי הַרְבִּים כְּכוֹכְבִים לְעוֹלָם וְעַד.”

“... in the future Esav will wrap a tallis around himself and sit himself down amongst the tzaddikim in Gan Eden, and HKB”H will drag him out of there; why? Because the possuk states (Ovadiah 1,4): ‘Even if you rise us like an eagle or if you place your nest among the stars, I will bring you down from there—the word of Hashem.’ Here the stars are an allusion to the righteous, the tzaddikim, as we see in the possuk (Daniel 12,3)...”

This passage is truly astonishing. After all, it is discussing the future redemption—a time when the glory of Hashem will be revealed to all and will illuminate the entire world; a time when wickedness and deceit will vanish from the world. How is it imaginable that under those circumstances, Esav will have the audacity to wrap a tallis around himself and attempt to sit amongst the tzaddikim in Gan Eden? Surely he will realize the truth about himself—that he is thoroughly wicked and belongs in gehinom rather than in Gan Eden.

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Furthermore, we may deduce from the language of the Yerushalmi: **”והקב”ה גוררו ומוציאו**—“and HKB”H will drag him out of there”—that Esav seems to feel that he has some justification for sitting amongst the righteous in Gan Eden; for, it requires an act of G-d, as it were, to remove him—in keeping with the possuk, **”אם תגביה כנשר ואם בין כוכבים שים קנך משם**—“Even if you rise us like an eagle or if you place your nest among the stars, I will bring you down from there.” We must try to understand what possible justification Eisav might have for thinking that he belongs among the tzaddikim in Gan Eden—which ultimately necessitates that he be dragged out of there.

“From My Enemies I Will Become Wiser”

To address these matters, let us introduce an important principle in the service of Hashem presented by the Kedushas Levi (Noach) elucidating the following possuk (Tehillim 119,98): **”מאויבי מצוותיך**—“from my enemies I will become wiser to keep your commandments.” It is worthwhile to learn from the ways of the wicked how to better serve Hashem. If they will utilize every conceivable trick or device to achieve their improper ends and desires, and will not give up despite one hundred failures, how much more so should we persist in our struggle to overcome the yetzer and in our quest to better serve Hashem?! To quote the wisest of all men (Mishlei 24,6): **”כי בתחבולות תעשה לך מלחמה**—“For by means of strategies (devices and tricks), you can wage war on your own terms.” This then is the meaning of the possuk: **”מאויבי”**—from my enemies, the wicked; **”תחכמני מצוותיך”**—I learn to serve Hashem and fulfill mitzvos with the same drive and intensity that they exhibit.

The source for this noble idea is the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov, zy”a, as described by the Tiferes Shlomo (Toldos):

”בשם הבעש”ט על פסוק (שמות כה ב), [ויקחו לי תרומה] מאת כל איש אשר ידבנו לבו תקחו את תרומתי, היינו שכל אדם צריך לשית עצות בנפשו, להפוך לעשות מדות טובות מכל אשר ידבנו לבו, מהתאוות החיצוניות ומדות הרעות אשר הרגיל בהם, מהם יקח דרך לעבודת הבורא ברוך הוא באותו חשק ובאותה התאוה ביתר שאת”.

In other words, we must turn our external desires and bad habits into good habits that will be put to use to serve Hashem with that very same and even greater desire and intensity.

Utilizing this concept, the Tiferes Shlomo explains the amazing deed of our matriarch Rivka in this week’s parsha (Bereishis 27,15): **”ותקח רבקה את בגדי עשו בנה הגדול החמודות אשר אתה**—“Then Rivka took her older son Esav’s special garments, which were in her house, and clothed her younger son, Yaakov.” He teaches us the following lesson:

”בגדי עשו בנה הגדול החמודות, הם התאוות והחמודות רעות של עשו, ותלבש את יעקב בנה הקטן, הם הצדיקים שהם קטנים בעיניהם, ומורא על ראשם לגשת אל הקודש, והם מלבישים אותו החשק והרצון של תאוות עולם הזה, לקחת אותו חשק לעבודת הבורא ברוך הוא”.

