

”וידו אוחזת בעקב עשו”

Yaakov A Reincarnation of Adam HaRishon Extracted from Eisav the Letter Yud the Nachash Stole from Adam HaRishon

We read this week in parshas Toldos (Bereishis 25, 25): **”ויצא הראשון אדמוני כולו כאדרת שער ויקראו שמו עשו, ואחרי כן יצא אחיו וידו אוחזת בעקב—the first one emerged red, all of him was like a hairy mantle; so they called his name Eisav. After that his brother emerged with his hand grasping onto the heel of Eisav; and he called his name Yaakov.** Rashi notes that the passuk states: **”He called his name Yaakov”**—referring to HKB”H. Seeing as HKB”H Himself named him Yaakov, because: **”וידו אוחזת בעקב עשו”**—he grasped onto Eisav’s heel, this implies that this act was extremely significant. Hence, it behooves us to examine what exactly was Yaakov’s intent.

Let us begin with the illuminating words of the Megaleh Amukos (Toldos). He repeats this idea in parshas Vayishlach and once again in greater detail in parshas Bechukosai. He addresses HKB”H’s surprising choice of the name **”יעקב”** for the elite of the Avos. Furthermore, based on the act of grasping Eisav’s heel, he should have been named **”עקב”**, meaning heel. Where did the additional **”yud”** come from?

He refers to Rashi’s comment regarding the choice of the name Eisav for the first of the twins to be born: **”לפי שהיה נעשה ונגמר בשעריו—because he was fully made and complete with respect to his hair, like a person many years older.** The Rashbam writes that according to this explanation the name **”עשו”** is derived from the word **”עשויו”**—indicating that he was born fully developed and physically complete like an older person. This being the case, we should ask why he was named **”עשו”** without the **”yud”**; he really should have been named **”עשויו”**, including the **”yud.”**

The Megaleh Amukos provides us with an answer. Indeed, he should have originally been named **”עשויו”**, including the **”yud”**; however, immediately upon emerging into the world, Yaakov grabbed his heel, i.e. the last letter of his name. Yaakov confiscated the **”yud”** and joined it to his own name—transforming **”עקב”** into **”יעקב”**; this left his brother simply with the name **”עשו”**. This event is alluded to by the passuk: **”וידו אוחזת בעקב עשו”**—Yaakov grabbed the heel, the last letter, of the name **”עשויו”**, and took it for himself.

Thus, the word **”יד”**, an anagram for the word for the letter **”יד”**, alludes to this snatching of the **”yud”** from the heel of Eisav. The final result: **”ויקרא שמו יעקב”**—he was named **”יעקב”**, signifying that he had successfully joined the **”yud”** to the name **”עקב”**. This concludes his explanation.

Being the descendants of Yaakov Avinu, and being named after him, it is incumbent upon us to investigate and clarify the deeper significance of the letter **”yud”**—the cause of a bitter battle to the end between Yaakov and Eisav.

Who Is Truly Wise? He Who Foresees Events to Come

I raised my eyes to the spiritual heights in search of a solution to this enigma. I settled upon the impeccable teachings of the Maharal of Prague. In Netivos Olam (Part 2), he addresses the following passuk in Koheles composed by the wisest of all men (4, 13): **”טוב ילד מסכן וחכם ממלך זקן וכסיל”**—**a poor but wise young boy is preferable to an old and foolish king.** Rashi provides the following comment in the name of the Midrash:

”טוב ילד מסכן וחכם, זה יצר טוב, ולמה נקרא ילד, שאינו בא באדם עד י”ג שנה. מסכן, שאין האיברים שומעים לו כמו ליצר הרע. חכם, שמשכיל את האדם לדרך טובה. ממלך זקן וכסיל, מלך, יצר הרע שהוא שליט על כל האיברים. זקן, שמשעה שנולד הוולד הוא נתון בו, שנאמר (בראשית ד-ז) לפתח חטאת רובץ. וכסיל, שמתעהו בדרך רעה.”

The poor wise boy is the yetzer tov. It is referred to as a young boy, because it does not join a person until he is thirteen years old; it is described as **”poor”** or **”unfortunate,”** because the bodily limbs do not heed its advice as they do to the yetzer hara; it is described as **”wise,”** because he intelligently guides man to do good. The king is the yetzer hara, who rules over all of the bodily limbs. It is described as **”old,”** because it enters one’s body at birth; it is described as **”foolish,”** because it misleads a person to go astray, along a wayward path.

