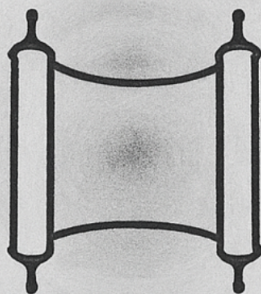


בס"ד

**Rebbe Elimelech
of Lizhensk
Parshas Vayeitzei**



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The Rebbe, Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk

Noam Elimelech

Parshas Vayeitzei

מאמר א

And Yaakov went out from Be'er Sheva etc. It appears to me by first explaining the verse "And Yehoshua weakened Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword" (Exodus 17:13), since the reason for Eisav's rule over the holy nation is entirely through the merit of honoring his father that he performed.

And in what was this honoring? With his sword, for he brought hunted meat to Yitzchak's mouth. Therefore it said to him, "By your sword you shall live" (Genesis 27:40), meaning that because of the mitzvah you performed with your sword you will have some life from it.

And therefore it did not write "with your sword you shall live," but rather "by your sword," meaning: because of it. And Yisrael, when they wish to weaken Eisav's power, do not need to stand against him with the strength of all 613 mitzvot.

For even by the power of his mitzvah he has no rule over them, since they fulfilled honoring the father more than he. As explained in the holy Torah, Yaakov honored his father more, as the Midrash says that Eisav found no game and trapped a dog and wanted to feed it to his father.

And it is found that in this very matter the father would strike him with an axe. And this is the meaning of "And Yehoshua weakened him... with the sword," meaning: according to the level and strength of his sword, for with that very thing with which he set himself to fight Yisrael, he was weakened.

And this is also the meaning of "And Yaakov went out from Be'er Sheva," for it is known that Be'er Sheva hints to the great levels Yaakov attained, having rectified all seven middot. Therefore, when he needed to stand against Eisav and Lavan, he did not fight them with all of those great levels.

Rather, he went out from that level called Be'er Sheva, and "he went to Charan," meaning he went with their power, and with that he acted and succeeded against them. And this is sufficient.

וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב מִבְּעַר שְׁבַע וְכוּ'. נִרְאֶה לִּי בְּהַקְדָּמָה לְפָרֵשׁ פְּסוּק 'וַיַּחֲלֹשׁ יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֶת עַמְלֵק וְאֶת עַמּוֹ לְפִי חֶרֶב', הָיִיתָ נְשִׁיבָת הַשְּׁלִיטָה שֶׁל עֵשָׂו עַל הָעָם הַקְדוּשׁ הוּא הַכֹּל בְּכַח מִצְוֹת כְּבוֹד אָב שֶׁעָשָׂה.

וּבִמָּה הָיָה כְּבוֹדוֹ? בְּחֶרֶבוֹ, שֶׁהָיָה צִיד בְּפִיו שֶׁל יִצְחָק. וְלָזֶה אָמַר לוֹ "עַל חֶרֶבְךָ תַּחְיֶה", פִּירוּשׁ שֶׁבִּשְׂבִּיל הַמִּצְוָה שֶׁעָשִׂיתָ בְּחֶרֶבְךָ עַל־יְדֵי כֹחַ יְהִיָּה לְךָ חַיִּית קָצֵת.

וְלָזֶה לֹא כָתַב "בְּחֶרֶבְךָ תַּחְיֶה" כִּי אִם "עַל חֶרֶבְךָ", פִּירוּשׁ כְּמוֹ בִּשְׂבִּיל. וַיִּשְׂרְאֵל כְּשֶׁרוֹצִים לְהַחֲלִישׁ כַּחוֹ שֶׁל עֵשָׂו אֵינָם צָרִיכִים לַעֲמוֹד נֶגְדּוֹ בְּכַח כָּל תְּרֵי"ג מִצְוֹת.

כִּי אִפְלוּ בְּכַח מִצְוָתוֹ אֵין לוֹ שְׁלִיטָה עֲלֵיהֶם, כִּי הֵם קִיָּמוּ כְּבוֹד אָב יוֹתֵר מִמֶּנּוּ, כְּמִבּוֹאֵר בַּתּוֹרָה הַקְדוּשָׁה שֶׁיַּעֲקֹב כִּיבֵּד אֶת אָבִיו יוֹתֵר. כְּדִי"תָא בַּמִּדְרָשׁ שֶׁעֵשָׂו לֹא מָצָא צִיד וְצָד כָּלָב וְרָצָה לְהַאֲכִילוֹ לְאָבִיו.

וְנִמְצָא מִנִּיה וּבִיה אָבָא לִיזִיל בֵּיה נִרְגָא. וְזֶהוּ "וַיַּחֲלֹשׁ יְהוֹשֻׁעַ וְכוּ' לְפִי חֶרֶב", פִּירוּשׁ לְפִי מִדְרָגָתוֹ וְכַחוֹ שֶׁל חֶרֶבוֹ, אֲשֶׁר לָזֶה הַמִּצְוָה עֲצָמוֹ לְהַחֲלִישׁ עִם יִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּזֶה עֲצָמוֹ הַחֲלִישׁ אוֹתוֹ.

