

“Travel on and let us go—I will proceed alongside you”

Eisov the Root of Evil Established an Important Principle: the Force of Evil Should Not Be Greater than the Force of Good!

In this week's parsha, parshas Vayishlach, after being appeased by Yaakov, Eisov proposes a friendly and brotherly plan (33, 12): “ויאמר נסעה ונלכה ואלכה” “and he said, “Travel on and let us go—I will proceed alongside you.” Rashi explains: “*ויאלכה לנגדרך*, בשוה לך. טובה זו אעשה לך, שאאריך ימי מהלכתי ללכת—he suggests that they travel together, and he will do Yaakov a favor by travelling as slowly as necessary to accommodate Yaakov. Nevertheless, Yaakov Avinu refuses this offer:

“ויאמר אליו אדוני יודע כי הילדים רכים והצאן והבקר עלות עלי, ודפקום יום אחד ומתו כל הצאן, יעבר נא אדוני לפני עבדו, ואני אתנהלה לאטי לרגל המלאכה אשר לפני ולרגל הילדים, עד אשר אבוא אל אדוני שעירה.”

But he said to him, “My lord knows that the children are tender, and the nursing flocks and cattle are upon me; and they will drive them hard for one day, then all the flocks will die. 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.”

The Great Danger in Joining Eisov

In the sefer Ben Ish Chai, authored by the great Rabbi Yosef Chaim of Bovel, zy”a, he views the dispute between Yaakov and Eisov as a crucial lesson concerning the inherent spiritual dangers of befriending and uniting with wicked people. He writes:

“ויאמר נסעה ונלכה ואלכה לנגדרך. יש לדקדק איך נהפך עשו לאיש אחר לבקש החברה עם יעקב אבינו ע”ה, אחר שתחילת ביאתו היתה כדי להרגו אלא השי”ת היה בעזרו... ונראה לי בסייעתא דשמיא על פי מה שכתב הרב ייטב לב ז”ל (פרשת שמות) בפסוק ויעבידו מצרים את בני ישראל בפרך, ואמרו רבותינו ז”ל (סוטה יא:): בפה רך.

הענין הוא על דרך שעניינו רואות עתה חדשות בארץ, שאומות העולם קראו דרור בארץ, ונתנו חירות ליהודים לקנות בתים שדות וכרמים ולהיות שרים... ובגלל זה יפתום בפיהם ויסיתו את עמי הארץ קלי הדעת, אשר צץ בהם מינות

ואפיקורסות להדמות להם בפה ולשוין ושם וכתב, וישנו את שמם ולשונם ומלבושיהם, וילכו בדרכיהם ויתערבו ביניהם וילמדו מעשיהם, ובזה ממש היתה עצת פרעה [לקלקל אותם בפה רך].

והנה באמת דברי הרב הנ”ל, יבואו נכון יותר על דבר זה אשר דיבר עשו עם יעקב, והוא כי תחילה רצה עשו לבוא על יעקב בחרב כדי לאבדו ח”ו, וסוף עתה בא להיפך... שעזב החרב והמלחמה עם יעקב, ודיבר להיפך נסעה ונלכה בעולם הזה בחברה ושיתוף ובהשוואה אחת, ואלכה נגדרך לעזרתך ולשמור אותך, וכל זה אינו אומר מאהבה אלא משנאה, שחשב שבזה יוכל לו לקלקל דרכיו ח”ו, ואז יגבר עליו ויהיה לו תקומה בעולם.

אך יעקב אבינו ע”ה הרגיש בנזק הדבר הזה, ואמר לו אדוני יודע כי הילדים רכים וכו’, כלומר ידעתי לא מאהבה וטוב לב אתה רוצה בכך, אלא כוונתך כדי להתגבר על זרעי ולשלוט בם, על ידי קלקול מעשיהם אשר יתקלקלו מחברת זרעך, דאז ידפקום המקטרגים יום אחד ומתו כל הצאן.”

He addresses Eisov's apparent change of heart regarding Yaakov Avinu; Eisov initially came to kill Yaakov and then decided to befriend him. The Ben Ish Chai proposes an explanation based on the commentary of the Yitav Lev (Shemos). We find, historically, that when the goyim gave the Jews equal rights and certain freedoms, this led to assimilation. Many adopted their language, manner of dress, and customs, changed their names, and strayed spiritually.

