

The Revelation of the Divine Kabbalist the Rama of Pano

Eliphaz Who Refrained from Killing Yaakov Reincarnated into Onkelos Who Refused to Heed the Advice of Titus a Reincarnation of Eisav

In this week's parsha, parshas Vayeitzei, we read (Bereishis 28, 10): **“ויצא יעקב מבאר שבע וילך חרנה”**—**Yaakov departed from Be'er Sheva and went to Charan.** In the Midrash, our blessed sages expound that Yaakov left for Charan to find a wife while empty-handed and penniless (B.R. 68, 2):

“רבי שמואל בר נחמן פתח (תהלים קכא-א), שיר למעלות אשא עיני אל ההרים, אשא עיני אל ההרים למלפני ולמעבדני [למלמדי ולעושי שהם ההורים], מאין יבוא עזרי, אליעזר בשעה שהלך להביא את רבקה מה כתיב ביה (בראשית כד-י), ויקח העבד עשרה גמלים וגו', ואני לא נזם אחד ולא צמיד אחד...”

חזר ואמר, מה אנא מובד סברי מן בריי [מה אני מאבד תקוותי מן בוראי], חס ושלום לית אנא מובד סברי מן בריי [אין אני מאבד תקוותי מבוראי], אלא (תהלים שם ב) עזרי מעם ה', אל יתן למוט רגלך אל יגום שומרך, הגה לא יגום ולא יישן וגו', ה' ישמרך מכל רע, מעשו ומלכך, ישמור את נפשך, ממלאך המות, ה' ישמור צאתך ובואך, ויצא יעקב.”

Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachman began (Tehillim 121, 1): “A song to the ascents. I raise my eyes to the mountains ('harim').” I raise my eyes to the parents (a play on words; “harim” means mountains, while “horim” means parents), to those who taught me and formed me. “From whence will come my help?” When Eliezer went to bring Rivka, it is written (Bereishis 24, 19): “The servant took ten camels, etc.”; while I do not even have a single nose-ring or bracelet ...

He contemplated and said: “Should I abandon my faith in my Creator?! Chas v'shalom! I shall not lose hope in my Creator. Rather (Tehillim 121, 2): ‘My help is from Hashem ... He will not allow the faltering of your foot; your Guardian will not slumber. Behold, He neither slumbers nor sleeps ... Hashem will protect you from all evil’—from Eisav and Lavan; ‘He will guard your soul’ from the Angel of Death; ‘He will guard your departure and your arrival.’” Thus, Yaakov departed.

In this Midrash, Chazal do not address the surprising fact that Yitzchak Avinu dispatched Yaakov to Padan Aram to marry one of Lavan's daughters empty-handed. He merely says (Bereishis 28, 2): **“קום לך פדנה ארם ביתה בתואל אבי אמך וקח לך משם”**—**Arise and go to Padan Aram, to the house of Betuel, your mother's father; and take a wife from there, from the daughters of Lavan, your mother's brother.** It seems inconceivable that Yitzchak would have sent him away penniless, without a single piece of jewelry or a single trinket. Yet, the answer is well known, as Rashi explains later on in his commentary (29, 11):

“וישק יעקב לרחל וישא את קולו ויבך - לפי שבא בידים ריקניות, אמר, אליעזר עבד אבי אבא היו בידיו נזמים וצמידים ומגדנות ואני אין בידי כלום. לפי שרדף אליפז בן עשו במצות אביו אחריו להורגו והשיגו, ולפי שגדל אליפז בחיקו של יצחק מושך ידו, אמר לו [ליעקב] מה אעשה לציווי של אבא, אמר לו יעקב, טול מה שבידי והעני חשוב כמות.”

“Yaakov kissed Rachel and raised his voice and wept,” because he came empty-handed. He said, “Eliezer, my paternal grandfather's servant, had in his hands nose-rings, and bracelets, and delicacies; whereas I have nothing in my hands; because Eliphaz, Eisav's son, pursued him at his father's command, to kill him. He overtook him; but since Eliphaz grew up under Yitzchak's influence, he withdrew his hand. He said (to Yaakov), “What should I do concerning my father's command?” Yaakov replied to him, “Take that which is in my hand; for, a poor person is considered to be like a dead person.”