וְזֶה גַם כֵּן פִּירוּשׁ "וַיֵּצֵא יַעֲקֹב מִבְּעַר שְׁבַע", שֶׁיָּדוּעַ שֶׁבְּעַר שְׁבַע רָמַז לְמִדְרָגוֹת גְּדוּלוֹת שֶׁהָיוּ לְיַעֲקֹב שֶׁתִּימָן כָּל הַשְּׁבַע מִדּוֹת. לָזֶה כְּשֶׁהַצֵּטְרָה לְהַתִּינִיב נֶגֶד עֵשָׂו וְלָכֵן לֹא נִלָּחֵם בְּכָל מִדְרָגוֹתָיו.

אֵלָּא יָצָא מִבְּחִינָה זֹאת הַנִּקְרָאָת בְּעַר שְׁבַע, "וַיִּלָּךְ חֶרְבָּה" פִּירוּשׁ שֶׁהָיָה הוֹלֵךְ בְּכֹחֶם, וְזֶהוּ וַיִּלָּךְ חֶרְבָּה וְעָשָׂה וְהַצִּלִּית נֶגְדָם. וְקָל

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[NOTE Summary:

The teaching explains that Eisav's temporary power over the Jewish people comes only from the mitzvah of honoring his father, which he fulfilled by bringing hunted meat to Yitzchak. This is the meaning of "By your sword you shall live" – his sword, which produced his "honor," grants him only limited vitality. Therefore, when Yisrael must weaken the power of Eisav, they do not need to summon the full strength of all 613 mitzvot, because even in the realm of honoring the father, Yaakov surpassed Eisav. The Midrash teaches that Eisav once failed to find proper game and wished to feed his father dog meat, showing that his honor lacked sincerity, while Yaakov's honor was genuine and complete. Thus, "And Yehoshua weakened Amalek with the sword" means he weakened Amalek *according to* the level of his own sword – the very instrument with which Amalek seeks to strengthen himself becomes the cause of his downfall.

This also explains "And Yaakov went out from Be'er Sheva." Be'er Sheva symbolizes the seven purified attributes Yaakov perfected. When confronting Eisav and Lavan, Yaakov did not engage them from these lofty spiritual heights. Instead, he descended into their realm, "and he went to Charan," engaging them on their own ground. By doing so, he succeeded in overcoming them and fulfilling his mission.

Practical Takeaway:

A person does not always need to engage challenges from the peak of their highest spiritual state. Sometimes true victory comes from meeting the struggle on its own level, using the very forces that oppose holiness as stepping stones to weaken negativity. Just as Yaakov stepped out of Be'er Sheva to confront the world effectively, so too must a person know how to descend wisely and strategically in order to rise higher in the end. **END NOTE]**

מאמר ב

Or it may be explained on the verse "And Yaakov went out from Be'er Sheva and encountered the place etc." It appears to me as follows: A perfectly righteous person, even when he ascends from level to level, must see himself as though he does nothing on his own, for everything is only from the Holy One, blessed be He.

And this is the meaning of "For with You is the source of life" (Psalms 36:10): David the King said that when he prays for the sick and they are healed, it is not from his own merit; rather, "for with You is the source of life."

And "in Your light we see light" (Psalms 36:10) means: the light that appears to me is entirely the light that You bestow in Your great kindness.

או יאמר "ויצא יעקב מבאר שבע ויפגוע במקום וכו'", נראה לי דהנה הצדיק הגמור אף שהולך ממדרגה למדרגה צריך שידמה בעיניו כאלו אינו עושה כלום, כי אם הכל הוא מהשם יתברך בריך הוא.

(Psalms 36:10) וזהו "כי עמך מקור חיים" פירוש דוד המלך עליו השלום אמר מה שאני מתפלל על הקלה ונתרפא, זה אינו מחמתי אלא כי עמך מקור חיים.

רצונו לומר (Psalms 36:10) "באורה נראה אור" והאור הנראה לי הוא הכל אורה שאתה נותן בחסדך הגדול.

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And this is the meaning of “And Yaakov went out from Be’er Sheva”: for the righteous person first rectifies the six directions and is then called the seventh; and he went out from these levels.

וזהו “ויצא יעקב מבאר שבע”, דהצדיק מתחלה מתקן הששת קצוות ונקרא הוא שביעי, ויצא ממדרגות אלו.

“And he went to Charan” means that he leads and nullifies the wrath directed at Yisrael; or, “and he went to Charan” can also mean that he brings forth freedom.

“ויילך חרנה” רצונו לומר שמוליד ומבטל החרון אף מישראל, וגם פירוש “ויילך חרנה” שמוליד ומביא חרות.

“And he encountered the place” means that even though he was in all of these levels, he considered all his prayers to be entirely from the Omnipresent, blessed be He.

“ויפגע במקום” רצונו לומר אף שהיה בכל המדרגות האלו היה חושב שכל תפלותיו שהוא מתפלל הכל הוא מאת המקום בריך הוא.

Or it may be said that “he encountered the place” means that all his prayers were only for the sake of the Shechinah, which is called “Place.”

או יש לומר הפירוש “ויפגע במקום” שכל תפלותיו לא היו רק על השכינה שנקראת מקום.

“And he lodged there because the sun had set” means that whenever the sun came to him – that is, whenever clarity and attachment to God came to him – he would make it into “lodging,” meaning night and darkness, by thinking that this brightness did not come from himself but entirely from Him, may He be blessed.

