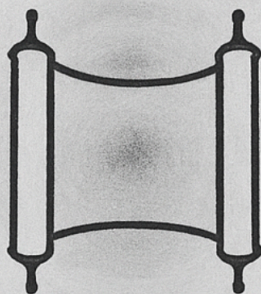


בס"ד

**Rebbe Elimelech
of Lizhensk
Parshas Vayechi**



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The Rebbe, Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk

Noam Elimelech

Parshas Vayechi

מאמר א

And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt. It seems to me, based on what is stated in the Gemara: "They said about Rabbi Chanina son of Dosa, when he would pray for the sick he would say, 'This one lives' etc." They said to him, "From where do you know?" He said, "If my prayer is fluent in my mouth, it is accepted." (Berakhot 34b)

At first glance, the phrase "fluent in my mouth" is not understood. He should have said, "If my prayer leaves my mouth without stammering, it is known that it is accepted."

However, the matter is as follows. One must understand the reason that when a righteous person prays for the sick, he is healed. It might appear, Heaven forbid, as if there is a change in the One simple and true Creator, and Heaven forbid to think or say such a thing.

Rather, all worlds and all created beings were originally, before the creation of the world, within the potential of the Infinite Light, blessed be He.

Afterwards, when His simple will arose to create them, He brought them forth from potential into actuality. Everything that would be already existed within the potential of the Infinite Light, blessed be He.

Thus, there is no change here at all, since all of this already existed within the potential of the Infinite Light: that this one would be sick, that the righteous person would pray for him, and that his prayer would be answered.

This is because the Holy One, blessed be He, desires the prayers of the righteous, for through prayer the righteous person cleaves to the exalted Creator, and this is the delight of the Omnipresent, that the righteous ascends and cleaves to Him.

It is also stated in the books the reason that we sometimes see two people come together and love one another greatly, even though they had not known each other previously, but only now have met.

ויחי יעקב בארץ מצרים. נראה לי על פי דאיתא בגמרא: "אמרו עליו על רבי חנינא בן דוסא בשהיה מתפלל על החולה היה אומר זה חי וכו'." אמרו לו מנין אתה יודע, אמר אם תפילתי שגורה בפי היא מקובלת.

לכאורה מלת "שגורה בפי" אינו מובן, היה לו לומר "אם תפילתי יוצאת מפי בלי גמגום בידוע שהיא מקובלת".

אך הענין הוא, דהנה לכאורה יש להבין הסבה הזאת שהצדיק מתפלל על החולה והוא מתרפא, ונראה הדבר כמו השתנות חס ושלום אצל הבורא האחד הפשוט האמתי, וחס ושלום לחשוב ולומר כן.

אך הענין, דהנה כל העולמות וכל הנבראים היו מתחלה קדם בריאת העולם בכתב אינסוף ברוך הוא.

ואחר כך כשעלה בראונו הפשוט לבראם הוציאם מכח אל הפעל, וכל מה שיהיה הוא שיהיה בכתב האינסוף ברוך הוא.

ונמצא אין כאן שום השתנות, כי כל זאת היה בכתב האינסוף, שנה יהיה חולה והצדיק יתפלל עליו ויעתר בתפלתו.

והוא שהקדוש ברוך הוא מתאנה לתפלתו של צדיקים, שעל ידי התפלה הצדיק מתדבק בבורא יתעלה, וזה תענוגו של מקום שהצדיק עולה ומתדבק בו.

ואיתא בספרים הטעם שאנו רואים שלפעמים באים שני בני אדם ואוהבים זה את זה מאד, גם שלא היו מכירים זה את זה מקודם כי אם עתה מקרוב באו ונתוועדו יחד.

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The reason is that they were neighbors together in their dwelling in the Garden of Eden, and now when they encounter one another, the old love that existed between them in the Garden of Eden is reawakened.

והטעם משום שהיו שכנים זה אצל זה בישיבתם בגן עדן יחד, ועתה בבואם זה אל זה נתעורר בהם האהבה הישנה שהיתה בהם בגן עדן.

This is what Rabbi Chanina son of Dosa said: "If my prayer is fluent," meaning that this prayer I am praying now is fluent in my mouth, like something familiar that has already been habituated.

וזהו שאמר רבי חנינא בן דוסא "אם תפילתי שגורה," רציון לומר התפלה הזאת שאני מתפלל עתה היא שגורה בפי כמו דבר הרגיל. ושהורגל בו כבר.

What is this habituation? It is that this matter, this prayer, and the righteous person all existed within the potential of the Infinite Light, similar to two righteous people who love one another because they were together.