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The clothes that Esav covets represent his evil desires and appetites. Her younger son Yaakov represents tzaddikim who diminish their own importance. They must clothe themselves with that desire and appetite for worldly things in order to transfer those drives to the intensified service of the Creator, Blessed is He.

In this same vein, he proceeds to elucidate the possuk (Bereishis 31,20): **“וויגנוב יעקב את לב לבן”**: **“הארמי, על בלי הגיד לו כי בורח הוא”**—“And Yaakov deceived Lavan the Aramean by not telling him that he was fleeing.” When Lavan saw how much Yaakov yearned to learn from him his scheming and deceptive ways, he was certain that Yaakov was a cheat just like him. Yet, the scripture testifies to the fact: **“וויגנוב יעקב את לב לבן הארמי”**—Yaakov stole Lavan’s evil ways; **“על בלי הגיד לו כי בורח הוא”**—and did not reveal to him that that he was fleeing from Lavan’s domain in order to utilize what he had learned to better serve Hashem.

“Why Did You Steal My God?”

This allows us to better understand the wicked Lavan’s complaint (ibid. 31,30): **“ועתה הלוך הלכת”** **“כי נכסוף נכספתה לבית אביך למה גנבת את אלהי”**—“Now, you have gone because you longed greatly for your father’s house; but why did you steal my god?” In other words, I cannot honestly complain that you wish to leave my house: **“כי נכסוף נכספתה לבית אביך”**—for you long to serve your Father in heaven and resume a life of Torah; however, I do have a legitimate claim against you: **“למה גנבת את אלהי”**—why did you steal my god, my negative traits and utilized what you learned from me to serve Hashem with even greater intensity?

We are now in a better position to clarify the puzzling passage cited earlier from the Yerushalmi:

“דרך כוכב מיעקב, ממני דרך כוכב ועתיד לעמוד מיעקב... עתיד עשו הרשע לעטוף טליתו ולישב עם הצדיקים בגן עדן לעתיד לבוא, והקב"ה גוררו ומוציאו משם, מה טעמא, אם תגביה כנשר ואם בין כוכבים שים קנך משם אורידך נאום ה', ואין כוכבים אלא צדיקים כמה דאת אמר ומצדיקי הרבים ככוכבים לעולם ועד.”

The possuk quoted at the end of this passage (Daniel 12,3): **“ומצדיקי הרבים ככוכבים”**—teaches us that the tzaddikim who guide the public to be righteous and meritorious are likened to stars. Therefore, in the future--when Eisav sees that Yaakov’s descendants, the people of Yisroel, follow in their forefather’s ways and serve Hashem with the methods Yaakov learned from him--he will claim that he, too, has guided the public to be meritorious and, thus, deserves to sit amongst the tzaddikim in Gan Eden.

Nevertheless, HKB”H will drag him out and expel him from their midst. For, in truth, whatever small amount of credit he may deserve, he surely doesn’t merit any reward for it. After all, he had no good intentions in the matter, and, in reality, caused Yisroel tremendous grief and hardships in his attempts to prevent them from serving Hashem. This, then, is implied in the verse: **“אם תגביה”** **“כנשר ואם בין כוכבים שים קנך”**—if you come forward claiming to have benefited the public and

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wish to be counted among the stars; “משם אורידך נאום ה’”—Hashem states emphatically that He will drag you down to where you truly belong.

A Complete Tzaddik Does Not Need to Learn from the Ways of the Wicked

At this point, we are compelled to present a divergent point of view. While the sources quoted thus far suggest that learning the tricks and strategies of the wicked is desirable, other sources point out a minor pitfall. By following the methodology of: “מאויבי תחכמני מצוותיך”—“from my enemies I will become wiser to keep your commandments”—we are empowering the wicked to a small degree. For, they now have a somewhat justified claim that they have assisted Yisroel to ascend to a higher level in their service of Hashem.