Yaakov Avinu Paved the Way for All of Yisrael to Withstand the Ordeal of Poverty

Now, it is incumbent upon us to explain and comprehend why HKB”H orchestrated the events in such a manner—that Yaakov should go to Charan, to establish a Jewish household and raise a

family, empty-handed. We can provide a genuine and legitimate explanation based on the incredible teachings of the Chiddushei HaRim as presented in Siach Sarfei Kodesh (Vayeitzei):

“והיה אומר החידושי הרי”מ זצ”ל, שיעקב אבינו היה מתמה על עצמו על המחשבה הזאת שאין ראוי לו, ולמה באה לו זאת המחשבה [שאינו לו אפילו נזם אחד וצמיד אחד], ולזה חזר ואמר חס ושלום לית אנא מוֹבִיד סברי מן בריי, היינו שהמחשבה הזאת היא רק לעזור, לאחר שידע בבירור שאין לו שום תועלת והוא אין, אז יבוא לו עזר מעם ד’ בתוקף ועוז, ולכן לא אמר תיכף עזרי מעם ד’, וזה פעל יעקב אבינו לדורות, כאשר ישראל אין להם שום עזר והמה אין, ויודעים שאין להם שום עזר, אז יבוא העזר מעם ד’ עושה שמים וארץ.”

We learn from his sacred words that it was orchestrated from above that Yaakov would endure the ordeal of poverty so that he would have faith only in Hashem and no other entity. Thus, he paved the way for all Yisrael to withstand the test of poverty. Based on the fundamental principle that all things evolve based on the way they begin, we can add a tantalizing thought.

Yaakov’s marriage to the holy matriarchs was the foundation upon which the future of the Jewish people was built. It began with Yaakov being penniless and enduring the ordeal of poverty. Despite being destitute, he found strength in his faith in Hashem. As we learned in the Midrash, he said: **“Chas v’shalom! I shall not lose hope in my Creator.”** We see, therefore, that the establishment of the Jewish people was founded on “emunah” and “bitachon” in Hashem. This beginning inculcated a similar strength and “emunah” in all future generations of Yisrael.

The Ordeal of Poverty Is a Preparation for the Ordeal of Wealth

Additionally, let us present the enlightening words of the Ksav Sofer. Although, HKB”H subjected Yaakov to the ordeal of poverty on his way to Charan; nevertheless, after his arrival in Charan, he was subjected to the ordeal of wealth. In Charan, he became tremendously affluent, as the passuk describes (Bereishis 30, 43): **“ויפרץ האיש מאד מאד ויהי לו צאן רבות ושפחות ועבדים—the man became exceedingly prosperous and he had proliferating flocks, and slave-women and slaves, and camels and donkeys.”**

In this manner, he proceeds to explain the significance of the tefilah articulated by Yaakov on his way to Charan (ibid. 28, 20): **“וידר יעקב נדר לאמר אם יהיה אלקים עמדי ושמרני בדרך הזה אשר אנכי הולך--ונתן לי לחם לאכול ובגד ללבוש, ושבתי בשלום אל בית אבי והיה ה’ לי לאלקים.”** Then Yaakov took a vow saying, **“If G-d will be with me, and He will guard me on this way that I am going; and He will**

give me bread to eat and clothes to wear; and I will return in peace to my father’s house, and Hashem will be a G-d to me.” Here are his holy words:

“הנה יש שני מיני ניסיונות, א’ ניסיון העוני, שאם יחיה בצער ויגון בעירום ובחוסר כל, ימרוד בה’ ויגנוב ויחמוס ויתרעם על מדותיו ברוך הוא, ועל זה אמר שלמה המלך ע”ה (משלי ל-ט) פן איורש וגנבתי, ב’ ניסיון העושר, שירום לבב האדם וישכח ה’ עושהו, ויאמר כוחי ועוצם ידי... ואומר, כי יעקב עמד בשתי ניסיונות הג’ל, תחילה כשהלך מאבותיו היה בעירום ובחוסר כל, ומכל מקום באמונתו עמד וטעמו לא פג, וכששב מבית לבן היה לו עושר וגדולה ונכסים מרובים, ואז גם כן עמד על מעמדו ומצבו הראשון.