“וינלן שם כי בא השמש” רצונו לומר בכל עת אשר בא לו השמש דהינו הבהירות ודבקות היה עושה לינה דהינו לילה וחשכה, בחשכתו שאין זה מעצמי ומחמתי בא לי הבהירות, כי אם הכל מאתו יתברך.

“And he dreamed, and behold a ladder etc.” The explanation is as follows: A righteous person draws down spiritual influence and sustenance, and the sustenance and bread must be to him like a dream. That is, bread should be for him only out of necessity, for the world cannot exist without bread. Therefore, the letters of “bread” (lechem) are the same as “dream” (chalom).

“ויחלם ונהיה סלם וכו’”, דהנה הצדיק הוא מושך השפעה ופרנסה, וצריך שיהיה הפרנסה והלחם אצלו כחלום, דהינו שלא יהיה הלחם אצלו רק מצד ההכרח שבלתי אפשרי לעולם בלא לחם, ולזה אותיות לחם הוא חלום.

And he must always keep before his eyes his own lowliness and the exaltedness of God, and then his prayer rises before Him, may He be blessed, and causes holiness to come upon him. As I explained above in Parashas Toldos on “words that come from the heart”: holy words that come from a person’s heart enter the heart of that very person.

וגם צריך להיות תמיד נגד עיניו שפלות עצמו ורוממות א-ל יתברך, ואז תפלתו עולה לפניו יתברך וגורמת לעצמו שייבוא לו קדשה, על דרך שפירשתי לעיל בפרשת תולדות “דברים היוצאים מן הלב” וכו’.

Meaning that the holy words that come from a person’s heart enter into that person’s own heart and increase and add abundant holiness—and the opposite as well, Heaven forbid.

דהינו שדברי קדשה היוצאים מלב האדם נכנסין ללב אותו אדם עצמו, ומרבים ומוסיפים קדשה רבה יתירה, וכן להיפך חס ושלום.

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And this is the meaning of “And he dreamed”: that the influx of sustenance was to him like a dream. And furthermore: “and behold a ladder set on the earth” means that prayer, which rises upward, is hinted at by the ladder; it was “set on the earth,” meaning its beginning was grounded in the earth, for he gazed upon his own lowliness.

And “its head reached the heavens” means the exaltedness of God. And through this he caused “and behold angels of God were ascending”—meaning the prayers and holy words that ascend upward to the supernal worlds, which are called angels—“and descending upon him,” meaning that those very words descend into him, i.e., within his inner being, and additional holiness is bestowed upon him. And this is sufficient.

[NOTE Summary:

Rabbi Elimelech teaches that even when a tzaddik ascends from one exalted level to another, he must regard himself as accomplishing nothing on his own. Every ascent, every prayer, every illumination is solely from God. This is the meaning of “For with You is the source of life” and “in Your light we see light”: even when a righteous person prays and healing or blessing occurs, he attributes it entirely to the divine Source, not to his own merit.

Thus, “And Yaakov went out from Be’er Sheva” symbolizes that the tzaddik first perfects the six directions of creation and becomes the seventh, yet he “goes out” from these exalted levels, refusing to claim spiritual achievement as his own. “And he went to Charan” indicates his ability to sweeten divine wrath or even to draw forth freedom for the Jewish people.

“And he encountered the place” teaches that Yaakov regarded all his prayers as coming only from the Omnipresent, or that all his prayers were directed solely toward the Shechinah, called “Place.” When “the sun set”—when divine illumination reached him—he would still transform that light into a sense of night, humbly thinking that none of it was born from his own efforts.

In the dream of the ladder, Rabbi Elimelech explains that sustenance must be like a dream to a tzaddik—necessary for life but never allowed to become central, for the letters of “bread” (lechem) rearrange to “dream” (chalom). He must hold before his eyes both the lowliness of his own being and the exaltedness of God. From such humility, prayer rises upward like the ladder whose base is “set on the earth” and whose “head reaches the heavens.” The holy words a person speaks—“angels of God”—ascend to spiritual realms and then return “upon him,” increasing his inner holiness. The same force that ascends in purity returns to sanctify the one who uttered it.

וזהו "ויחלם" רצונו לומר שהיה אצלו השפעות
הלחם בחלום. ועוד "והנה סלם מצב ארצה" רצונו
לומר התפלה שהיא עולה למעלה, לזה רומז סלם,
היה מצב ארצה דהינו שהתחלתו היתה מצב ארצה
שהיה מביט בשפלותו.

"וראשו מגיע השמימה" הינו רוממות א"ל, ופעל על
ידי זה "והנה מלאכי אלהים עליהם" רצונו לומר
התפלות והדבורים הקדושים שעולים למעלה
לעולמות העליונים שהם נקראים מלאכים, "וירדו
בו" רצונו לומר אותם הדבורים עצמם ירדו "בו",
דהינו בקרבו, שנתוסף לו קדושה כנ"ל. וקל

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Practical Takeaway:

Spiritual clarity must never lead to self-congratulation. True holiness is built when a person recognizes that every moment of insight, every uplifting feeling, every success in prayer comes only from God. When one combines deep humility with genuine yearning, the words of prayer rise heavenward and return with blessing, sanctifying the heart that sent them.