One of these divergent sources is the Knesses Yechezkel written by the great Rabbi Yechezkel of Dezh, zts”l, (Balak). In short, he states that a true tzaddik, one who has reached the pinnacle of perfection, does not need to learn from the wicked how to ascend to a higher level in the service of Hashem. It is sufficient that he motivates himself to achieve greater heights as did Avraham Avinu (B.R. 61,1): “זימן לו הקב”ה שתי כליותיו כמין שני רבנים, והיו נובעות ומלמדות אותו תורה” —“HKB”H provided him with two kidneys that functioned as two teachers, and they would flow and teach him Torah and wisdom.”

He suggests that there is a way to distinguish which method the tzaddik is employing in his service of Hashem—learning from one’s enemies, “מאויבי תחכמני מצוותיך”, or self-motivation. If the tzaddik’s level of kedushah and good deeds merely parallel the wicked person’s level of malevolence and impurity, then it is a sign that he is utilizing the former method.

If, however, we discern that the tzaddik is rising to higher and higher levels of kedushah—far surpassing the wicked person’s opposite degree of impurity—it becomes clear that the tzaddik is not relying on the wicked person to learn how to better serve Hashem. In this case, the wicked person no longer has any merit or claim to reward from the domain of kedushah—from the good deeds of the righteous.

Further on in his discussion of this topic, the Knesses Yechezkel validates his theory with the following telling story:

“ויסופר מאת מרן הקדוש שר שלום מבעלזא זי”ע, שבילדותו היה דר בשכונתו ערל נפח אחד, שהיה דרכו לקום בבוקר השכם אחר חצות לילה לעסוק במלאכתו, ואשתו הצדיקית [הרבנית מלכה ע”ה] כשהיתה שומעת קול הקורנס של הנפח מכה, היתה מעוררת את בעלה ואמרה, שלום שלום קום לעבודת הבורא כי הנפח כבר מכה בקורנס.

ויהי היום שהוא הקדוש קם בבוקר השכם, עוד טרם נשמע קול הקורנס, ובאותו יום מת הנפח, ואמר שכל עיקר חיותו [של הנפח] היה, על ידי אותה יניקה שהוא היה מעורר אותו לעבודת הבורא יתברך שמו, ותיכף שאירע שקם בלתי התעוררות ממנו נפסק פתיל חיותו כרגע.”

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Our holy master, the Sar Shalom of Belz, zy" a, tells a story from his younger days. A gentile blacksmith lived in his neighborhood; he regularly woke up in the very early hours of the morning, after midnight, and began his daily work. When his righteous wife, the Rebbetzin Malkah, a" h, would hear the sound of the blacksmith's sledge-hammer, she would wake her husband and say: Shalom, Shalom rise up to serve the Creator, for the blacksmith is already pounding away with the sledge-hammer.

It so happened, one day, that the holy master rose early before he heard the sound of the sledge-hammer. That day, the blacksmith died. He explained that the blacksmith's existence derived from the fact that he served the function of waking him to serve the Creator, Blessed is He. As soon as he arose without the other's assistance, the blacksmith's thread of existence ceased at that moment.

Rabbi Yisroel of Tshartkov's, zy" a, View on this Subject

Now, let us examine this concept with a slight twist as it appears in the Yismach Yisroel, authored by Rabbi Yisroel of Tshartkov, zy" a, (Vayishlach). His point of view is that it is fine and appropriate to study the ways of the wicked in order to better serve Hashem as one is beginning one's spiritual development. Once, however, one has children and students, this method possesses an inherent danger. Upon seeing him pay close attention to the ways of the wicked and even imitating them, his children and students might, chas v' shalom, mistakenly come to follow their improper behavior.