והיינו דאמר, אם יהיה אלקים עמדי ושמרני בדרך הזה אשר אנכי הולך, היינו שאנכי הולך עתה הוא ניסיון העושר, ושמרני ה’ שלא אבעט בו, כמו שאמרנו (קידושין ל:): אלמלא הקב”ה עוזרו וכו’ [אינו יכול לו], כי תמיד צריך עזר אלקי לעמוד בניסיונות, והיינו ושמרני בדרך הזה וכו’, ונתן לי לחם לאכול ובגד ללבוש, היינו שיתרבה בעושר נכסים והוא ניסיון העושר... ושבתי בשלום אל בית אבי... והיה ה’ לי לאלקים, דהיינו בכל זאת יהיה ה’ בקרבי ולא אבעט בו.”

There are two types of ordeals. The first is the ordeal of poverty. If a person lives in misery, penniless, he is likely to rebel against Hashem; he will steal, become corrupt and criticize the Almighty. The second is the ordeal of wealth. In this scenario, a person is liable to become haughty and to forget Hashem, his Maker; he will take all of the credit for his own success. Yaakov withstood both ordeals. Initially, he left his parents’ home penniless and destitute; nevertheless, he remained steadfast in his “emunah.” Upon returning from Lavan’s house, he possessed great wealth and abundant property and possessions. Nevertheless, his “emunah” and belief in Hashem remained unchanged.

This is reflected in the prayer formulated by Yaakov: **“If G-d will be with me, and He will guard me on this way that I am going...”** In other words, I am embarking now on a path that will involve the ordeal of wealth; I pray that Hashem will protect me so that I will not abandon him... For, Hashem’s assistance is always necessary to endure every sort of ordeal. This is what he meant by the words: **“and He will guard me on this way that I am going; and He will give me bread to eat and clothes to wear”**—he foresaw that he would become affluent and be subjected to the ordeal of wealth... Nevertheless: **“I will return in peace to my father’s house, and Hashem will be a G-d to me.”** Despite his new found wealth, he would maintain his intimate relationship with Hashem and would not abandon Him.

We have presented in the past the following passage in the Gemara (Chullin 98b): **“כתיב (בראשית לב-לב) ויזרח לו השמש,”**

וכי שמש לו לבד זרחה והלא לכל העולם זרחה, אמר רבי יצחק שמש הבאה
 “--according to the passuk, **“the sun rose for him.”** Is it possible that it rose only for him and not for the rest of the world? Rabbi Yitzchak answers that the sun that had set prematurely on his behalf, now rose prematurely on his behalf. Let us explain. When HKB”H had the sun set miraculously for Yaakov—alluding to the trial of poverty—He prepared the way for all of Yisrael, the children of Yaakov, to withstand the ordeal of poverty just as Yaakov had—even when the sun of their success sets upon them. Similarly, HKB”H had the sun rise miraculously for him, subsequently, on his return from Lavan’s house. This alluded to the trial of wealth. Here HKB”H made preparations for all future generations of Yisrael to also remain adherent to Yaakov’s kedushah and withstand the ordeal of wealth, remaining steadfast in their “emunah,” even when the sun of success shines upon them. In both cases, Yaakov remained steadfast in his “emunah” in Hashem without any deviation whatsoever.

HKB”H Subjected Yaakov to the Ordeal of Poverty First before the More Difficult Ordeal of Wealth

It appears that we can elaborate further on this noble idea presented by the Ksav Sofer. Why, in fact, did HKB”H subject Yaakov to the ordeal of poverty before the ordeal of wealth? The answer is related to the question as to which of these two ordeals is the more difficult. We find an answer to this inquiry in the writings of the Chasam Sofer (Shelach p. 67b). He explains why the meraglim, who were esteemed leaders of Yisrael, delivered defamatory reports regarding Eretz Yisrael. They feared the trial of wealth in the land more than the trial of poverty in the wilderness.