ומה הוא ההרגל, הינו מה שהזכרנו לעיל שהיה הדבר הזה והתפלה הזאת והצדיק כלם בכח האין-סוף, על דרך שני צדיקים. שאוהבים זה את זה משום שהיו יחד.

Therefore, "it is known that it is accepted," since it already existed within the potential of the Infinite Light, blessed be He, and there is no change before Him, Heaven forbid.

בידוע שהיא מקובלת, "משום שכבר היה" בכח האין-סוף ברוך הוא ואין השתנות לפניו חס ושלום.

But if my prayer is not fluent in my mouth, then this prayer did not exist within the potential of the Infinite Light, rather the person is praying on his own, and it is known that he is confused.

ואם אין תפילתי שגורה בפי, "נמצא לא" היתה התפלה הזאת בכח האין-סוף, רק האדם מעצמו הוא מתפלל, "בידוע שהוא מטורף."

Behold, the primary vitality of the righteous person is through prayer, for through it he cleaves to the exalted Creator, as explained above. It is known that through the holy Name that emerges from the verse "the heavens" and "the earth," the world was created, and its numerical value is seventeen. The essence of the prayer of the righteous person is for the holy Shechinah.

והנה עיקר החיות של הצדיק היא על ידי התפלה שעל ידה הוא מתדבק בבורא יתעלה כפ"ל, וידוע שעל ידי שם הקדוש היוצא מפסוק 'את השמים ואת הארץ' נברא העולם, והוא גימטריא טו"ב, ועיקר תפלת הצדיק היא על השכינה הקדושה.

This is the meaning of "And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt." "Egypt" is an expression of constriction of the sea, meaning that because he afflicted himself over the exile of the Shechinah, which is called "sea," through this he had vitality, for he cleaved to the Creator, blessed be He.

וזהו "ויחי יעקב בארץ מצרים," "מצרים" לשון מיצר גם, דהינו על ידי שהיה מצער עצמו על גלות השכינה הנקראת 'ים', על ידי זה היתה לו חיות שהיה מתדבק בבורא ברוך הוא.

"Seventeen years," meaning that all of this was within the potential of the Infinite Light at the beginning of creation, when He created all created beings and all worlds through the holy Name whose numerical value is seventeen, as stated above, through which the world was created.

שבע עשרה שנה, "פירוש שכל זאת היה" בכח האין-סוף בתחילת הבריאה כשברא כל הנבראים וכל העולמות על ידי השם הקדוש שהוא גימטריא י"ז כפ"ל שבו נברא העולם.

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This is the meaning of “Blessed is the Lord, who has not removed my prayer” that I pray. He did not remove it from me, because it was then within the potential of the Infinite Light, blessed be He, and therefore it is accepted.

“And His kindness from me,” meaning that for all of this I will thank God, since this prayer was within the potential of the Infinite Light. It follows that this is not due to me, from my own action, such that I would deserve reward for it.

Even so, the Holy One, blessed be He, gives me reward as if the action were from me. This is “and His kindness from me,” that I give thanks to Him, blessed be His Name, for His great kindness, that He considers it as though it were from me. Understand this well.

וְהוּא “בְּרוּךְ ה' אֲשֶׁר לֹא הִסִּיר תְּפִלָּתִי” שֶׁאֵינִי מִתְפַּלֵּל, לֹא הִסִּיר אוֹתָהּ מִמֶּנִּי מִחֲמַת שְׁהִיְתָה אֲזַבְכָּה הָאֵין־סוֹף בְּרוּךְ הוּא וּמִמֶּלֶא הִיא מְקוּבָּלָת.

וְחִסְדּוֹ מֵאֵתִי, “פִּירוּשׁ וְעַל כָּל זֹאת אוֹדָה יְהוָה, מֵאַחֵר שְׁהִיְתָה הַתְּפִלָּה הַזֹּאת בְּכַח הָאֵין־סוֹף, נִמְצָא שֶׁאֵין זֶה מִחֲמַתִּי מִצַּד פְּעֻלָּתִי שֶׁיְהִי רָאוּי לְהַנִּית לִי שָׂכָר עַל זֶה.

וְאַף עַל פִּי כֵן נוֹתֵן לִי הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ שָׂכָר בְּאֵלוֹ הֵיטָב הַפְּעֻלָּה מִמֶּנִּי, “וְהוּא וְחִסְדּוֹ מֵאֵתִי, שֶׁאוֹדָה לוֹ יִתְשַׁבַּח עַל חִסְדּוֹ הַגָּדוֹל שֶׁמִּעֲלָה עָלַי בְּאֵלוֹ הֵיטָב מֵאֵתִי. וְהִבֵּן.