He concludes that this was, indeed, Eisov's plan here. Eisov's seemingly gracious proposal was not uttered out of brotherly love but out of hatred. He calculated that he stood a better chance of harming Yaakov and undermining his plans, chas v'shalom, by adopting this new tactic.

Yet, Yaakov Avinu sensed the danger and responded appropriately. He informs Eisov that he is aware that the offer is not sincere and that Eisov's true intention is to rule over and dominate Yaakov's offspring. Yaakov foresees the inherent harm in the union and friendship of his descendants with Eisov's descendants.

Rabbi Yehoshua Defeats the Heretic and Causes His Death

In this essay, we wish to focus on a novel insight found in the Gemoreh (Chagigeh 5b) concerning Eisov's proposal to Yaakov Avinu: "Travel on and let us go—I will proceed alongside you." In order to better appreciate this insight, let us first examine an amazing story found in the Gemoreh (ibid.) illustrating the incredible wisdom displayed by the divine Tanne Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya. Rabbi Yehoshua used to debate heretics, who despised the Jews, in the presence of the Roman Caesar.

This story is based on a possuk in parshas Vayelech (Devorim 31, 18): "ואנכי הסתר אסתיר פני ביום ההוא"—and I will certainly conceal my face on that day. Concerning this possuk, Rabbi Yosef stated that even when HKB"H conceals his presence from Yisroel: "ידו נטויה עלינו, "ידו נטויה עלינו"—he, nevertheless, continues to watch over us and protect us. Our blessed sages cite a related incident:

"רבי יהושע בן חנניה הוה קאי בי קיסר, אחוי ליה ההוא אפיקורסא, עמא דאהדרינהו מריה לאפיה מיניה, אחוי ליה ידו נטויה עלינו. אמר ליה קיסר לרבי יהושע, מאי אחוי לך, עמא דאהדרינהו מריה לאפיה מיניה, ואנא מחוינא ליה ידו נטויה עלינו. אמרו ליה להווא מינא, מאי אחויית ליה, עמא דאהדרינהו מריה מיניה, ומאי אחוי לך, לא ידענא, אמרו, גברא דלא ידע מאי מחווי ליה במחוג יחוי קמי מלכא, אפקוהו וקטלוהו."

Rabbi Yehoshua stood before the Caesar, while a certain heretic attempted to provoke him and embarrass him. Without uttering a word, he turned away from Rabbi Yehoshua; this gesture was intended to suggest that HKB"H, so to speak, had turned away from Yisroel, as indicated by the possuk: "ואנכי הסתר אסתיר פני ביום ההוא"—and I will certainly conceal my face on that day.

Rabbi Yehoshua comprehended his meaning immediately and gestured in return with an outstretched hand. He was indicating that even in exile, while HKB"H seemingly conceals his countenance, nevertheless: "ידו נטויה עלינו"—His hand remains outstretched over us to protect us. The heretic had no clue what Rabbi Yehoshua was conveying by this gesture. He was too embarrassed to admit this fact in front of the Caesar, and hoped that the matter would pass uneventfully--without anyone realizing that he had failed to grasp Rabbi Yehoshua's meaning.

Upon witnessing this exchange of gestures between the heretic and Rabbi Yehoshua, the Caesar immediately understood that a debate was taking place concerning the Jews. Therefore, he addressed Rabbi Yehoshua privately and inquired as to the meaning of the heretic's gesture of turning away from him. Rabbi Yehoshua replied that he was suggesting that Yisroel were a people whose Master had turned away from them. Next, the Caesar inquired as to the meaning of Rabbi Yehoshua's return gesture—the outstretching of his hand. He answered that he was signaling that "ידו נטויה עלינו"—HKB"H's hand remains outstretched over us.

Then, the Caesar's representatives proceeded to quiz the heretic to see if he had understood Rabbi Yehoshua's gestures. They asked him what he had signaled to Rabbi Yehoshua. He replied that he had indicated that HKB"H had turned away from Yisroel. Next, they ask him what Rabbi Yehoshua had conveyed in return by his outstretched hand. The heretic confessed that he did not comprehend the meaning of that gesture. The Caesar's officials expressed their surprise: is someone who is unable to appreciate what is being conveyed to him worthy of standing before the Caesar? They took him out and killed him.