The Maharal explains the practical relevance of these descriptions. The yetzer tov is defined as **”חכם”**—wise—based on the qualification **”איזהו חכם הרואה את הנולד”**—a truly wise person foresees

the consequences of his actions. When the yetzer hara persuades a person to commit an "aveirah," the yetzer tov provides moral support. It encourages him not to be swayed or tempted by the glittery nonsense that surrounds us in this world. It helps a person realize that he is being deluded by his desires and cravings.

Rather, a person should behave like a "חכם הרואה את הנולד"—looking with open eyes to the distant future and the realization that all men eventually die and nothing will remain from the cravings and foolishness of this world. Furthermore, he will ultimately be held accountable by HKB"H for all of his actions, barring none. The divine Tanna Akavya ben Mehalalel expresses this idea as follows (Avos 3, 1): "ולפני מי אתה עתיד לתת דין חשבון לפני: לפני מלך מלכי המלכים הקדוש ברוך הוא—Before Whom are you destined to give an accounting? Before the King of Kings, HKB"H. By looking to the future, and realizing that you will ultimately be held accountable, you will be spared from committing an aveirah.

The "Wise King" Has Seen a Lot but "Foolishly" Has Not Learned a Thing

In this manner, the Maharal proceeds to explain why the yetzer hara is described as "an old and foolish king." He addresses each of the three adjectives: זקן, מלך, וקן—**king, old, and fool:**

"והיפך זה נקרא יצר הרע מלך זקן וכסיל, נקרא מלך כמו שאמרנו [לעיל]: כי כן ענין שלו למלך, ואף מלכות השי"ת אינו מקבל עליו", ונקרא זקן וכסיל, שהזקן אף שאינו חכם להיות רואה את הנולד, מכל מקום מפני שראה לפניו מעשים הרבה, בשביל כך יודע שאם הוא עושה גם כן כמו שעשו אותם רשעים שלפניו, יקרה לו גם כן כמו שקרה לאותו שראה.

וכמו שאמר במדרש (ילקוט שמעוני ישעיה רמז תצ) על הפסוק (ישעיה גז-כ) והרשעים כים נגרש, מזה הים הגל הראשון אומר, עכשיו אני עולה ומציף כל העולם, וכיון שבא לחול הוא כורע ומשתבר, ואין הגל השני למד מן הראשון, כך פרעה נתגאה על ישראל והפילו הקב"ה, וכן עמלק, וכן סיחון ועוג, ובלעם, ובלק, ואין אחד למד מן חבירו עד כאן. הרי לך כי זה ענין הרשע אשר לא למד מן הראשון, ולפיכך קרא אותו זקן שראה מעשים הרבה שמגיע לרשעים וחוטאים, והיה אחרית שלהם לרע, ואין חכם כבעל ניסיון."

In direct contrast, the yetzer hara is described as an old and foolish king. It is described as a king, because its sole purpose is to rule over a person and control his actions; it doesn't even accept upon itself the sovereignty of Heaven. It is described as old and foolish, because it has seen and witnessed much. It has witnessed the fate of the wicked before him, and knows that if he acts in the same manner, the very same fate awaits him.

He cites the Midrash on the passuk in Yeshayah (57, 20) comparing the wicked to the sea. The first wave says that it will rise and engulf the entire world; it reaches the seashore and vanishes. Yet, the second wave fails to learn from the fate of the first wave.

Similarly, the vain Pharaoh imposed himself upon Yisrael and was vanquished by HKB"H; so too Amalek; so too Sichon and Og and Bilam and Balak. None of them learned from their predecessors. This is the nature of the wicked.

We learn a tremendous principle from the Maharal concerning the service of Hashem and the source of the constant battle that takes place between the yetzer tov and the yetzer hara. The yetzer tov is described as "חכם", because it influences a person with wisdom. It encourages a person not to be tempted by the false illusions created by one's present, earthly desires. Rather, a person should look to the future, in keeping with the dictum: "חכם" "הרואה את הנולד"—**a wise man foresees the consequences of his actions.** He must be aware that HKB"H will ultimately hold him accountable for his actions. On the other hand, the yetzer hara—the old, foolish king—imbues a person with a spirit of foolishness and stupidity. It causes a person to only consider his current situation and immediate desires, while neglecting any possible future consequences.