[NOTE Summary:

In this maamar, Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk explains that the entire vitality of a tzaddik flows from prayer, because prayer is the act through which the tzaddik cleaves to the Creator. There is no change, Heaven forbid, in God when a prayer is answered. Rather, all events, including illness, healing, and the prayer itself, already existed in potential within the Infinite Light before creation. When the tzaddik prays, he is not causing something new to occur, but revealing what was already embedded in divine potential.

This idea clarifies the teaching of Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, who said that if his prayer was “fluent in his mouth,” it was accepted. “Fluent” does not mean technically smooth speech, but that the prayer feels familiar and natural, like something long known. Such a prayer resonates with its root in the Infinite Light, indicating that it belongs to the divine order of creation. If the prayer does not flow in this way, it suggests that it is an individual initiative not rooted in that higher potential, and therefore lacks the same certainty of acceptance.

Rabbi Elimelech connects this to the verse “And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt.” Egypt is interpreted as constriction, specifically the constriction of the “sea,” which symbolizes the Shechinah. Jacob’s vitality came from his pain over the exile of the Shechinah. Through this self-affliction and compassion for the divine presence, he cleaved more deeply to God and thereby attained true life. The seventeen years Jacob lived in Egypt allude to the divine Name with the numerical value of seventeen, through which the world was created. This teaches that Jacob’s spiritual vitality in exile was rooted in the very foundations of creation.

Finally, Rabbi Elimelech explains the verse “Blessed is the Lord, who has not removed my prayer from me, nor His kindness from me.” Since the prayer already existed in divine potential, the person praying does not truly deserve reward for it. Nevertheless, God grants reward as an act of pure kindness, treating the prayer as though it originated solely from the person. This is the ultimate expression of divine chesed: God credits the human being for what was, in truth, always His own design.

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A person should approach prayer with humility and depth, understanding that the goal of prayer is not to change God, but to attach oneself to Him. When prayer flows naturally and sincerely, it may indicate alignment with a higher spiritual root. One should also cultivate sensitivity to the pain of the Shechinah and the spiritual brokenness of the world, because such compassion itself becomes a source of true vitality and closeness to God. Finally, one should recognize that any spiritual success is a gift of divine kindness and respond with gratitude rather than self-congratulation.

It is related by students of Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk that once a broken Jew came to him seeking a blessing for healing. Rabbi Elimelech did not immediately pray aloud. Instead, he sat in silence, his head resting in his hands, visibly pained. After some time, he quietly recited a short prayer and told the man to go in peace.

When the students later asked why the Rebbe seemed so distressed before praying, Rabbi Elimelech explained that he was not focused on the man's illness alone. He was mourning the suffering of the Shechinah, which is in exile together with every broken soul of Israel. Only after he felt that pain deeply could his prayer attach itself naturally to its root above.

The man recovered, but Rabbi Elimelech emphasized to his students that the healing was not the result of personal power or merit. Rather, it was an act of divine kindness, because God desires the prayers of the righteous and credits them as if the deed were their own.

מצמר ב

Alternatively, one may explain “And Jacob lived” based on the verse: “Sing the glory of His Name; make His praise glorious.” Its meaning appears to be that when a person begins serving the Creator, blessed be He, he certainly cannot immediately ascend, at the very beginning, to the level of the higher realms.

או יאמר "ויחי כו" על פי הפסוק "זמר
כבוד שמו שימו כבוד תהלתו", נראה פשוט
היות התחלות אדם בעבודת הבורא ברוך הוא,
בדאי אינו יכול תכף בהתחלתו לעלות
במדרגת עליונים

For he is still surrounded by foreign thoughts, his mind bound to this lowly world and its vanities. Rather, a person must first clear his thoughts and “sing away the tyrants,” meaning the forces of the husks that confuse and obstruct him in his service.

כִּי עָדִינוּ סָבְבוּהוּ זָרִים בְּמַחֲשַׁבְתּוֹ הַדְּבוּקָה
בַּעֲוֹלָם הַזֶּה הַשֹּׁפֵל וּבַהֲבִלּוּ, אָבָל צָרִיד אָדָם
מֵקֵדֵם לַפְּנוֹת מַחֲשַׁבְתּוֹ וּלְזַמֵּר צָרִיצִים, הִמָּה
הַקְּלִיפּוֹת הַמַּבְלִבּוֹת אוֹתוֹ מַעֲבֹדוֹת

This requires great effort. Only afterwards can he turn himself to ascend in holy thoughts, through unifications and higher intentions.