At that point in one's spiritual development, the optimal method of growth is through concentration on one's Torah study and davening. This avoids any contact and association with the wicked. In the words of Yisroel's sweet psalmist (Tehillim 119,37): "העבר עיני מראות שוא בדרכיך חייני"—"Avert my eyes from witnessing falsehood, sustain me through Your ways." In other words, avert my eyes so that I will not need to observe the ways of the wicked in order to learn from them. Rather, guide me and sustain me in the ways of Torah and mitzvos—obviating any need on my part to pay attention to the wicked.

At the beginning of his spiritual journey, Yaakov Avinu followed the philosophy of "מאויבי תחכמני"—learning the strategies of one's enemies. To this end, the Scriptures state (Bereishis 32,5): "עם לבן גרתי"—"I dwelt with Lavan." To which Rashi comments: "עם לבן גרתי ותרי"ג"—"מצוות שמרתי"—due to my perilous circumstances, living in proximity to Lavan, I learned from his evil ways and was more diligent in observing the six hundred and thirteen mitzvos. Nevertheless, once his children were born, the tribes, he completely abandoned this methodology and chose to adopt the second method of spiritual development; he focused on Torah study and prayer, while avoiding any further contact with the wicked.

In this manner, he explains our sages words concerning Yaakov's conversation with Eisav after appeasing him (Bereishis 33,14): "יעבר נא ארוני לפני עבדו ואני אתנהלה לאטי לרגל המלאכה"—"אשר לפני ולרגל הילדים עד אשר אבא אל ארוני שעירה"—"Let my lord go ahead of his servant; I will make my way at my slow pace according to the gait of the work that is before me and to the gait of the children, until I come to my lord at Seir." We learned in the Midrash (B.R. 78,14):

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“יעבר נא אדוני לפני עבדו, אמר לו [עשו], מבקש את שנהא שותף עמך בעולמך, אמר לו [יעקב], יעבר נא אדוני לפני עבדו, אמר לו [עשו], ואין את מתיירא מדוכסי ומן אפרכי ומן אסטרטילי, אמר לו ואני אתנהלה לאטי.”

Eisav wished to be a partner in Yaakov's life; he wanted Yaakov to observe his ways and to incorporate what he learned into his service of Hashem. In this manner, Eisav would share in Yaakov's work and would be his partner. Yaakov replied: “יעבר נא אדוני לפני עבדו”—“let my lord go ahead of his servant”—because I have abandoned the tactic of observing and learning from the ways of the wicked.

In response, Eisav inquires: “ואין את מתיירא מדוכסי ומן אפרכי ומן אסטרטילי”—“And aren't you afraid of my officials?” In other words, aren't you concerned about the yetzer horah who places obstacles and roadblocks in one's path? By observing my ways, you will know how to defeat him and circumvent the obstacles. Yaakov answers: “ואני אתנהלה לאטי לרגל המלאכה אשר לפני”—now that I have children, it is too dangerous to employ the method of observing the strategies of the wicked. This is the meaning of the possuk (Bereishis 32, 25): “ויותר יעקב”—“and Yaakov remained alone”—he remained alone implying that he now served Hashem entirely by means of his own devices, without involving the wicked.

Yaakov versus Yisroel

Come and see now, how nicely we can interpret the verses that follow according to the Yismach Yisroel's elucidation (ibid.):

“ויותר יעקב לבדו ויאבק איש עמו, וירא כי לא יכול לו, ויגע בכף ירכו ותקע כף ירך יעקב בהאבקו עמו, ויאמר שלחני כי עלה השחר ויאמר לא אשלחך כי אם ברכתני, ויאמר אליו מה שמך ויאמר יעקב, ויאמר לא יעקב עוד שמך כי אם ישראל, כי שרית עם אלהים ועם אנשים ותוכל.”

“And Yaakov was left alone and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. When he perceived that he could not overcome him, he struck the ball of his thighbone; and the ball of Yaakov's thighbone became dislocated as he wrestled with him. Then he said, ‘Let me go, for dawn has broken.’ And he said, ‘I will not let you go unless you have blessed me.’ He said to him, ‘What is your name?’ He said, ‘Yaakov.’ He said, ‘No longer will it be said that your name is Yaakov, but Yisroel, for you have striven with the Divine and with men and you have overcome.’”