Similarly, the Ksav Sofer, in parshas Mishpatim (Shemos 23, 25), citing his father, the Chasam Sofer, zy”a, brings a proof supporting this conclusion from the Mishnah (Avos 4, 9): **כל: “whoever fulfills the Torah in a state of poverty is destined to fulfill its precepts in a state of wealth.** This Mishnah indicates that HKB”H tests a person initially with the easier test, poverty. If he passes that test, HKB”H subjects him to the more difficult test, wealth and affluence. This then is the message conveyed by the Mishnah: **“כל המקיים את התורה מעוני”**—if a person passes the easier test, by fulfilling the tenets of the Torah even in poverty; **“סופה לקיימה מעושר”**—he will ultimately succeed in the more difficult test—observing the Torah even when wealthy.

Now, come and witness the wonders of Hashem. He tested Yaakov Avinu, the head of the people of Yisrael, with these two tests. When Yaakov fled from his brother, Eisav, Eliphaz pursued him and confiscated all of his belongings—making him a pauper. Nevertheless, he did not complain and remained staunch in his faith in Hashem.

Subsequently, he became very wealthy in Lavan’s house, as it is written (Bereishis 30, 43): **“ויפרוץ האיש מאד מאד ויהי לו צאן רבות:—the man became exceedingly prosperous and he had proliferating flocks, and slave women and slaves, and camels and donkeys.** Nevertheless, he remained steadfast in his faith in Hashem, as evidenced by his proclamation to Lavan (ibid. 31, 42): **“לולי אלקי אבי אלקי:—had not the G-d of my father—the G-d of Avraham and the Dread of Yitzchak—been with me, you would surely have now sent me away empty handed.**

Similarly, I found this idea expressed by the Sefas Emes (Eikev 5659): **“דיש ניסיון בעוני ובעושר, ואיתא (אבות פ”ד מ”ט) המקיים התורה מעוני סופו לקיימה מעושר, כי ניסיון העשירות קשה מניסיון עניות. There is an ordeal of poverty and of wealth. It states: “Whoever fulfills the Torah in a state of poverty is destined to fulfill its precepts in a state of wealth.” For, the ordeal of wealth is more difficult than the ordeal of poverty.**

The Deeds of the Fathers Foreshadow the Events of the Children

Thus, we see that the words of the Mishnah are exemplified by Yaakov: **“Whoever fulfills the Torah in a state of poverty will ultimately fulfill it in wealth.”** As the Chasam Sofer and Sefas Emes explain, HKB”H tested him initially with the easier ordeal—that of poverty. After withstanding that ordeal, He tested him with the more difficult ordeal—that of wealth. We can explain this sequence of events based on the writings of the Ramban (Bereishis 12, 6):

“ויעבר אברם בארץ עד מקום שכם. אומר לך כלל, תבין אותו בכל הפרשיות הבאות בענין אברהם יצחק ויעקב, והוא ענין גדול הזכירוהו רבותינו בדרך קצרה (מדרש תנחומא לך לך אות ט), ואמרו כל מה שאירע לאבות סימן לבנים, ולכן יאריכו הכתובים בסיפור המסעות וחפירת הבארות ושאר המקרים, ויחשוב החושב בהם כאלו הם דברים מיותרים אין בהם תועלת, וכולם באים ללמד על העתיד.”

Here the Ramban introduces a basic principle, based on the Midrash Tanchuma (Lech Lecha 9), that plays a vital role throughout the parshiyos involving Avraham, Yitzchak and

Yaakov: The events experienced by the Avos foretell future events that their descendants will experience—"ma'aseh Avos siman la'banim." Therefore, the Torah depicts at length their journeys, the digging of the wells and other events that might otherwise seem superfluous. They are all related to the future destiny of the children of Yisrael.