וְלִזְהָ צָרִיד עֲבוּדָה רַבָּה, וְאַחֵר כֶּף יִפְנֶה עֲצָמוֹ
לַעֲלוֹת בְּמַחֲשַׁבַת קְדוֹשִׁים בְּיְחֻדִּים וְכִנּוּנֹת
עֲלִיוֹנִים.

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Then, that initial labor he performed, namely “singing away the tyrants,” is considered for him equal to the primary and exalted labor by which he ascends to his ultimate purpose.

ואז נחשב לו אותה העבודה שעבד בתחלתו, והיא לזמר עריצים, כאותה העבודה החשובה העקרית שעולה בה לתכליתו.

Since his entire intention is for the sake of Heaven, it is all one. This is the meaning of “Sing the glory,” that the labor of removing the tyrants is as important as “make His praise glorious.”

כיון שכוונתו הכל לשם שמים והכל אחד, וזהו זמרו כבוד כו', פרושו כנ"ל שהעבודה של זמיר עריצים היא חשובה כמו שימו כבוד תהלתו.

“Praise” refers to the great level of the righteous person, who illuminates the higher worlds. Praise is an expression of light, as in the phrase “his flashes shine with light.”

ש'תהלה' נקרא המדרגה הגדולה של הצדיק שמאיר לעולמות עליונים, ותהלה הוא לשון "אור, כמו עטיושיתיו תהל אור".

This is also the explanation here: “And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt.” There, his service was in a state of smallness.

וזהו גם כן הפרוש כאן, "ויחי יעקב בארץ מצרים", ששם היתה עבודתו במדרגת קטנות.

This is hinted to by “seventeen years,” whose numerical value corresponds to “good,” which is the holy Name in reduced form, because he was in the land of Egypt, a place of husks.

וזה רמז "שבע עשרה שנה", גימטריא טו"ב, שהוא השם הקדוש במספר קטן, מחמת שהיה בארץ מצרים מקום הקליפות.

His primary service there was to “sing away the tyrants.” Even so, it was considered for him equal to the other years in which he served in a state of greatness.

והיתה עיקר העבודה לזמר עריצים, אף על פי כן היה נחשב לו זה פשוט שניו שהיה עובד בהם במדרגת גדלות.

This is the meaning of “And the days of Jacob, the years of his life,” that these years were counted equally together with all his other years.

וזהו "ויחי ימי יעקב שני חייו", פרוש שנה היתה נחשב לו כמנין שאר שניו בשנה כנ"ל.

[NOTE Summary:

In this maamar, Rabbi Elimelech presents a foundational teaching about spiritual growth and divine service. A person cannot begin their avodat Hashem by immediately ascending to lofty spiritual states. At the outset, the mind is still entangled in foreign thoughts, habits, and attachments to the physical world. These inner disturbances are described as “aritzim,” tyrants or violent forces, identified with the klipot that obstruct true service.

The first and often most difficult stage of avodah is therefore not illumination, inspiration, or lofty unifications, but clearing space. One must labor to quiet, remove, and “sing away” these inner tyrants. This stage demands sustained effort, patience, and humility. Only afterward can a person rise into higher consciousness, holy intentions, and elevated spiritual awareness.

Rabbi Elimelech teaches a crucial principle: when one’s intention throughout is purely for the sake of Heaven, the preparatory work of removing inner resistance is considered equal in value to the most exalted spiritual achievements. The verse “Sing the glory of His Name, make His praise glorious” is interpreted to mean that the act of “singing away” negativity is itself a form of divine glory, no less than the radiant praise associated with

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the highest levels of the tzaddik, which illuminate the upper worlds. Praise, tehilah, is associated with light, yet that light is only possible because the darkness was first addressed.

This idea explains the life of Jacob in Egypt. Egypt represents a place of spiritual constriction and impurity, where service is necessarily in a state of katnut, spiritual smallness. Jacob's seventeen years in Egypt symbolize goodness in a diminished form, a holy Name expressed in reduced measure, appropriate to an environment dominated by klipot. Yet these years were counted equally with all the other years of his life. His avodah of restraint, endurance, and inner purification in Egypt was valued just as highly as his moments of spiritual greatness.

Practical Takeaway:

Periods of spiritual dryness, inner struggle, or lack of inspiration are not spiritual failures. The effort to remove distractions, regulate thought, and persist in simple faith-driven practice is itself precious avodat Hashem. When intention is sincere, clearing inner obstacles is as valuable as moments of spiritual elevation. One should therefore not dismiss early or difficult stages of growth, but recognize them as integral and fully counted parts of a complete spiritual life.