This then is the meaning of the Gemara's statement (Sotah 3a): "אין אדם עובר עבירה אלא אם כן נכנס בו רוח שטות"-- **a person does not commit an aveirah unless he is possessed by a whim of insanity.** In other words, the spirit of kedushah and wisdom—which would prompt him to consider the consequences and act accordingly--has left him. Instead, he is controlled by a whim of insanity, which blinds him to the true reality. Rather than seeing the ultimate consequences of his actions, he only sees the present persuasions of the yetzer—the earthly cravings which fill his heart with false illusions.

The Yud Represents the Ancient Wisdom from which the Torah Emanated

Based on this notion, I would like to propose an interpretation of the following Gemara (Berachos 61a): "דרש רב נחמן בר רב חסדא, מאי דכתיב (בראשית ב-1) וייצר ה' אלהים את האדם, בשני יודין, שני יצרים ברא הקב"ה, Rav Nachman bar Rav Chisda expounded: **What is the significance of that which is written (Bereishis 2, 7): "And Hashem Elokim formed (וייצר) man," spelled with two yuds? It alludes to the fact that HKB"H created man with two yetzers—one yetzer tov and one yetzer ra.** Understood simply, the two yuds mentioned by the Gemara represent the two yetzers--**יצר טוב, יצר רע.** Nevertheless, what prompted HKB"H to allude to the two yetzers specifically with two yuds—to the point that He actually formed man with two yuds (וייצר)?

We can suggest an answer based on the well-known fact that the letter "yud" from the name הוי"ה represents divine wisdom

("chochmah"). This concept is expressed by the divine poet in the song Bar Yochai (fifth stanza): "בר יוחאי יוד חכמה קדומה"—**Bar Yochai! The "yud" of the ancient wisdom** . . . The source for this idea is the Zohar hakadosh (Mishpatim 121a). It states that the letter "yud" representing "chochmah" rests upon he who engages in Torah study.

Similarly, we find in the Raiya Mehemna (Tzav 33a) that this concept is employed to explain the allusion in the Mishnah (Avos 2, 5): "לא עם הארץ חסיד"—literally, an "ahm ha'aretz" cannot be a chassid. For, a Torah scholar who occupies himself with the wisdom of the Torah—represented by the letter "yud," which is "chochmah"—must also embody the attribute of "chesed," by demonstrating kindness toward others. Thus, the letter "yud" is united with the word חס"ד, producing חסי"ד. An unlearned "ahm ha'aretz," however, although he may demonstrate חס"ד, lacks the wisdom of the Torah. Consequently, he lacks the letter "yud" necessary to transform חס"ד into חסי"ד. Therefore, the Mishnah states: "לא עם הארץ חסיד".

This teaches us that by means of the letter "yud," representing "chochmah," a person foresees consequences and events to come. So, we can posit that this, too, is the implication of the two yuds in "וייצר," corresponding to the yetzer tov and the yetzer hara. It teaches us that the battle between the two yetzers focuses on the letter "yud"—"chochmah." The yetzer tov, referred to as wise—"חכם"—endeavors to instill in man the "yud" of "chochmah" from the aspect of kedushah. If successful, that person will become: "חכם הרואה את הנולד"—he will weigh the consequences of his actions and conclude that the earthly desires lack meaning and substance. Furthermore, he will realize that he is destined to die and will have to account to HKB"H for all of his actions. This thought process will save him from committing an aveirah.

The yetzer hara, on the other hand, the old and foolish king, strives with all of its power to steal the letter "yud" from the realm of kedushah and house it in the realm of tumah. Firstly, it intends to prevent man from being influenced by the realm of kedushah. It doesn't want man to consider the consequences of his actions; it doesn't want man to enhance his holy service of Hashem due to the knowledge that he will ultimately be held accountable for his actions. Additionally, the yetzer hara has enormous chutzpah. It attempts to persuade a person to use his "chochmah" for the sake of committing an aveirah. After all, if he knows that he is going to die anyway, why not fill his heart's desires today—as reflected by the words of the prophet (Yeshayah 22, 13): "אכול ושתו כי מחר נמות"—**eat and drink for tomorrow we die**.