Chassidic Story:

It is told that during the days of Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk, a poor villager once traveled to Lizhensk seeking assistance. As he entered the beis midrash, he saw Reb Elimelech seated alone, whispering words of prayer with his face aflame. The man waited quietly until the Rebbe finished. When Reb Elimelech finally lifted his eyes, the villager approached him with awe and said, “Rebbe, if only I could pray as you pray. Your voice trembled like a heavenly flame. Surely such prayers rise straight to the Throne of Glory.”

Reb Elimelech shook his head gently. “My friend,” he said, “do not be deceived by what you saw. The trembling was not holiness—it was fear. For I know that not one word of prayer can rise from me unless the Holy One Himself lifts it. And if I felt my own strength in those words, the ladder of prayer would fall to the earth.”

Then he placed his hand warmly on the villager’s shoulder. “But when a Jew knows he is nothing without God, his words become angels. They ascend higher than he imagines, and when they return, they bring into his heart a holiness that is not his own. Pray with humility, and Heaven will carry your words home.”

The villager later said that those few moments with Reb Elimelech taught him more about prayer than all the sermons he had ever heard. **END NOTE]**

מאמר ג

“And Yaakov lifted his feet etc.” (Genesis 29:1). In the way of remez: The tzaddik is the entirety of Israel, and he elevates all the lowliness that has occurred among Israel, Heaven forbid, to bring it into holiness.

And this is the meaning of “And Yaakov lifted his feet”: Even the sinners of Israel are full of mitzvot like a pomegranate; but the mitzvah does not have the strength to ascend to the holy levels because sins extinguish it and cast it down to the feet below.

”וַיִּשָּׂא יַעֲקֹב רַגְלָיו וְכוּ”, עַל דֶּרֶךְ הַרְמוֹז, דְּהִנֵּה צָדִיק הוּא כָּלִיל וְיִשְׂרָאֵל וְהוּא מַעֲלָה כָּל הַשְּׂפִלוֹת אֲשֶׁר נִבְעָשָׂה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל חֲלִילָה לְהִבְיָאֵם אֶל הַקִּדְשָׁה.

וְזֶהוּ ”וַיִּשָּׂא יַעֲקֹב רַגְלָיו” רְצוֹנוֹ לומר דָּגָם פּוֹשְׁעֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מְלֵאִים מִצְוֹת פְּרָמוֹן, רַק נִשְׁאִין כַּח בְּמִצְוָה שְׂמַעְלָה בְּמַעֲלוֹת קְדוּשִׁים מִחֻמַּת עֲבֵרוֹת הַמַּכְבִּים אוֹתָהּ וְהוֹרִידוֹ אוֹתָהּ לְרַגְלִים לְמַטָּה.

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And the tzaddik who serves in truth extracts the holiness from the klipah and elevates it to the Holy One, blessed be He. This is “And Yaakov lifted”—the tzaddik called by the name Yaakov—“his feet,” meaning the holiness that fell to the feet.

והצדיק העובד באמת מוציא הקדושה מן הקליפה ומעלה אותה לה' יתברך. וזהו "וישא יעקב" הוא הצדיק הנקרא בשם יעקב, הוא מעלה ומנשא למעלה את "רגליו" רצונו לומר הקדושה שנפלה אל הרגלים.

“And he went to the land of the children of the East” (Genesis 29:1) means that it becomes mixed with earthiness; “children of the East” refers to that which touches upon the Creator, blessed be He, Who is the Ancient One of the world.

"ויאלץ ארצה בני קדם" רצונו לומר נעשה הולץ עם הארציית, "בני קדם" רצונו לומר הנוגע לבורא יתברך שהוא קדמוני של עולם.

“And he saw, and behold a well in the field” (Genesis 29:2). The verse teaches the path by which the tzaddik reaches this level: it is through always gazing upon the inner dimension of the holy Torah. The Torah is called “a well”—“a well the nobles dug”—and the inner dimension is called “a field,” which is the orchard of holy apples.

"וירא והנה באר בשדה", דהנה הכתוב הורה לנו את הדרך אשר יבוא בו הצדיק אל המדרגה הנ"ל, הוא על-ידי שהצדיק רואה תמיד על פנימיות התורה הקדושה, דהתורה נקראת "באר", באר תפורה שרים, והפנימיות נקראת "שדה" שהוא חקלא דתפוחין.

And this is “He saw, and behold a well in the field”: the essence of Torah is for the sake of the field, the inner dimension called the orchard of holy apples.

וזהו "וירא והנה באר בשדה" רצונו לומר שעקר התורה היא בשביל השדה שהוא הפנימיות הנקראת שדה חקלא דתפוחין.

And the means by which one merits the inner dimension of Torah is through the three levels the Holy One placed in man—nefesh, ruach, and neshamah. After a person breaks the animal soul, he merits the intellectual nefesh; after that he merits ruach; and after he holds firmly to his service of the Creator with truth, he merits neshamah. Through these three levels he merits the inner dimension of Torah.

והסבה אשר על-ידיה ישיג פנימיות התורה היא על-ידי ג' בחינות שנתן השם יתברך באדם, דהיינו נפש רוח ונשמה. והיינו אחר שישבור האדם הנפש הבהמית יזכה לנפש השכלית, ואחר כך יזכה לרוח, ואחר אשר יחזיק במעוזו בעבודת הבורא באמת יזכה לנשמה, ועל-ידי ג' בחינות אלו יזכה להשיג פנימיות התורה הקדושה.