Chassidic Story:

A young man once complained to Rabbi Elimelech that despite years of effort, his prayers felt heavy and uninspired. He said that others spoke of light, sweetness, and elevated states, while he felt only resistance and wandering thoughts.

Rabbi Elimelech listened and replied that when a forest is overgrown, the first labor is not planting orchards but cutting back thorns and clearing pathways. The worker who removes stones and weeds may see no fruit, yet without him nothing beautiful could ever grow.

He told the student that every time he pushed away a distracting thought, every time he returned to prayer despite inner resistance, he was already singing before Heaven. Those quiet struggles, unseen by others, were counted among his greatest accomplishments. **END NOTE]**

מאמר ג

Alternatively, one may explain “the days of Jacob, the years of his life,” for the primary vitality of the righteous person is those days in which he adds light through his service.

These are called “days,” in accordance with what is said, “God called the light ‘day’” (Genesis 1:5).

או יאמר “ימי יעקב שני חייו כו”, לפי שעיקר החיות של הצדיק הם אותם הימים שמוסיף בהם אור העבודה.

והם נקראים “ימים” על דרך שגאמר “ויקרא אלקים לאור יום” (בראשית א:ה).

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This is the meaning of “And the days of Jacob,” namely, the days in which he added light, these were the essence of “the years of his life.” Understand this well.

וזהו “ויהי ימי יעקב,” פירוש הימים שבהם מוסיף בהם אור, הם היו עיקר “שני חייו.” וקל להבין.

[NOTE Summary:

In this brief but penetrating teaching, Rabbi Elimelech redefines what is meant by “life” in the verse “the days of Jacob, the years of his life.” Not all days are equal. The true vitality of a tzaddik is found specifically in those days when he adds light to his service of God. These are the days that genuinely count.

The Torah itself defines “day” as light, as stated in the verse “God called the light ‘day.’” Accordingly, days that are filled with added illumination, clarity, and spiritual contribution are considered true days. They are alive. Days that pass without added light may exist chronologically, but they do not fully participate in the essence of life.

Thus, when the Torah speaks of the “days of Jacob,” it refers not merely to the passage of time, but to the accumulation of illuminated moments, days in which divine light was increased through avodah. These days alone are described as “the years of his life,” because they alone express authentic spiritual living.

Rabbi Elimelech’s teaching subtly but powerfully shifts the definition of a meaningful life. Life is not measured by duration, but by illumination. Even a short span filled with added light outweighs long stretches of spiritual stagnation.

Practical Takeaway:

One should not measure life solely by productivity, longevity, or outward activity, but by whether a given day added light. A single act of sincerity, growth, or clarity can transform an ordinary day into a true “day of life.” This teaching encourages mindfulness in avodat Hashem, asking not “How much did I do today?” but “Did I add light today?”

Chassidic Story:

It is told that a chassid once lamented to Rabbi Elimelech that entire weeks seemed to pass without spiritual excitement or insight. He felt that time was slipping away from him.

Rabbi Elimelech replied that Heaven does not count pages of the calendar the way people do. A single moment of honest effort, a sincere thought turned toward God, can outweigh many empty days. “That moment,” he said, “is written above as a full day, shining with light.”

The chassid later said that this teaching changed how he lived. He stopped chasing grand experiences and instead sought to bring a small measure of light into each day, knowing that such days alone are truly alive.

END NOTE]

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Parshas Vayechi

מאמר ד

Alternatively, one may explain “And Jacob lived,” and we will first explain the verse: “Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good.” For behold, through the pure and refined prayer of the righteous person, he draws the Creator, blessed be He and blessed be His Name, into this world.

This is comparable to bringing His great Name into a state of smallness, for His essential greatness is that His glory is upon the heavens and His greatness spans all worlds.

When the righteous person draws Him into this world, it is as if this is a form of smallness. The holy Name in smallness has the numerical value of seventeen.

Yet through this act of drawing the Creator into this world, the earth becomes filled with His kindness, with many influences, blessings, and good things.

This is the meaning of “Give thanks to the Lord,” that is, pray before Him and give thanks to Him.

“For He is good,” meaning that even though you draw Him, blessed be His Name and exalted, as it were, into a state of smallness, namely the holy Name Havayah in smallness whose numerical value is “good,” as stated above.

“For His kindness is eternal,” meaning that through this you bring about the drawing of His kindness into this world, namely flows of kindness and goodness.

This is the meaning of “And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years,” that through the holy Name which he drew downward, whose numerical value is seventeen, as stated above.

Through this he had vitality and good influences in the land of Egypt.

This is the meaning of “Blessed is the Lord... and His kindness from me,” namely that through my prayer I cause His kindness to be drawn into the world, as explained above. Understand this well.