This prompts Yirmiyah to lament (4, 22): "חכמים המה להרע—**they are wise at doing evil, but know not how to do good**. In other words, they use their "chochmah"—realizing that they are destined to die. Yet, they do so solely for the sake of evil—to fill their hearts' desires while they are still alive; they do not use their "chochmah" for the sake of good—to perform more mitzvot and good deeds in order to merit life in "olam haba." We can even suggest that this is why the Gemara states (Berachos 18b): "רשעים בהייהו קרויין מתים"—**the wicked, while they are still alive, are referred to as dead**. For, the eventuality of death actually motivates them to pursue the meaningless pleasures of this world, in keeping with the passuk: "אכול ושתו כי מחר נמות"—**eat and drink for tomorrow we die**.

This, then, is why the Torah writes: "וייצר ה' אלהים את האדם," and the Gemara expounds: "בשני יודין, שני יצרים ברא הקב"ה, אחד יצר טוב ואחד יצר רע". HKB"H formed man with two yuds, so that he would understand that the choice is his. He can follow the advice of the yetzer tov, employing the "chochmah" of its "yud" (יצר) for the sake of kedushah—realizing that in the future, he will be held accountable for his actions. Or, chas v'shalom, he can follow the persuasions of the yetzer hara, employing the "chochmah" of its "yud" (יצר) for the sake of sin and evil, living by the motto: "eat and drink for tomorrow we die."

Yaakov Represents the Yetzer Tov while Eisav Represents the Yetzer Hara

Continuing along this path, let us now explain the matter of the struggle that transpired between Yaakov Avinu and the wicked Eisav—regarding the letter "yud" that originally appeared in Eisav's name, "עשו". As we have learned, Yaakov came along and snatched it away from him, incorporating it into his own name, י-עקב. Now, the Arizal teaches us in Likutei Torah (Shemos) that Yaakov, the source of kedushah, alludes to the yetzer tov, while Eisav, the source of tumah, alludes to the yetzer hara.

This illuminates for us the significance of the struggle between Yaakov and Eisav over the letter "yud." For, this battle is precisely the same battle fought by the yetzer tov and yetzer hara over this letter. Eisav, representing the yetzer hara, wishes to take the "yud" for his own name, for the sake of tumah, in keeping with the passuk: "חכמים המה להרע ולהיטיב לא ידעו"—**they are wise at doing evil, but know not how to do good**.

This, then, is the meaning of the passuk (Bereishis 25, 32): "ויאמר עשו הנה הולך למות ולמה זה לי בכורה"—**and Eisav said, "Look, I am going to die, so why do I need a birthright?"** We see that he chose to forego the kedushah of serving Hashem associated with

the birthright, because he looked to the future and realized that he would ultimately die. Consequently, he saw no reason to exert himself for the sake of the birthright and to deprive himself of the pleasures of this world. Accordingly, he should have been called "עשוי", incorporating the "yud" of "chochmah" for the purpose of doing evil. This name reflects his misguided mindset that he was already complete and perfect and did not require the additional service of Hashem to achieve fulfillment.

In contrast, Yaakov Avinu, the source of kedushah, emerges onto the scene and immediately: "וידו אוחזת בעקב עשו"—grabs hold of the letter "yud," representing "chochmah," at the end of the name "עשוי", takes it away from Eisav, and recruits it for the realm of kedushah. There, it can help overcome the yetzer hara by instilling the wisdom to recognize the consequences of one's actions. To commemorate this momentous event, it states: "ויקרא יעקב"—HKB"H named him יעקב, combining the "yud" with the name "עקב". For, the name "עקב" suggests something remote, like the heel of the foot at the remote end of the body. Adding the letter "yud" to the name "עקב" conveys the fact that he utilizes the "chochmah" of the letter "yud" to see the remote consequences and ultimate reality: "ולפני מי אתה עתיד ליתן דין וחשבון"—knowing to Whom he would ultimately be held accountable.