And this is the hint of “three flocks of sheep lying by it etc.” (Genesis 29:2)—a hint to the three levels mentioned, by which one merits the inner dimension of Torah.

וזה רמז "שלושה עדרי צאן רבצים עליה וכו'", רמז לג' בחינות הנ"ל אשר על-ידיהן יזכה לפנימיות התורה.

And in addition, he will bestow good influence upon Israel, and this is “for from that well they water the flocks”—they are the holy Israel, flocks of holy sheep.

ועוד נוסף לזה שישפיע השפעות טובות לישראל, וזה "כי מן הבאר ההוא ישקו העדרים" הם ישראל הקדושים, עדרי צאן קדושים.

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Parshas Vayeitzei

“And the stone was large upon the mouth of the well” (Genesis 29:2). The verse explains that the root of holiness is above. Holy letters are called “stones,” as stated in Sefer Yetzirah. In the upper worlds the letters are great; to us God gave small letters. As stated in the holy Zohar: there are great letters and small letters.

And we are obligated to sanctify and purify ourselves and to bind the small letters with the great letters above. This is accomplished through nefesh, ruach, and neshamah. And this is “and the stone was large” meaning: the letters above are great—“upon the mouth of the well,” meaning in the upper world called the mouth of the well, for there is the root of holiness.

“And all the flocks would gather there” (Genesis 29:3) means: After a person gathers together the three levels of nefesh, ruach, and neshamah mentioned above, then “they roll the stone,” meaning a turning and overturning, that with this holiness they transform the attribute of judgment into the attribute of mercy and sweeten the judgments at their root.

“And they would water the flock” means: Then they cause influxes of blessing to go out to Israel, the holy flock. “And they returned the stone to its place” means: They also cause the binding and uniting of the small letters with the great upper letters, where their principal place is.

“And Yaakov said to them: My brothers, from where do you come?” (Genesis 29:4). The tzaddik’s thoughts continually rise upon him to always think fear of God and to seek and investigate all pathways of fear of God and His service. It is as if his thoughts speak to one another to tell him what cause or action awakens a person’s heart to divine service.

“והאבן גדולה על־פי הבאר”, רצונו לומר דהכתוב מפרש דשרש מקום קדושה הוא למעלה, ואותיות הקדושים נקראים “אבנים” כדיתא בספר יצירה, ובעולמות עליונים שם האותיות גדולים, ולנו נתן השם יתברך אותיות זעירות, כדיתא בזהר הקדוש אית אתוין רברבין ואית אתוין זעירות.

ואנחנו מחייבין לקדש ולטהר עצמנו ולקשר אותיות זעירות באותוין רברבין העליונים, והוא על־ידי נפש רוח נשמה שיזקה האדם. וזהו “והאבן גדולה” רצונו לומר האותיות גדולים הוא “על־פי הבאר” רצונו לומר בעולם העליון הנקרא פי הבאר, שם הוא שרש הקדושה

“ונאספו שמה כל העדרים” רצונו לומר אחר אשר יאספו יחד כל הג’ בחינות נפש רוח נשמה הנ”ל, אז “וגללו את האבן” רצונו לומר גלילה והפיכה, דהינו שעם הקדושה הזאת הם מהפכים מדת הדין למדת הרחמים וממתקים הדינים בשרשם.

“והשקו את הצאן” פירוש אז הם גורמים השפעות לישראל צאן קדושים. “והשיבו את האבן למקומה” רצונו לומר שגם הם גורמים קישור ויחוד האותוין זעירות לאותוין רברבין העליונים ששם הוא עיקר מקומם.

“ויאמר להם יעקב אחי מאין אתם”, דהנה הצדיק רעיונו סליקו עליה תמיד לחשוב תמיד יראת ה’ ולדרוש ולחקר כל אופני יראת ה’ ועבודתו יתברך ויתעלה, כאלו מחשבותיו מדברים זה לזה לומר לו איזו סיבה ופעולה היא לאדם שיתעורר לבו לעבודתו יתברך.

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And this is “And he said... my brothers, from where do you come”—meaning: From what manner or cause has your awakening to divine service come? “And they said: We are from Charan” (Genesis 29:4), meaning his branches of thought answer him that their primary beginning of awakening to fear came from recalling the wrath they aroused, that they angered His great and exalted Name.

Especially in the common sin, may the Merciful One save us: When a person stumbles in the impurity of keri, the person trembles and is terrified, seized with fear and dread, and through this his heart is awakened to divine service, saying: How did I anger the great and awesome Name with my evil deeds and stumble in my sin?

And this is what the Tanna said: “Reflect upon three things and you will not come to sin...” (Pirkei Avot 3:1). “Know from where you came—from a putrid drop.” Meaning: From where did you begin your divine service? Recall how you stumbled in your sin through an impure occurrence, and this is “a putrid drop.”

“And to where you are going”—meaning: What cause and manner will bring you to walk in His service? When you recall that you will return to “dust, worms, and maggots,” that cause brings great humility to a person, and humility is the root through which one grows continually in fear of God and His holy Torah.

“And before Whom you are destined to give judgment and accounting...” Meaning: After you remember the two matters above, you merit to the exaltedness of God. And this is “And he saw, and behold a ladder set on the earth...” (Genesis 28:12). “Ladder,” without a vav, has the numerical value of Sinai—meaning the cause that enables one to attain the Torah given at Sinai is humility.