We can now understand full-well why HKB"H arranged for Yaakov to first experience the ordeal of poverty and then the ordeal of wealth—both of which he passed with flying colors. These ordeals represented examples of "ma'aseh Avos siman la'banim." The events Yaakov endured paved the way for all of Yisrael throughout the generations. By adhering to and emulating Yaakov's kedushah, his children would also successfully withstand the trials of poverty and the trials of wealth.

Thus, we can also conclude that by withstanding the ordeal of poverty and engaging in Torah-study during galut, we will ultimately be privileged to fulfill the tenets of the Torah during the future geulah in a state of abundant wealth. The Sefas Emes expresses this notion as follows (Ki Savo 5643):

"ואיתא שיש גיסיו בבחינת העושר, ויש בבחינת עניות, ושניסיון העושר קשה משל העוני, והראיה שלא יכולנו לעמוד בניסיון העשירות, ומתוך העניות יהיה הגאולה במהרה בימינו, וזה כמו שאיתא במשנה, המקיים התורה מעוני סופו לקיימה מעושר, ומבטלה מעושר סופו לבטלה מעוני, ושניהם נתקיים בנו כי על ידי שלא עבדנו בשמחה בו, ומכל מקום יתקיים גם הסיפא, שעל ידי שמתחזקים בגלות לקיים התורה [בעוני] סופנו לקיימה מעושר."

We are proof positive that the ordeal of wealth is more demanding and difficult than the ordeal of poverty. We have failed to successfully withstand the ordeal of wealth; therefore, the geulah will arrive swiftly in our times from a state of poverty. This concept is reflected by the Mishnah. Just as one who fulfills the Torah in a state of poverty will ultimately fulfill it in a state of wealth; similarly, one who neglects to fulfill the Torah in a state of wealth, will ultimately fail to do so in a state of poverty. Both clauses of the Mishnah apply to us.

Furthermore, we can suggest that this is the message HKB"H conveyed to Yaakov in the dream (Bereishis 28, 12): "והנה סולם" —and behold! A ladder was set earthward . . . --this represents an allusion to the ordeal of poverty, when a man is bound by his earthly limitations; "וראשו מגיע השמימה" —and its top reached heavenward--this represents an allusion to the ordeal of wealth; "והנה מלאכי אלקים עולים ויורדים בו" —and behold! G-d's malachim ascending and descending on it--this alludes to the fact that HKB"H sends His malachim to take people up and

down the rungs of the ladder—from poverty to wealth and vice-versa. Nevertheless, in both scenarios: "והנה ה' נצב עליו"—Hashem watches over a Jew so that he will succeed in serving Hashem, be it in a state of poverty or be it in a state of wealth.

Eliphaz the Son of Eisav Reincarnated into the Convert Onkelos

Continuing onward and upward along this exalted path, let us examine the fascinating personality of Eliphaz. On the one hand, he was the first son of the wicked Eisav. On the other hand, he was the father of the wicked Amalek. Yet, he himself, who stood genealogically between these two reshaim, refused to kill Yaakov, as per his father's command. Why? Because he grew up under Yitzchak's influence. Still, as we learned from Rashi's comment cited above, he inquired of Yaakov as to how he should proceed based on the precepts of the Torah: **He said (to Yaakov), "What should I do concerning my father's command?" Yaakov replied to him, "Take that which is in my hand; for, a poor person is considered to be like a dead person."**

Now, we learn an important principle in the Gemara (B.K. 38b): **אמר רבי יוחנן, אין הקב"ה מקפח שכר כל בריה אפילו שכר שיחה—Rabbi Yochanan said: HKB"H does not withhold the reward of any creature, event the reward for refined speech.** Accordingly, we must identify where and how HKB"H rewarded Eliphaz for sparing Yaakov's life. It appears that we can find a clear-cut answer to this question in sefer Iyov. Among the colleagues who responded to Iyov's complaints regarding the suffering visited upon him by HKB"H was Eliphaz HaTeimani, as it is written (Iyov 4, 1): **"ויען אליפז התימני ויאמר"—and Eliphaz HaTeimani responded and said.**