"Counsel has been lost from the children; their wisdom has turned putrid"

Later on, the Gemoreh relates a conversation between the sages and Rabbi Yehoshua, as he was about to pass away: "כי קא ניחא נפשיה דרבי יהושע בן חנניה"—as he was dying; "אמרו ליה רבנן, מאי תיהוי עלן מאפיקורסין"—they asked him who would be able to defend them in future debates in front of the Caesar, and defeat the heretics, as he had done so admirably while alive.

Rabbi Yehoshua responded by citing a possuk from the Prophets (Yirmiyah 49, 7): "אברה עצה מבנים נסרחה"—counsel has been lost from the children; their wisdom has turned putrid; עצה - כיון שאברה עצה - מבנים, נסרחה חכמתן של אומות העולם—in other words, if wise men able to defeat the wicked are not found among the people of Yisroel, then, in similar fashion, wisdom will also be lost and absent among the wicked. Then, the Gemoreh brings an additional possuk as proof: "ואי בעית אימא מהבא, ויאמר נסעה ונלכה ואלכה"—here Eisov's proposal in our parsha is cited: "Travel on and let us go—I will proceed alongside you." As Rashi explains: "לנגדך, בשוה"—when he says "alongside you," he means on equal terms.

Upon closer examination, we find that our blessed sages are revealing a novel interpretation of Eisov's statement. Eisov, the embodiment of evil, says to Yaakov Avinu, the embodiment of kedusheh, after Yaakov had successfully subjugated Eisov's ministering angel and appeased him: **"Travel on and let us go—I will proceed alongside you."** In other words, it is true that my children and I will continue to wage a battle of extermination against Yaakov, the epitome of kedusheh, and his children Yisroel. Nonetheless, I promise you that this battle will be: **"נגדר, בשוה"**—on equal terms. The force of evil and impurity will not exceed the force of kedusheh. If the force of kedusheh is diminished, the force of evil will also be diminished. This mirrors the concept of (Shabbat 119b): **"ומלאך רע עונה אמן בעל כרחו"**—**and the bad angel is forced to answer "Amen" against his will.** Eisov himself, the root of evil, limited the force of evil—promising that his power would never exceed the power of kedusheh.

"G-d has made the one in accordance with the other"

As our sacred sources explain, this is the concept being expressed by the wisest of all men, when he states (Koheles 7, 14): **"זה לעומת זה עשה האלקים"**—**G-d has made the one in accordance with the other.** For example, the Ramak writes in Pardes Rimonim (25, 1): **"ראוי לנו לדעת כי גם את זה לעומת זה עשה האלקים, כי כמו שיש צד הקדושה והטהרה והצדקה והיושר וטוב... כן יש צד הקליפה שהיא הטומאה הרצוצה שהיא הקטרוג, ומצדה המשטין ומעוות את האדם מדרך הישר אל דרך לא טוב."** It is important to realize that just as there exists a side of kedusheh, so, too, there exists a side of the klipeh, negative forces.

This concept is found, similarly, in the writings of our teacher, the Arizal (Shaar HaGilgulim, Introduction 21). He employs this concept to explain the Gemoreh's statement (Succah 52a): **"כל הגדול מחבירו יצרו גדול הימנו"**—the greater a person is, the greater is his yetzer hara. As the level of kedusheh increases, correspondingly the degree of tumeh increases. Based on what we have learned, Eisov, the very embodiment of evil, was forced to admit to this arrangement against his will. This fact is reflected by his statement to Yaakov: **"Travel on and let us go—I will proceed alongside you"**—but only on equal terms.

This might lead one to wonder—if the power of kedusheh and the corresponding power of tumeh are equal—how is one ever able to overcome the force of

tumeh? The answer, however, is quite simple. Although these two diametrically opposed forces are indeed equal, HKB"H endowed us with the wonderful gift of the holy Torah. When a Jew engages in Torah study, he effectively weakens and subdues the force of tumeh. This simple truth is expressed by the Gemoreh as follows (Kiddushin 30b): **"כך הקב"ה אמר להם לישראל, בניי בראתי יצר הרע ובראתי לו תורה תבלין, ואם אתם עוסקים בתורה אין אתם נמסרים בידו"**—**so said HKB"H to Yisroel, "My children I created the yetzer hara and I have created the Torah, its antidote; if you occupy yourselves with Torah-study, you will not fall under its control."**