וזהו ויאמר... אחי מאין אתם, הינו מאיזה אפן וסיבה בא לכם התעוררות לעבודתו יתברך. ויאמרו מתרן אנהנו דהינו סעיפיו ומחשבותיו ישיבוהו שבה להם עיקר התחלת התעוררות יראה מחמת שהזכירו הקרון שהכעיסו שמו הגדול יתברך ויתעלה.

ובפרט בעון המצוי בעונינו הרבים, פאשר יושל האדם בטמאת קרי, אז יחדד האיש וילפת, אחרותו חיל ורעדה ופליצות, ועל ידי זה יתעורר לב האדם לעבודתו יתברך באמרו איד הכעסתי את השם הגדול והנורא במעשי הרעים וכשילתי בעוני.

וזה שאמר התנא “הסתפל בשלשה דברים ואין אתה בא לידי עברה... דע מאין באת מטפה סרוחה”, פירוש מאין באת להתחיל בעבודת הבורא יתברך, דהינו שתזכר איד נכשלם בעונה במקרה בלתי טהור, ונהו מטפה סרוחה.

“ולאן אתה הולך” רצונו לומר איזו סיבה ואפן יביאך שתהיה הולך בעבודתו יתברך, בזכרה שתשוב “לעפר רמה ותולעה”, הסיבה הזאת מביאה לאדם הכנעה גדולה, והיא העיקר והשרש שעל ידי הכנעה יהיה הולך ומתגבר ביראת ה' ובתורתו הקדושה.

“ולפני מי אתה עתיד לתן דין וחשבון...”, דהינו אחר שתזכר שני דברים הנל תזכה לרוממות אל יתברך. וזהו וינרא ונהה סלם מצב ארצה, “סלם” בלא ו גימטריא סיני, דהינו הסיבה הגורמת לאדם שישגיג את התורה הנתנה בסיני, הוא העיקר הכנעה.

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“Set on the earth” hints to great humility; “and its head” meaning the holiness attained by this “reaches the heavens.” And one must yearn very greatly that his holiness rise upward endlessly, always longing and saying: When will I reach the place of my fathers?

“And behold angels of God were ascending...” (Genesis 28:12). The words a person speaks in holiness create from each holy word an angel. “Angels... ascending” means they arouse awakening from below; “and descending upon him” means awakening from above, with good influences upon Israel.

And let us return to the explanation of the verse: “And he said to them: Do you know Lavan the son of Nachor” (Genesis 29:5). This means that his thoughts ask one another whether they have paid attention to the thoughts and ulterior motives that come to a person during the learning of the holy Torah, which was given as black fire upon white fire. This is hinted in “Lavan”—meaning Torah; “the son of Nachor,” from the expression “the sons of my mother were incensed against me,” meaning the distractions and foreign thoughts that come during learning.

“And they said: We know him” (Genesis 29:5) means his thoughts answer him: Indeed, we know—we have paid attention to this constantly.

“And he said to them: Is it well with him?” (Genesis 29:6) meaning: Though it is true that you pay attention to these distractions and foreign thoughts, I ask you whether you have rectified and completed this trait—to make your learning perfect, without any ulterior motives.

“And they said: It is well, and behold Rachel his daughter is coming with the sheep” (Genesis 29:6). Meaning: By our constantly trembling and fearing, like Rachel before her shearer, we have completed our traits in learning Torah. “Rachel his daughter” hints to fear, which is called “daughter,” for love is called “son.”

“מִצָּב אֶרְצָה” רָמַז לְהִכְנָעָה גְּדוּלָּה, “וְרֹאשׁוֹ” הֵינּוּ הַקְדָּשָׁה שֶׁיִּשְׁגֶּה עַל־יָדֵי זֶה “מִגִּיעַ הַשְּׁמִימָה”, וְצָרִיד שֶׁתְּהִיָּה הַשְּׁתוּקוּתוֹ מֵאֵד מֵאֵד שֶׁיִּגִּיעַ בְּקִדְשׁוֹתוֹ לְמַעַלָּה לְמַעַלָּה עַד אֵין קֵץ וְתִכְלִית, וַיִּשְׁתַּקֵּק תָּמִיד לומר מתי אגיע למקום אבותי.

“וַיִּהְיֶה מַלְאָכֵי אֱלֹהִים עֲלֵיהֶם וְכוּ’”, דְּהֵנָּה הַדְּבוּרִים שֶׁל אָדָם הַמְדַּבֵּר בְּקִדּוּשָׁה, נִבְרָא מִכָּל דְּבוּר וְדְבוּר שֶׁיֵּצֵא בְּקִדּוּשָׁה מִלֵּאף קְדוּשָׁה. וְזֶהוּ “מַלְאָכִים... עֲלֵיהֶם” רָצוֹנוֹ לומר הֵם מְעוֹרְרִים אֶתְעֲרוּתָא דְלִתְמָא, “וַיִּרְדּוּ בּוֹ” הֵינּוּ אֶתְעֲרוּתָא דְלַעֲיָלָא בְּהַשְׁפָּעוֹת טוֹבוֹת עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל

וְנִחְזֹר לְבִיאור הַפָּתוּב “וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם הִידַעְתֶּם אֵת לָבֵן בֶּן נָחוֹר”, רָצוֹנוֹ לומר שֶׁמִּתְשַׁבְּחוּתוֹ שׁוֹאֲלִים זֶה לָזֶה אִם נִתְּנוּ לֵב לְדַעַת הַמִּתְשַׁבְּחוֹת וְהַפְּנִיּוֹת שֶׁבָּאִים לְאָדָם בְּשַׁעַת לְמוּד הַתּוֹרָה הַקְדוּשָׁה הַנִּתְּנָה אֵשׁ שְׁחוּרָה עַל גְּבִי אֵשׁ לְבָנָה, וְזֶהוּ רָמַז “לָבֵן” דְּהֵינּוּ הַתּוֹרָה, “בֶּן נָחוֹר” לְשׁוֹן “בְּנֵי אִמִּי נָחוּר בִּי” דְּהֵינּוּ הַפְּנִיּוֹת וְהַסְּתוֹת הַמִּתְשַׁבְּחוֹת זְרוֹת שֶׁבָּא בְּתוֹךְ לְמוּד

“וַיֹּאמְרוּ יִדְעָנוּ” שֶׁמִּתְשַׁבְּחוּתוֹ יִשְׁבִּיבוּהוּ אִמָּנָם בֶּן הוּא, יִדְעָנוּ, שֶׁנִּתְּנוּ לְבָנוֹ לְהַסְתַּפֵּל תָּמִיד עַל זֶה

“וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם הַשְּׁלוֹם לוֹ” פִּירוּשׁ הֵן אָמַת שְׁאַתֶּם נוֹתְנִים דַּעְתְּכֶם לְהַסְתַּפֵּל עַל הַפְּנִיּוֹת וְהַמִּתְשַׁבְּחוֹת זְרוֹת, אָבֵל זֹאת אֲנִי שׁוֹאֵל אֶתְכֶם אִם תִּקְנֶתֶם וְהַשְׁלַמְתֶּם אֵת הַמִּדָּה הַזֹּאת לְהִיּוֹת הַלְמוּד שֶׁלְכֶם בְּשִׁלְמוֹת בְּלִי שׁוּם פְּגָמָה

“וַיֹּאמְרוּ שְׁלוֹם וְהָיָה רַחֵל בְּתוֹ בָּאָה עִם הַצֹּאֵן” רָצוֹנוֹ לומר עַל־יָדֵי זֶה שֶׁאֵנָּה תָּמִיד מְזַדְּצָעִים וִירְאִים בְּרַחֵל לְפָנֵי גּוֹזְזָה, בְּזֶה הַשְּׁלֵמָנוּ מְדוּתֵינוּ בְּלְמוּד הַתּוֹרָה הַקְדוּשָׁה, וְלָזֶה רָמַז “רַחֵל בְּתוֹ” רֹמֵז לִירְאָה הַנִּקְרָאת בַּת, דְּאֵהֱבָה נִקְרָאת בֶּן

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“And he said: Behold, the day is yet great” (Genesis 29:7).

Meaning: The tzaddik says further—Do not say: The day is still long to engage in divine service, and when I am free from worldly occupation, then I will begin. Do not say this, “for it is not the time to gather the cattle,” meaning: It is not the time to gather the possessions of this world, for our days pass like a shadow.

“Water the sheep” (Genesis 29:7) means: Your worldly matters, the physical matters, should be to you like a kiss—just a mere touch—as one who kisses has only light contact. So should your thoughts on worldly matters be only a slight touch, something necessary.

“And go pasture” (Genesis 29:7) means: The essence is to attach oneself to the Creator, blessed be He, with complete and perfect deveikus. This is the meaning of “And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her” (Ruth 1:14). “Orpah kissed”—the physical matters, called “the neck,” should be like a kiss, a light touch; but Ruth clung to her—this hints to divine service, that one must cling completely.

“And they said: We cannot until...” (Genesis 29:8). His thoughts answer him that he may say: We cannot begin divine service “until all the flocks are gathered,” as said above—that is, only through the three levels of nefesh, ruach, and neshamah, and the matter is very difficult for us.

I give you advice: “While he was yet speaking with them” (Genesis 29:9), meaning: At the moment you begin speaking words of Torah, “and Rachel came with the sheep” meaning: Then strive to speak with fear and trembling, as explained above.

“For she was a shepherdess” (Genesis 29:9) meaning: This is complete fear—the fear of the Creator, blessed and exalted, who is our Father in Heaven. May He do kindness with us and place in our hearts His love and His fear forever and ever. Amen.