He Will Pound Your Head and You Will Bite His Heel

Come and witness the wonders of the Torah! We find the following in the Tikunei Zohar (Tikun 13, 29a), and this appears to be the source for the Megaleh Amukos's incredible chiddush concerning the "yud" that Yaakov snatched from Eisav:

"ויעקב בההיא ירכא אתמור ביה (בראשית לב-לב) והוא צולע על ירכו, דפרח מניה י' ואשתאר עקב, ורזא דמלה (בראשית ג-טו) הוא ישופך ראש ואתה תשופנו עקב." פירושו: "ויעקב באותו ירך נאמר בו והוא צולע על ירכו, שפרח ממנו י' ונשאר עקב, וסוד הדבר הוא ישופך ראש ואתה תשופנו עקב."

In other words, when HKB"H told the nachash, after it caused Adam and Chava to sin with the Eitz HaDa'as (Bereishis 3, 15): "הוא ישופך ראש ואתה תשופנו עקב"—**he will pound your head and you will bite his heel**, this is what He meant: **"He will pound your head"**—mankind will succeed in overcoming you by means of the letter "yud" in the name יעקב—representing the head. On the other hand: **"You will bite his heel"**—you, the nachash, will succeed in overcoming man, if you are able to steal the letter "yud" from him, leaving him with only the letters "עקב", meaning heel.

We learn from the Tikunim a tremendous chiddush. Already from the beginning of time, from the time of the original sin in this

world, the primeval serpent and Adam HaRishon were already waging battle over the letter "yud" in the name יעקב. There, however, the nachash succeeded in stealing the letter "yud" from Adam HaRishon, leaving him merely with the letters "עקב". As a result, it succeeded in causing man's downfall and failure in the matter of the Eitz HaDa'as. Concerning this constant and ever-present struggle, HKB"H said to the nachash: **"He will pound your head"**—combating your efforts with the "yud" of kedushah; however, **"You will bite his heel,"** if you can deprive him of the "yud," leaving him merely with "עקב".

Let us attempt to explain the significance of the nachash's taking of the letter "yud" from Adam HaRishon. We find that HKB"H issues Adam HaRishon the following warning not to eat from the Eitz HaDa'as (Bereishis 2, 17): "ומעץ הדעת טוב ורע לא תאכל -- but from the Tree of Knowledge Good and Bad you must not eat; for, on the day you eat of it, you will surely die. With this warning, HKB"H is explicitly advising Adam HaRishon how to withstand the persuasions of the yetzer hara, in the guise of the nachash. Act wisely by considering the consequences of your actions: **"For, on the day you eat of it, you will surely die."**

Nevertheless, the passuk attests to the fact that (ibid. 3, 1): "והנחש היה ערום מכל חית השדה אשר עשה ה' אלקים"—**the nachash was more cunning than any beast of the field that Hashem Elokim had made.** Targum Onkelos provides the following interpretation: "וחויה הוה חכים מכל חות ברא די עבד ה' אלקים". The nachash was wiser than any of the other creatures; however, it used its wisdom for evil purposes rather than for good. Therefore, it persuaded Chava not to look to the future and the eventuality of death (ibid. 3, 4): "ויאמר הנחש אל האשה לא מות תמותו"—**the nachash said to the woman, "You will not surely die."** By means of this ploy, he trapped Adam and Chava and caused their downfall.

Thus, we have learned that the root of the "cheit Eitz HaDa'as" involved the "chochmah" associated with the letter "yud." The nachash stole the "yud" from Adam and Chava, so that they would not act with "chochmah" by considering the eventuality and accountability of death. Seemingly, this is why he was punished as follows: **"For, on the day you eat of it, you will surely die."** For, by actually dying, it would be easier for them to envision and remember the day of death.

The Panim Yafos provides us with the following insight in his comment on the passuk (Tehillim 89, 49): "מי גבר יחיה ולא יראה מות"—**what man lives and will never see death, and will rescue his soul from the power of the Lower World?**

Selah. It is certainly true that HKB"H warned Adam that he would die if he ate from the tree. Nevertheless, one cannot compare the impact of merely hearing about something to actually seeing the thing or experiencing it. Therefore, HKB"H decreed that man would actually die. By witnessing the reality of death throughout one's life, a person is always cognizant of the possibility and eventuality of death; and he knows that he will be held accountable for his actions. This is the message conveyed by David HaMelech: "מי גבר יחיה"—what man wishes to live a life of Torah; "ולא יראה מות"—without actually witnessing death; "ימלט נפשו מיד שאול סלה".