We can suggest the following analogy. Two enemies of equal strength and courage stand opposite each other on the field of battle, ready to battle to the death. If one of them is able to extract a concealed sword, and his opponent does not have such a concealed weapon, he will surely overwhelm his opponent with this sword. This, in fact, is the case in the battle of kedusheh versus tumeh. Albeit, the two opposing forces are of equal strength; yet, when we engage in Torah-study, it is as if we are pulling out a concealed weapon—as it is written (Tehillim 48, 4): **"חגור חרבך על ירך"**—**strap your sword onto your thigh.** Rashi comments: **"להילחם מלחמתה של תורה"**—to wage battle on behalf of the Torah. For, we now have a sword which the side of Tumeh lacks, and those forces of evil can now be vanquished with this powerful weapon in hand.

Now, let us offer a small tidbit regarding this concept based on what we have learned in the Gemoreh (Succah 52b): **"אם פגע בך מנוול זה משכהו לבית המדרש, אם אבן"**—**if this repulsive one engages you, drag him into the Beis HaMidrash; if he is like a stone, he will dissolve; if he is like iron, he will shatter.** The repulsive character referred to here is the yetzer hara. Say you perceive that he is of equal strength to your yetzer hatov, and you question how you will be able to resist its negative influence. We find an allusion to this situation in the word **"מנוול"**, repulsive one. **לנו"ל** is an abbreviation for **"נסעה ונלכה ואלכה לנגרך"**—**"Travel on and let us go—I will proceed alongside you."** Recall that this statement reflects the fact that the power of evil parallels the power of good. If you encounter this situation, the following course of action is advised: **"משכהו לבית המדרש"**—drag him into the Beis HaMidrash, where you will engage in Torah-study. This is your concealed weapon to subdue and eliminate the yetzer hara; **"אם אבן הוא"**—no matter what tricks he has up his sleeve, you will successfully overcome him.

“Let my lord go ahead of his servant”

Continuing along this path of enlightenment, let us proceed to address Yaakov's apparent refusal to accept Eisov's proposal: **“יעבר נא אדוני לפני עבדו, ואני אתנהלה: 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.** In other words, Yaakov does not agree to accept the terms of Eisov's proposal—to continue on alongside one another as equals. This requires some explanation, since Eisov's suggestion that both forces proceed on an equal and level plane, paralleling one another is an established principle. As we have seen, this is the basis for the Gemoreh's statement: **“כל הגדול מחבירו יצרו גדול הימנו”**—whoever is greater than his colleague possesses a greater yetzer hara than his colleague, as well.

The wisdom of Yaakov Avinu's refusal can be understood in the following light. Based on Yaakov's response to Eisov, our blessed sages established the halachah, which was instituted in the Shulchan Aruch (Y.D. 153, 3), that it is dangerous to travel alone with an idolater lest he may kill you; rather, one must travel in such a manner that one is always protected from him. This is expressed in the Gemoreh as follows (Avodah Zorah 25b):

“תנו רבנן ישראל שנודמן לו עובד כוכבים בדרך... היו עולין במעלה או יורדין בירידה, לא יהא ישראל למטה ועובד כוכבים למעלה, אלא ישראל למעלה ועובד כוכבים למטה, [ופירש רש"י: בעלייה ילך ישראל לפני העובד כוכבים דהיינו למעלה... ובירידה יוליך העובד כוכבים לפניו], ואל ישוח לפניו, שמא ירוץ את גולגלתו. שאלו [העובד כוכבים] להיכן הולך, ירחיב לו את הדרך [לספר לו שהולך למקום אחר], כדרך שעשה יעקב אבינו לעשו הרשע, דכתיב עד אשר אבוא אל אדוני שעירה, וכתיב ויעקב נסע סכותה.”

To paraphrase the Gemara: if one is travelling with an idolater, one should always be cognizant of his location relative to yours in order to stay out of harm's way. As Rashi clarifies, if you are walking uphill, the Jew should walk in front, keeping the idolater below him and slightly to the right; downhill, the Jew should be sure that the idolater is in front. Do not bend down in front of him, lest he smash your skull while you are not looking. If he inquires as to your final destination, choose a destination that is actually farther than your true destination—as Yaakov Avinu did during his interaction with Eisov.