[NOTE Summary:

Rabbi Elimelech teaches that the tzaddik represents the collective soul of Israel and carries within himself the spiritual burdens, failings, and hidden holiness of the entire nation. When a mitzvah becomes weighed down by sin and cannot rise, the tzaddik lifts it—“And Yaakov lifted his feet”—elevating fallen holiness from the lowest

“ויאמר הן עוד היום גדול” רצונו לומר דגם זאת אומר הצדיק פן תאמר עוד היום גדול לעסק בעבודתו ותברך, באשר אפנה מענייני עולם הזה אז אתחיל בעבודתו ותברך, אל תאמר פן “כי לא עת האסף המקנה” רצונו לומר שאין עת לאסף קנייני עולם הזה כי צל ימינו על ארץ

“השקו את הצאן” רצונו לומר ענייני עולם הזה דברים גשמיים יהיו לכם כמו נשיקה, כדרך המנשקים שאינו אלא נגיעה בעלמא, פן יהיו מחשבותיכם על ענייני עולם הזה כמו נגיעה בעלמא ונדבר הכרחי

“ולכו רעו” פירוש ועיקר לדבק עצמו בבורא ותברך בדבקות ושלמות גמור, וזהו “ותשק ערפה לחמותה” רמז לדברים הגשמיים הנקראים בשם “ערף” יהיה כמו נשיקה, “וירות דבקה בה” רמז בענייני עבודתו, דהינו לרונותו בשירות ותשבחות, צריך לזה דבקות גמור

“ויאמרו לא נוכל עד וכו’” רצונו לומר שמחשבותיו לשיבוהו כי תאמר הרי לא נוכל להתחיל בעבודתו ותברך “עד אשר יאספו כל העדרים” כנ”ל, כי אם בג’ בחינות נפש רוח נשמה, והדבר קשה עלינו עד מאד

אני נותן לך עצה דהינו “עודנו מדבר עמם” רצונו לומר בעת שתתחיל לדבר בדברי תורה, ורחל באה עם הצאן” רצונו לומר אז תראה לדבר ביראה ופחד כנ”ל

“אשר לאביה” היא היראה השלמה, יראת הבורא בשם ותברך ותעלה, הוא אבינו שבשמים, יעשה עמנו חסד וישים בלבנו אהבתו ויראתו לעד ולנצח נצחים. אמן

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places back to its Source. Even those who seem distant are filled with mitzvot “like a pomegranate,” yet their merits sink under the weight of transgression; the tzaddik’s task is to extract the trapped sparks and carry them upward.

The path toward such elevation is revealed in the vision of the well: Torah is the “well,” and its inner dimension is the “field,” the orchard of holy apples. One gains access to this inner dimension only after refining the three levels of nefesh, ruach, and neshamah. These three levels are the “three flocks of sheep lying by it,” through which a person can perceive the depths of Torah and even draw blessing to all of Israel.

The Torah’s letters in their upper source are immense, spiritual “stones,” while we receive small letters. Through refinement of nefesh–ruach–neshamah, a person binds the lower letters to the higher ones, reconnecting his Torah to its supernal root. Thus, “the great stone upon the mouth of the well” represents the lofty letters of the upper worlds, and the work of the tzaddik is to roll this stone—uniting the two realms.

Rabbi Elimelech then turns inward, showing how Yaakov’s interactions with the shepherds reflect the inner dialogue of one who seeks true service of God. His thoughts question each other: Have you noticed the distracting thoughts that enter during Torah study? Have you purified your motives so that Torah is learned with full sincerity? The answer comes: We tremble like “Rachel before her shearer”—the trembling of reverence that completes and purifies Torah study.

The tzaddik warns against delaying divine service—“the day is still long”—for spiritual work must not wait until worldly affairs are completed. One must treat material concerns like a brief “kiss,” merely touching them out of necessity, while true attachment is reserved for God alone—“and Ruth clung to her.”

Even when one feels unready, lacking the fullness of nefesh, ruach, and neshamah, Rabbi Elimelech advises: Begin speaking words of Torah “while he was yet speaking with them,” for the act of speaking awakens fear and humility (“Rachel coming with the sheep”). This awakening draws forth divine kindness, enabling the heart to hold both the love and fear of God forever.

Practical Takeaway:

Do not wait for perfection before striving toward God. Even when weighed down by distraction, impurity, or a sense of unworthiness, begin with sincerity and trembling. Humility opens the gate to inner Torah; fear refines the heart; and every word of Torah spoken with purity becomes an angel that ascends upward and returns with blessing. Treat the material world only as necessary contact, and reserve your true attachment for God. Through this steady work, one merits to elevate fallen sparks—within oneself and within all of Israel.

Chassidic Story:

A true story is told among the disciples of Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk. There was once a young man who traveled to Lizhensk burdened with guilt, ashamed of impure thoughts and failures that he believed had made him unworthy of approaching a tzaddik. He stood at the edge of the beis midrash, afraid to enter, watching the

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chassidim immersed in prayer and learning. Finally, mustering courage, he approached Rabbi Elimelech after prayers.

“Rebbe,” he whispered, “my Torah is filled with distractions, my mind darkened with thoughts I cannot control. How can I dare to learn or pray? My mitzvot fall to the ground. I fear I will never rise.”

Rabbi Elimelech looked at him with deep compassion. “My child,” he said, “do you think that your fallen thoughts remain on the floor? When a Jew trembles over his distance, when he regrets even one impure whisper of the heart, that trembling is Rachel before her shearer. Do you know what the tzaddik does? He lifts the feet of Yaakov. Every spark that fell, he carries back upward.”

He pointed to the young man’s heart. “Your struggle itself is the rolling of the stone from the well. Your trembling is the Rachel who brings the flock. When you begin to speak words of Torah—even broken ones—you give birth to angels who rise and return to awaken you from Above.”

The young man later testified that these words changed his life. From that day forward, he approached Torah with humility, trembling, and perseverance. He said: “The Rebbe taught me that the path upward begins exactly where we fall—and that a single sincere word of Torah can lift a world.”

END NOTE]