או יאמר “ויחי כו’”, ונקדים לפרש הפסוק “הודו לה’ כי טוב כו’”, דהנה הצדיק על ידי תפלתו הנכונה והצלולה הוא ממשיך את הבורא ברוך הוא וברוך שמו לעולם הזה.

והרי הוא כמו שמביא שמו הגדול אל הקטנות, כי עיקר גדולתו על השמים כבודו, וגדולתו על כל העולמות.

והצדיק ממשיכו לעולם הזה הוא כמו קטנות, והשם הקדוש בקטנות גימטריא י”ז.

אף על ידי זה שממשיך את הבורא לעולם הזה, אז מלאה הארץ חסדו בהשפעות וברכות וטובות הרבה.

ונה “הודו לה’”, הינו שתתפללו לפניו ותודו לו.

כי טוב”, רציון לומר הגם שתביאו אותו ותשבח ויתעלה כמו אל הקטנות, דהינו השם הקדוש הנה ברוך הוא בקטנות גימטריא טוב כפ”ל.

כי לעולם חסדו”, רציון לומר כי על ידי זה תפעלו להמשיך לעולם הזה חסדו, הינו השפעות חסדים וטובות.

ונהו “ויחי יעקב בארץ מצרים שבע עשרה שנה”, רציון לומר על ידי השם הקדוש שהמשיך למטה והוא גימטריא י”ז כפ”ל.

על ידי זה היתה לו חיות והשפעות טובות בארץ מצרים.

ונהו “ברוך ה’ אשר כו’ וחסדו מאתי”, דהינו שעל ידי תפילתי אני גורם להמשיך חסדו לעולם כפ”ל. וקל להבין.

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[NOTE Summary:

In this maamar, Rabbi Elimelech explains the verse “Give thanks to Hashem for He is good, for His kindness is eternal” as a teaching about the power of the tzaddik’s prayer. Through pure and refined prayer, the tzaddik draws the Creator, blessed be He, down into this world. This act is described as bringing the Divine Name into a state of “smallness,” since God’s true greatness is that His glory rests above the heavens and across all worlds. To draw that infinite greatness into the finite world is, relative to His exalted state, a form of contraction.

This contraction is symbolized by the Divine Name in “smallness,” whose numerical value is seventeen, equivalent to the word “good.” Although this appears as a diminishing of divine transcendence, it is precisely this act that fills the world with kindness, blessing, and abundance. When the tzaddik prays and draws Godliness downward, the result is that “the earth is filled with His kindness,” manifesting as tangible goodness and beneficence in the physical world.

This explains the verse “And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years.” Through the Divine Name of seventeen that Jacob drew downward, he attained vitality and blessing even in Egypt, a place of spiritual constriction. Likewise, the verse “Blessed is Hashem... and His kindness from me” is understood to mean that through the tzaddik’s prayer, divine kindness is actively drawn into the world.

Practical Takeaway:

Prayer is not only a request or expression of gratitude; it is an act that draws divine presence into everyday reality. Even when spiritual work feels like a descent or contraction, its purpose may be to bring holiness into places of limitation. A person should therefore approach prayer with seriousness and humility, recognizing that sincere prayer can become a conduit for blessing, kindness, and goodness to flow into the world. **END NOTE]**

מאמר ה

Alternatively, one may explain “And Jacob lived,” for it is fitting to contemplate and understand the matter of receiving reward for mitzvot. From the perspective of reason and strict justice, reward is not due merely because we fulfill the mitzvot, for since the Creator, blessed and exalted be His Name, created us for His glory, we are not even sufficient to thank Him for one out of a thousand of the kindnesses He has done for us.

It is proper and correct that we fulfill His holy commandments, as the Tanna said: “If you have learned much Torah, do not claim merit for yourself, for that is what you were created for.”

או יאמר “ויהי יעקב כו”, דהנה ראוי להשפיל ולהבין על קבלת שכר המצוות, הנה מצד השכל והדין אינו מחמת קיום המצוות, כי מאחר שהבורא יתעלה בראנו לכבודו, ואין אנו מספיקים להודות על אחת מאלהי כו' על הטובות כו' שעשה עמנו.

וראוי ונכון היותנו מקימים מצוותיו הקדושות כמאמר התנא “אם למדת תורה הרבה אל תתחזיק טובה לעצמך כו' כי לכך נוצרת.”

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Rather, the essence of our receiving reward is because the Creator, blessed be His Name, placed within us the evil inclination, which incites us at every moment and overpowers us to crave desire and, Heaven forbid, to contemplate transgression, for the inclination of his thoughts is only evil all day.