We learn from this passage that Yaakov did not wish to travel with Eisov, because of the possible danger involved;

after all, he might have a change of heart and decide to kill Yaakov along the way. Therefore, he told Eisov to go ahead: **“יעבר נא אדוני לפני עבדו”**—**Let my lord go ahead of his servant.** In truth, Yaakov feared that if Eisov followed behind him, he might attack him suddenly and kill him.

This strategy has spiritual ramifications, as well. As Rabbi Yehoshua taught us, Eisov intended that the powers of kedusheh and the powers of tumeh should be equal and parallel one another. In truth, these forces do parallel each other, and engaging in Torah-study allows a Jew to overpower the yetzer hara. Yet, this hinges on one crucial condition. A Jew must remain on guard constantly, without pause, always remembering that Eisov's ministering angel--the yetzer hara, his archenemy--lies in wait to trap him and kill him. One cannot lose sight of this fact for even a single second, thinking erroneously that the yetzer hara has abandoned its efforts to trap him. The Gemoreh teaches (Kiddushin 30b): **“יצרו של אדם מתחדש עליו בכל יום”**—**a person's yetzer hara renews its efforts against him each day.** Additionally (ibid.): **“יצרו של אדם מתגבר עליו בכל יום”**—**a person's yetzer hara threatens to overpower him every day and seeks to kill him.**

Hence, Yaakov wisely told Eisov that he agreed with the proposal in principle: **“נסעה ונלכה ואלכה לנגדך”**—that the power of tumeh should never exceed the power of kedusheh, and that if the power of kedusheh decreases, chas v'shalom, the power of tumeh should also decrease correspondingly. Nevertheless, he still did not agree to travel together as a brother and a friend. Yaakov provided the following rationale: **“אדוני יודע כי הילדים רכים והצאן—My lord knows that the children are tender, and the nursing flocks and cattle are upon me; and they will drive them hard for one day, then all the flocks will die.**

In other words, in truth, I myself am not afraid to travel with you; for, I have already defeated your ministering angel, and I am quite capable of standing on constant guard. My young, precious children, however, are not yet capable of being on constant watch against the danger you would pose if we all travelled together. I fear that if they were to travel with you: **“ודפקום יום”**—you are liable to attack them suddenly and smash their skulls spiritually with the temptations of the yetzer; **“ומתו כל הצאן”**—as a result, they would all be overcome by the yetzer that attempts to kill us on a daily basis.

Therefore, I suggest: “יעבר נא אדוני לפני עבדו”—we should not travel together; rather, you should go ahead of us, so that my young, precious flock can keep an eye on you, and learn how to remain on constant watch against the danger you pose. **“ואני אתנהלה לאטי לרגל המלאכה.”** “אשר לפני ולרגל הילדים”—I will proceed slowly, at my own pace; for, I still have much work to do, educating the children how to protect themselves from the ambush you have planned for them.

“עד אשר אבוא אל אדוני שעירה”—**until I meet up with my lord in Seir.** Rashi explains that this refers to the times of the Mashiach. We can suggest that Yaakov is informing Eisov that at the time of the ultimate redemption—when the yetzer hara will be eliminated from the world—they will no longer fear travelling with his descendants. The prophet describes this situation as follows (Zechariah 8, 23): **“כה אמר ה' צבאות בימים ההמה, אשר יחזיקו עשרה אנשים מכל לשונות הגוים, והחזיקו בכנף איש יהודי לאמר—נלכה עמכם כי שמענו אלקים עמכם.”** **Thus said Hashem, Master of Legions: In those days it will happen that ten men, of all the different languages of the nations, will take hold, they will take hold of the corner of the garment of a Jewish man, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that G-d is with you!'**

The Meshech Chochmah's Wonderful Explanation

At this point, let us take a closer look at the story presented earlier involving the divine Tanne Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya. We know that Rabban Yochanan ben Zakai, his teacher, said of him (Ovos 2, 8): **“אשרי יולדתו”—praised is the one who gave birth to him.** As we learned, he outwitted the heretic and caused his death with an outstretched arm—symbolizing that even while in exile: **“ידו”**—HKB”H’s outstretched hand protects us.