Rashi comments: **"אליפז בן עשו היה, ועל ידי שנתגדל בחיקו של יצחק זכה שתשרה עליו שכינה"—Eliphaz was the son of Eisav; because he grew up under Yitzchak's influence, he merited that the Shechinah should rest upon him.** In other words, the Shechinah rested upon him, so that he could respond to Iyov's complaints. Apparently, Rashi's comment coincides with the Gemara's statement (B.B. 15b) that Eliphaz HaTeimani was one of seven neviim who prophesied to the nations of the world. Thus, we can postulate that the Shechinah rested upon Eliphaz, because he absorbed some of Yitzchak's kedushah; as a result, he chose not to heed his father Eisav's command to kill Yaakov.

Notwithstanding, let us explore the wonders of Hashem, Who orchestrates all that happens in the world. He reincarnates Neshamos from generation to generation to rectify them and

provide them with their due reward. Chazal tell us a fascinating story concerning Onkelos before he converted (Gittin 56b):

“אונקלוס בר קלוניקוס בר אחתיה (דטיטוס) [דאנדריינוס] הוה [כן] היא גירסת הגר”א, כמבואר במדרש תנחומא (פרשת משפטים אות ה) שנביא לקמן], בעי לאיגורי, אזל אסקיה לטיטוס בנגידא, אמר ליה מאן חשיב בההוא עלמא, אמר ליה ישראל, מהו לאידבוקי בהו, אמר ליה מילייהו נפשינן ולא מצית לקיומניהו, זיל איגרי בהו בההוא עלמא והוית רישא, דכתיב (איכה א-ה) היו צריה לראש וגו’, כל המיצר לישראל נעשה ראש.”

Onkelos was the nephew of the Roman Caesar Hadrian; he wished to convert. Using sorcery, he raised the Caesar Titus from the dead. He asked him who is important in that world. Titus replied that Yisrael are important. Onkelos asked if he should join them. Titus replied that they have many mitzvot and he would not be able to abide by them. Instead, torment them in this world and you will become a leader, as it is written (Eichah 1, 5): **“Her tormentors have become leaders.”** All those who torment Yisrael become leaders.

In the sefer Gilgulei Neshamos authored by the divine kabbalist, the Rama of Pano, he writes:

“אונקלוס הגר עיבור של אליפז, שלא רצה להרוג את יעקב במצות אביו, ולקח לו הזהב ועזב לו הגוף, ואמר אליפז מה אעשה לצווי של אבא, אמר לו קח לך הכסף והזהב והנפש תן לי והעני חשוב כמות, וכן נתייעץ עם טיטוס כשבא להתגייר, ואמר לו לך והצר להם היו צריה לראש, ולא שמע לו ונתגייר, והענין טיטוס הוא עשו, ורישיה דעשו בעטפיה דיצחק, כי מראש פרעות אויב הוא כמס עמדיו.”

The convert Onkelos was an “ibur” (a form of gilgul) of Eliphaz, who did not want to kill Yaakov as his father commanded. He took his gold and left his body. . . Also, he sought advice from Titus when he went to convert. He told him to go and torment them . . . Because Titus is Eisav; and Eisav’s head rests with Yitzchak . . .

Onkelos the “Ger” Interpreted the Torah Just As It Was Given to Moshe at Sinai

Here we learn an unbelievable fact. As a reward for not heeding Eisav’s command to kill Yaakov, Eliphaz merited reincarnating into Onkelos, who did not heed the advice of the wicked Titus—who was a gilgul of Eisav—who advised him not to convert. Instead, he converted and was privileged to learn Torah from Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua and to translate the entire Torah. This is explained in the Gemara as follows (Megillah 3a): **“תרגום של תורה אונקלוס הגר אמרו מפי רבי אליעזר ורבי יהושע”—the Targum of the Torah was composed by Onkelos the “ger,” who learned it from Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua.**