A person stands against it and, with strategy, wages war against it, to guard and protect himself from every evil matter: from flattery, falsehood, mockery, evil speech, desires, improper thoughts, and the like.

This requires great warfare and labor to break the power of the desires of the evil inclination, and this is a great affliction and self-mortification.

Through this, the Holy One, blessed be He, sanctifies and purifies him as if he had performed a mitzvah, for through mitzvot we are sanctified and purified, as stated: “Who has sanctified us with His commandments.”

This is what the Gemara says: “One who sits idle and does not transgress is credited by Scripture as if he performed a mitzvah.”

This is as explained above: by breaking the power of the desire of the evil inclination and not sinning, he becomes sanctified as if he had performed a mitzvah.

This is why Moses our teacher prayed: “Make us rejoice according to the days You afflicted us.” Meaning, gladden us with Your holiness corresponding to the days of our affliction through the evil inclination, which we are forced to battle and break its power.

“The years in which we saw evil,” meaning all the years we saw and confronted evil in order to guard ourselves from it.

Through this, “May Your work be seen by Your servants,” meaning that it will be considered before You as if we had performed all Your mitzvot and deeds.

For through the afflictions and self-mortification imposed by the evil inclination, by breaking its power, it is considered as if one fulfilled all the mitzvot.

אף עיקר קבלת שכרנו הוא מצד שהבורא יתשבח נתן בנו יצר הרע המסית אותנו בכל עת ורגע ומתגבר עלינו להתאוות תאוה ולהרהר חס ושלום בעבירה, וכל יצר מחשבותיו רק רע כל היום.

והאדם עומד כנגדו ובתחבולות יעשה מלחמה נגדו להזהר ולהשמר מכל דבר רע, מתניפות ושקרים וליצנות ולשון הרע ותאוות והרהורים והדומה להם.

ולזה צריך מלחמה ועבודה רבה לשבר כח תאוות היצר הרע, וזהו ענוי וסגור גדול.

על ידי זה הקדוש ברוך הוא מקדש ומטהר כאלו עשה מצוה, כי על ידי המצוות אנו מתקדשים ומטהרים באומר “אשר קדשנו במצוותיו.”

וזהו דאמרינו בגמרא “היושב בטל ואינו עובר עבירה מעלה עליו הכתוב כאלו עשה מצוה.”

והינו כפ"ל, על ידי שהוא משבר כח התאוה של היצר הרע שלא לחטא חס ושלום, על ידי זה הוא מתקדש כאלו עשה מצוה.

וזהו שהתפלל משה רבנו עליו השלום “שמחנו כימות עניתנו”, פרוש שתשמחנו בקדושתך כימות עניתנו על ידי היצר הרע שאנו מכרחים לשבר כח תאוות.

שנות ראינו רעה, פרוש כל השנים אשר ראינו והסתכלנו ברע להזהר ולהשמר ממנו.

על ידי זה “יראה אל עבדיך פֶּעֱלָה”, רציון לומר יחשב לפניך כאלו עשינו כל מצוותיך ופעולותיך.

כפ"ל, שעל ידי ענויים וסגופים מהיצר הרע לשבר כחו, יחשב כאלו עשה כל המצוות.

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“You have granted him his heart’s desire” meaning that You gave a person free choice, that he may act according to the desire of his heart. “And the request of his lips You have not withheld, Selah.” You did not restrain him from speaking with his lips as he wishes. All of this You did for the benefit of the person. (Psalms 21:3–4)

“For You precede him with blessings of goodness,” meaning that through this, when a person has free choice and the evil inclination incites him and he subdues his inclination, through this the Holy One, blessed be He, precedes him with blessings and great reward, through the holy Name Havayah, whose numerical value is “good.” (Psalms 21:4)

This applies even in bitter exile, when the Name is in a state of smallness. In the future, when the Name will be in greatness, there will surely be no end or limit to its influence. “Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good,” meaning to the Name Havayah, His great Name, blessed be He. “For His kindness is eternal.” (Psalms 118:1)

“Issachar is a strong-boned donkey,” meaning that there is reward for a person when the donkey, namely the material body that desires and craves, is subdued by the person who breaks the power of its desire, and this causes him great reward. (Genesis 49:14)

“Crouching between the boundaries,” meaning the tongue, which lies between the lips, for the choice is in his hands to speak with his tongue as he wishes. (Genesis 49:14)

“He saw that rest was good,” meaning that when a person breaks the power of his desire and seeks only rest from desires and foreign thoughts, through this he brings upon himself that it is “good,” receiving influence from the Attribute of Mercy whose numerical value is good. (Genesis 49:15)