We will begin by introducing a fantastic interpretation of the debate between Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya and the heretic found in the sefer Meshech Chochmah (Shemos 3, 13), written by the great author of the Ohr Sameach. His interpretation is based on the Gemoreh’s (Beroches 6a) elucidation of the possuk (Devorim 28, 10): **“וראו כל עמי הארץ כי שם ה' נקרא עליך ויראו ממך, רבי אליעזר הגדול אומר, אלו תפילין שבראש”**. There we are taught that the sight of the tefillin shel rosh instills fear in non-Jews. On the other hand, the Gemoreh (Menochos 37b) elucidates the possuk (Shemos 13, 9): **“והיה לך לאות על ירך”**—teaching us that the tefillin shel

yad remain covered, unlike the tefillin shel rosh; we are aware of their presence but outsiders are not.

Based on these elucidations, the Meshech Chochmah teaches us an incredible principle. During the times of the Beis HaMikdash and at the time of the future redemption—when Hashem’s presence and His management of the world are apparent to all—HKB”H illuminates the world with tefillin shel rosh in addition to tefillin shel yad. With the tefillin shel rosh revealed for all to see, fear is instilled in the hearts and minds of the goyim, as depicted by the Gemara: **“וראו כל עמי הארץ כי שם ה' נקרא עליך”**—**וראו ממך, אלו תפילין שבראש”**. During times of exile, however, when Hashem’s management is concealed, HKB”H reveals Himself in the world with only the tefillin shel yad, which are hidden: **“לך לאות ולא לאחרים לאות”**—indicating that HKB”H is watching over Yisroel unseen, as it were, employing the mechanism of the tefillin shel yad.

This, then, is the interpretation of the dispute between the heretic and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananya. The heretic gestured to Rabbi Yehoshua—by turning his head away—that HKB”H had turned his countenance away from Yisroel, in keeping with the notion of: **“ואנכי הסתר”**—**ואסתיר לפני”**. Under those circumstances, His tefillin shel rosh—which instill fear in the nations of the world—are not revealed. In response, Rabbi Yehoshua gestured to him with a movement of his arm: **“ידו נטויה עלינו”**—that even in exile, HKB”H watches over Yisroel, although unseen, utilizing the tefillin shel yad.

His Left Hand Still Protects Us

After much thought and consideration, I would like to propose an explanation for the nature of HKB”H’s supervision over Yisroel during periods of exile—supervision based on the tefillin shel yad. The Maharsha, in Chidushei Aggadot (Chagigah ibid.), provides us with brilliant insights regarding Rabbi Yehoshua’s hand gesture. He teaches us that the phrase **“ידו נטויה עלינו”**—**His hand is outstretched over us**—employed by Rabbi Yehoshua is taken from the words of the prophet (Yeshayah 5, 24): **“כי מאסו את תורת ה' צבאות ואת אמרת קדוש ישראל נאצו, על כן חרה אף ה' בעמו ויט ידו עליו ויכהו... בכל זאת לא שב אפו ועוד ידו נטויה”**—**for they have abhorred the Torah of Hashem, Master of Legions, and they have scorned the word of the Holy One of Yisroel. Therefore, Hashem’s wrath has flared up against His people and He has stretched forth His hand against them and stricken them. . . Yet still His wrath has not ceased and His hand is still stretched out.”**

It is apparent from Rabbi Yehoshua's remarks that the conclusion of this possuk, "וְעוֹד יָדוֹ נְטוּיָה" -- **and His hand is still stretched out**—is for Yisroel's benefit. In other words, although HKB"H has concealed His countenance from Yisroel and is still angry with them, nonetheless, His outstretched hand continues to protect them. Based on the Gemara (Menoches 36b), the Maharsho points out that when Scriptures refers to a nonspecific hand, it is referring to the left hand. He brings a proof from the possuk (Yeshayeh 48, 13): "אֵף יְדֵי יִסְדָּה אֶרֶץ וַיְמִינִי" "אֵף יְדֵי יִסְדָּה אֶרֶץ וַיְמִינִי" -- **also, My hand has laid the foundation of the earth, and My right hand has measured out the heavens.** (The first part of the possuk does not specify which hand it is referring to; yet, from the conclusion of the possuk, it is clear that the unspecified hand must be the left.) Similarly, when the prophet says: "וְעוֹד יָדוֹ" "וְעוֹד יָדוֹ" -- **and His hand is still stretched out**—he is also referring to the left hand.