It appears that we can explain how Eliphaz the son of Eisav merited such a great reward—reincarnating into Onkelos the “ger,” who interpreted the entire Torah—based on an explanation in the Zohar hakadosh (Vayeitzei 146b) regarding the Mishnah (Avos 1, 2): **“על שלשה דברים העולם עומד, על התורה ועל העבודה ועל גמילות חסדים, התורה דא יעקב, העבודה דא יצחק, גמילות חסדים דא אברהם—the world rests on three pillars—on the Torah, on the “avodah” (the sacred service), and on “gemilut chasadim” (the practice of kind deeds); the Torah is Yaakov; the “avodah” is Yitzchak; “gemilut chasadim” is Avraham.**

In other words, Avraham Avinu, who welcomed and entertained guests, represents the pillar of “chesed.” Yitzchak Avinu, who was bound on the mizbeiach as a korban, represents the “avodah”—the sacrificial service. Yaakov Avinu, who studied Torah in the Beit Midrash of Shem and Eiver, represents the pillar of Torah, as it states (Bereishis 25, 27): **“ויעקב איש תם—Yaakov was a wholesome man, dwelling in tents.** Rashi explains that this is a reference to the tents of Shem and Eiver. Subsequently, when he fled from his brother Eisav, before going to Charan, he hid in the Beit Midrash of Eiver for fourteen years studying Torah. Rashi points this out in his commentary on the passuk in our parsha (ibid. 28, 11): **“ויושב במקום ההוא, לשון מיעוט, באותו מקום שכב, אבל י”ד שנים ששימש בבית עבר לא שכב בלילה, שהיה עוסק בתורה—this expresses exclusion; in that place he lay down; however, during the fourteen years that he served in the house of Eiver, he did not lay down at night, because he engaged in Torah-study.**

Now, this enlightens us and allows us to rejoice at having glimpsed the wondrous ways of Hashem. Eliphaz, Eisav’s firstborn, put his life at risk, by not obeying his father’s command to kill Yaakov, the pillar of Torah. He knew that Eisav was a murderer and was liable to kill him in a fit of anger for failing to obey his command. Therefore, “midah k’neged midah,” Eliphaz merited reincarnating into Onkelos the “ger,” who translated the entire Torah, just as it was given over to Moshe at Sinai. Through the generations, it had been forgotten, until Onkelos restored it for Yisrael.

Onkelos the “Ger” Outwitted His Uncle Hadrian the Roman Caesar

Come and witness the wonders of the Torah. After Onkelos used sorcery to raise the spirit of Titus from the dead to seek his advice regarding conversion to Judaism, and consulting with other spirits from the dead—including the wicked Bilam and the Christian Yeshu—he decided to convert. Notwithstanding,

he feared the reaction of his uncle Hadrian, who was the Roman Caesar at that time. Therefore, he outwitted him by stating that he wished to go out and learn the ways of commerce. Here is how the Midrash Tanchuma recounts the story of Akilas, otherwise known as Onkelos the “ger” (Mishpatim 5):

“ואלה המשפטים, זהו שאמר הכתוב (תהלים קמז-יט) מגיד דבריו ליעקב וגו' לא עשה כן וגו', עקילס (נ"א אונקלוס) הגר בן אחותו של אדריאנוס היה מבקש להתגייר, והיה מתיירא מן אדריאנוס דודו, אמר לו אני מבקש לעשות סחורה, אמר לו שמא אתה חסר כסף וזהב הרי אוצרותי לפניך, אמר לו אני מבקש לעשות סחורה לצאת לחוץ לידע דעת הבריות, ואני מבקש לימלך בכ היאך לעשות, אמר לו כל פרקמטיא שאתה רואה שפלה ונתונה בארץ, לך עסוק בה שסופה להתעלות ואת משתכר.

בא לו לארץ ישראל ולמד תורה, לאחר זמן מצאוהו רבי אליעזר ורבי יהושע, ראוהו פניו משתנות, אמרו זה לזה עקילס לומד תורה, כיון שבא אצלם התחיל לשאול להם שאלות הרבה והן משיבין אותו, עלה אצל אדריאנוס דודו, אמר לו ולמה פניך משתנות, סבור אני שהפסידה פרקמטיא שלך, או שמא הצר לך אדם, אמר לו [אונקלוס] לא, אמר לו [אונקלוס שוב] אתה קרוב לי ואדם מצר לי [הלא כולם מפחדים ממך].