We shall begin by reiterating a concept found in our holy sources many, many times. When the people of Yisroel are referred to as “יעקב”, it reflects that they are spiritually on a lower level—resembling the “עקב”, the heel. When they are referred to as “ישראל”, it reflects a higher level. The source for this distinction is found in the holy Zohar (Terumah 175:): “יעקב לאו שלימותא, ישראל—Yaakov does not reflect perfection; Yisroel does. Let us explain the significance and the difference between the title “יעקב” and the title “ישראל”.

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Based on what we have learned thus far, we can suggest that the name **"יעקב"** alluding to the lower spiritual level, similar to the heel, represents the beginning of one's journey and development in his service of Hashem. It represents the stage in Yaakov's development when he was still learning how to serve Hashem utilizing tactics learned from the wicked Eisav—learning never to tire or stop trying in his quest to achieve his goals. This is reflected by the name **"יעקב"** which he was given because he emerged while grasping his brother Eisav's heel. In other words, he was holding onto Eisav's heel in order to utilize his ways for the sake of kedushah.

This is the meaning of the verse: **"ויוצא הראשון אדמוני כולו כאדרת שער"**—"The first one emerged red, all of him was like a hairy mantle." Red is an allusion to sins and transgressions. Yet, immediately afterwards, Yaakov emerged: **"וידו אוחזת בעקב עשו"**—grasping Eisav's heel, indicating that he wished to employ his tactics in the service of Hashem. **"ויקרא שמו יעקב"**—HKB"H named him Yaakov indicating that serving Hashem in this manner is very important. Nevertheless, the name **"ישראל"** represents a stage in Yaakov's life when he had elevated to a higher spiritual level, no longer requiring this association with Eisav.

This will illuminate for us the following verses: **"ויותר יעקב לבדו"**—he no longer needed to serve Hashem by observing the methods of the wicked. So, when Eisav's ministering angel was wrestling with him: **"וירא כי לא יכול לו"**—he realized that he no longer shared a part in Yaakov's actions; **"ויוגע בכף ירכו"**—so, he resorted to striking a blow at Yaakov's descendants, who were not yet on that level of service and still needed to observe the ways of the wicked. As a consequence, he still had a minor connection with their holy accomplishments which resulted in a minor and temporary injury to Yaakov's thighbone: **"ותקע כף ירך יעקב בהאבקו עמו"**.

"ויאמר שלחני כי עלה השחר, ויאמר לא אשלחך כי אם ברכתני"—"Then he said, 'Let me go, for dawn has broken.' And he said, 'I will not let you go unless you have blessed me.'" On behalf of his descendants, Yaakov Avinu wished to force Eisav's ministering angel to bless them, so that they, too, would merit to serve Hashem in an elevated fashion not requiring an association with Eisav and his descendants. The angel concedes: **"ויאמר אליו מה שמך ויאמר יעקב, ויאמר לא יעקב"**—"He said to him, 'What is your name?' He said, 'Yaakov.' He said, 'No longer will it be said that your name is Yaakov, but Yisroel, for you have striven with the Divine and with men and you have overcome.'"

Continuing along this path, we can explain how Eisav, who is associated with the impurity of the pig, merited to have a sign of purity in his hooves. We find an incredible idea presented by the Yismach Moshe in this week's parsha. He suggests that the touch of Yaakov's holy hand imparted a semblance of purity to Eisav's heel. Based on what we have explained above, however, we can suggest another explanation. Seeing as Yaakov grasped onto Eisav's heel in order to follow in his ways and transform his evil devices into instruments dedicated to the service of Hashem-- **"מאויבי"** **"תחכמני מצוותיך"**, learning from my enemies how to better serve Hashem—it turns out that this accrued some merit to Eisav. Therefore, that is where we find his signs of purity.