Furthermore, we know that the right hand symbolizes the attribute of "chesed," kindness, while the left hand symbolizes the attribute of "din," justice. The source for this concept is the Tikunei Zohar in the passage of Petach Eliyahu (Introduction 17a): "חֶסֶד דְּרוּעָא יְמִינָא, גְּבוּרָה דְּרוּעָא שְׂמָלָא" "חֶסֶד דְּרוּעָא יְמִינָא, גְּבוּרָה דְּרוּעָא שְׂמָלָא" This is also evident from the possuk (Eichoh 2, 3): "הִשִּׁיב אַחֲוֵר יְמִינִי" "הִשִּׁיב אַחֲוֵר יְמִינִי" -- **He drew back His right hand.** Clearly, during times of exile, when the attribute of justice is in force, HKB"H draws His right hand, symbolizing "chesed," behind Him.

It is now clear why the prophet says "וְעוֹד יָדוֹ נְטוּיָה" -- **and His hand is still stretched out.** He is informing us that even during times of exile—when HKB"H manages us with His left hand, representing "din"—nevertheless, HKB"H's hand is still stretched out over us to protect us. For this reason, the heretic signaled to Rabbi Yehoshua that HKB"H had concealed His countenance from us; for, during times of exile, HKB"H draws His right hand, representing "chesed," behind him. Responding to this insinuation, Rabbi Yehoshua motions with his hand that "וְעוֹד יָדוֹ נְטוּיָה" -- **and His hand is still stretched out**—even with His left hand, He stretches it out over us to protect us.

Rabbi Yehoshua Causes the Downfall of the Heretic with His Left Hand

Alas, let us add a small embellishment of our own to the words of the Maharsha. He taught us that when it says: "וְעוֹד יָדוֹ נְטוּיָה" -- **and His hand is still stretched out**—this is a reference to periods of exile. Although HKB"H has withdrawn His right hand from Yisroel, His "chesed,"

he still protects Yisroel with His left hand, His "din." By so doing, he insures that Yisroel will remain in exile until they correct all that needs to be corrected.

Yet, when the wicked overstep their bounds, and oppress Yisroel beyond what they are allowed to, the people of Yisroel are no longer able to fulfill their mission in exile and to make the necessary corrections. At that point, that very same left hand which exacts justice from Yisroel in exile, is used by HKB"H to smite the wicked and safeguard Yisroel. This is the meaning of the prophet's words: "בְּכַל זֹאת לֹא שָׁב אָפוֹ" "בְּכַל זֹאת לֹא שָׁב אָפוֹ" -- **although His wrath concerning Yisroel yet persists during exile, even so: "וְעוֹד יָדוֹ נְטוּיָה" -- He still extends His left hand to protect us and to strike down Yisroel's enemies.**

We can now better appreciate Rabbi Yehoshua's ingenuity. The heretic intended to mock Yisroel in front of the Roman Caesar—implying that HKB"H has withdrawn His attention and favors from Yisroel in their time of exile. After all, He drew His right hand behind Him, illustrating that He no longer guided them with "chesed." The holy Tanne Rabbi Yehoshua, however, outsmarted him by cleverly gesturing with an extended left hand. He conveyed the vital message that even during times of exile His extended left hand still safeguards and protects Yisroel.

With this clever motion of his hand, Rabbi Yehoshua imposed the full measure of the law upon the heretic. For, this hand gesture led to the heretic's death, when he was unable to fathom Rabbi Yehoshua's message. This sequence of events also revealed to the Caesar and his officers that even in the midst of this bitter exile: "וְעוֹד יָדוֹ נְטוּיָה" -- **and His hand is still stretched out**—HKB"H continues to protect Yisroel even with His left hand; this hand of "din" continues to strike down and mete out justice to Yisroel's enemies.

Thus, we have gained a deeper understanding of the Meshech Chochmeh's marvelous insight. It is true that during times of exile, we lack the guidance and process associated with the tefillin shel rosh—which fills the nations of the world with fear. Nevertheless, in its place, we still merit supervision and guidance according to the dictates of the tefillin shel yad. These tefillin adorn the left arm and exact strict punishment from Yisroel's enemies, who oppress them and hinder them from accomplishing their mission in exile. It is HKB"H's left arm and tefillin shel yad that will continue to guide us and protect us until we merit the final and complete redemption. Then, once again, HKB"H will shower us with the light of the tefillin shel rosh, instilling fear and trepidation in the nations of the world—swiftly, in our days, Amen.