אמר לו [אדריאנוס] ולמה פניך משתנות, אמר לו [אונקלוס] שלמדתי תורה, ולא עוד אלא שמלתי את עצמי, אמר לו [אדריאנוס] ומי אמר לך כך, אמר לו [אונקלוס] כך נמלכתי, אמר לו [אדריאנוס] אימתי, אמר לו [אונקלוס] בשעה שאמרתי לך מבקש אני לעשות סחורה, ואמרת לי כל פרקמטיא שאתה רואה שפלה ונתונה בארץ, לך ועסוק בה שסופה להתעלות, חזרתי על כל האומות ולא ראיתי שפלה נתונה בארץ כישראל וסופה להתעלות, שכן אמר ישעיה (ישעיה מט-ז) כה אמר ה' גואל ישראל וקדושו... מלכים יראו וקמו, שרים וישתחוו, למען ה' אשר נאמן קדוש ישראל ויבחרך.”

Akilas, the nephew of Hadrian wished to convert; he feared his uncle's reaction. So, he told him that he was going to engage in commerce. The uncle responded that if he needed money, his coffers were open to him. The nephew said that he desired to go out into the world and gain first-hand knowledge; I want your advice on how to proceed. The uncle advised him to seek out a depreciated business, currently out of favor; for, eventually it will come into favor and be very profitable.

Akilas went to Eretz Yisrael and began learning Torah. He was noticed by Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua; they detected an obvious change in his facial appearance. They said to one another that Akilas is obviously learning Torah. When he came to learn with them, he began asking them many questions, which they answered. When he returned to his uncle Hadrian,

the uncle inquired as to the change in his facial appearance. I figured it was because your business endeavor failed; or perhaps someone was causing you problems. Onkelos responded that that was not the case; “no one would dare bother me, because they know we are related, and they are all afraid of you.”

So, Hadrian persisted, “Why has your facial appearance changed?” Onkelos replied, “Because I have been learning Torah. Furthermore, I have been circumcised.” Hadrian said, “And who advised you to do so?” Onkelos replied, “I sought advice from you.” He said, “When?” Onkelos replied, “When I told you that I wanted to engage in commerce; and you told me to get involved in a business that is currently out of favor; for it would eventually become valuable. I scrutinized all the nations and did not find anyone as lowly and undervalued as Yisrael. They are surely destined to rise; this is substantiated by the words of the prophet Yeshayah (Yeshayah 49, 7).

If we analyze this Midrash, we find something fascinating. Onkelos converted based on the advice of the Caesar Hadrian: “כל פרקמטיא שאתה רואה שפלה ונתונה בארץ, לך עסוק בה שסופה להתעלות”—find a depreciated, devalued business; engage in it, for it will eventually rise and be profitable. This advice led him to associate himself with Yisrael, as he tells Hadrian: “חזרתי”—no other nation in the land is as downtrodden as Yisrael; they are surely destined to rise. For, HKB”H subjects Yisrael in galut to the ordeal of poverty. By fulfilling the precepts of the Torah in a state of poverty, they will ultimately fulfill its precepts in a state of wealth, at the time of the future geulah. Thus, Onkelos converted and joined Yisrael, the lowly people in galut.

As we have discussed, this parallels the situation of Eliphaz very nicely. He endangered his life by not killing Yaakov. Yet, to still comply with the mitzvah of “kibud av,” he confiscated all of Yaakov's possessions. As a result, Yaakov was left to fulfill the precepts of the Torah while subjected to the ordeal of poverty. By withstanding this ordeal, he subsequently fulfilled the precepts of the Torah in Lavan's house in a state of abundant wealth. Therefore, Eliphaz reincarnated into Onkelos the “ger,” who converted by associating himself with Yisrael, who are subjected to the ordeal of poverty in galut. Yet, he did so knowing full well that in this merit, they would ultimately rise valiantly at the time of the future geulah.

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