Yaakov the Image of Adam Returned the Stolen Yud to the Realm of Kedushah

Following this exalted path, let us now explain why Yaakov Avinu was in such a hurry, upon entering this world, to snatch the letter "yud" from the name of Eisav. It states in our parsha (Bereishis 25, 27): "ויהי עשו איש יודע ציד"—and Eisav became a man who knows trapping. The Targum Onkelos and the Targum Yonatan make the following comment: "והוה עשו גבר נחשירכן". The Peirush Yonatan explains in the name of the Tziyoni that the word "נחשירכן" is a contraction of two words: "נחש ירכן"—indicating that Eisav had the image of a nachash on his thigh, signifying that he was related to the nachash. The Zohar hakadosh (Toldos 138b) similarly explains that the wicked Eisav was the embodiment of the original nachash that trapped Adam and Chava with its treachery.

Furthermore, let us introduce an idea from the Arizal in Shaar HaPesukim (Vayigash). He teaches us that Yaakov Avinu was the reincarnation and rectification of Adam HaRishon. The source for this idea comes from the Zohar hakadosh (Bereishis 35b): "דהא יעקב דוגמא דאדם הראשון הוה דיעקב שופריה דאדם הראשון הוה". In fact, our blessed sages allude to this fact in the Gemara (B.M. 84a): "שופריה דיעקב אבינו—the magnificence of Yaakov Avinu was a semblance of the magnificence of Adam HaRishon."

We can now begin to appreciate the wonders of reincarnation throughout the generations. The primeval serpent was more cunning than all of the other animals; yet, it used its wisdom and guile to perpetrate evil. It stole the "yud" of "chochmah" from Adam HaRishon from the aspect of kedushah, so that he would not consider future consequences. He accomplished this objective by telling Chava: "לא מות תמותן"—you will not die if you eat from the

forbidden tree. As a result of this ruse, it caused Adam and Chava and all living creatures to actually die. For, by experiencing and witnessing death, man could act wisely by taking into account the eventuality of death before deciding how to act.

Several generations later, comes along Yaakov Avinu, the magnificence of Adam HaRishon—his reincarnation and rectification. He avenges the wrong perpetrated by the nachash against Adam HaRishon and all of creation by snatching back the "yud" of chochmah from Eisav—the embodiment of the nachash. He appropriates it for himself and incorporates it into his name forming "יעקב". Thus, the precious "yud" was returned to its rightful owners, seeing as Yaakov was the reincarnation of Adam HaRishon.

This then is the implication of that which we have learned in the Gemara (Taanis 5b): "יעקב אבינו לא מת"—**Yaakov Avinu never died.** For, he took back the letter "yud," representing "chochmah," about which it is said (Koheles 7, 12): "החכמה תחיה"—**"chochmah" preserves the life of its owners.** The passuk specifies "בעליה"—**"its owners"**—seeing as Yaakov was the reincarnation of Adam HaRishon, the rightful owner of the "yud." This interpretation is inherent in Chazal's statement: "שופריה דיעקב אבינו—**the magnificence of Yaakov Avinu was a semblance of the magnificence of Adam HaRishon.** For, he possessed the beauty and magnificence of Adam HaRishon prior to the sin—after he took back possession of the letter "yud" from Eisav, the embodiment of the nachash.

This explains very nicely the import of the Tikunei Zohar cited above. HKB"H said to the nachash: "הוא ישופך ראש ואתה תשופנו עקב"—**he will pound your head and you will bite his heel**—insinuating that Adam would be able to overcome the nachash by means of the letter "yud" in "יעקב", representing the **"head."** On the other hand, the nachash would succeed in overcoming man, if it could manage to steal the "yud" from him, leaving him with merely "עקב"—**"his heel."** In this vein, we can suggest that HKB"H was hinting to the nachash that Yaakov—the reincarnation and "tikun" of Adam HaRishon—was destined to avenge the original iniquity: "הוא ישופך ראש". In other words, Yaakov—the magnificence of Adam HaRishon—will ultimately crush your head by taking back possession from Eisav, the nachash, of the letter "yud"—"chochmah."

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