This is “And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt,” meaning that by breaking the power of the desires of the evil inclination, which are called “the land of Egypt,” the realm of the husks, he attained vitality and influence from the Name of Mercy whose numerical value is seventeen. (Genesis 47:28)

תאֲזוּת לְבוֹ נָתַתָּ לּוֹ כו', זֶה שְׁנָתַתָּ לְאָדָם הַבְּחִירָה שֶׁיַּעֲשֶׂה כְּתַאֲזוּת לְבוֹ, וְאַרְשֵׁת שְׁפָתָיו בַּל מְנַעַת סָלָה, שְׁלֵא מְנַעַת מִמֶּנּוּ לְדַבֵּר בְּשִׁפְתָיו כְּרָצוֹנוֹ, כָּל זֹאת עָשִׂיתָ לְטוֹבַת הָאָדָם.

כִּי תִקְדָּמֶנּוּ בְּרָכוֹת טוֹב, פְּרוּשׁ עַל יְדֵי זֶה שֶׁהַבְּחִירָה לְאָדָם וְהַיָּצֵר הָרַע מְסִיתוֹ וְהוּא כּוֹבֵשׁ אֶת יָצָרוֹ, עַל יְדֵי זֶה יִקְדָּמֶנּוּ הַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ בְּרָכוֹת וְשֹׁכֵר גָּדוֹל, עַל יְדֵי הַשֵּׁם הַקָּדוֹשׁ שֶׁם הַנִּיָּה בְּרוּךְ הוּא שֶׁהוּא גִימָטְרִיָּא טוֹב.

וְהִנֵּנוּ אֲפִלּוּ בַּגְּלוּת הַמֶּר שֶׁהַשֵּׁם הוּא בְּקִטְנוּת, כִּי לְעֵתִיד שְׁיִהְיֶה הַשֵּׁם בַּגְּדָלוּת בְּיֻדָּא אֵין קֶץ וְסוֹף לְהַשְׁפָּעָתוֹ, וְזֶהוּ “הוֹדוּ לֵה” רָצִיוֹן לַוִּי לְשֵׁם הַנִּיָּה שְׁמוֹ הַגָּדוֹל יִתְשַׁבַּח, “כִּי טוֹב”, וְזֶהוּ “כִּי לְעוֹלָם תִּסְדּוּ”.

יִשְׁשַׁכָּר חֲמוֹר גֶּרֶם כו', פְּרוּשׁ “יֵשׁ שֹׁכֵר” לְאָדָם עַל יְדֵי שֶׁחֲמוֹר – הוּא הַגּוֹף הַחָמָר – הִתְחַמַּד וּמִתְאַוָּה וְהָאָדָם מְשַׁבֵּר כַּח תַּאֲזוּתוֹ, הוּא גּוֹרֵם לוֹ לְשֹׁכֵר הַגָּדוֹל.

רִבִּץ בֵּין הַמְּשָׁפְתִים, פְּרוּשׁ הַלְשׁוֹן, שֶׁהוּא רִבִּץ בֵּין הַמְּשָׁפְתִים, שֶׁהַבְּחִירָה בְּיָדוֹ לְדַבֵּר בְּלִשׁוֹנוֹ כְּרָצוֹנוֹ.

וַיֵּרָא מִנְחָה כִּי טוֹב, פְּרוּשׁ וְהָאָדָם מְשַׁבֵּר כַּח תַּאֲזוּתוֹ וְאֵינוֹ רוֹאֶה רַק שְׁיִהְיֶה לוֹ מְנוּחָה מִהַתַּאֲזוּת וְהַמְּחָשְׁבוֹת הַזָּרוֹת, עַל יְדֵי זֶה גּוֹרֵם לוֹ “כִּי טוֹב”.

וְזֶהוּ “וַיָּחִי יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם”, פְּרוּשׁ עַל יְדֵי שֶׁהָיָה מְשַׁבֵּר כַּח הַתַּאֲזוּת הַיָּצֵר הָרַע הַנִּקְרָאִים ‘אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם’ שֶׁהִיא הַקְּלִיפָה, עַל יְדֵי זֶה הָיְתָה לוֹ חַיִּית וְהַשְׁפָּעָה מֵהַשֵּׁם הַרְחָמִים שֶׁהוּא גִימָטְרִיָּא “שִׁבְעַ עֶשְׂרִי” כַּנִּל. וְקָל לְהַבִּין.

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[NOTE Summary:

In this maamar, Rabbi Elimelech develops a profound understanding of free will, desire, and reward. The verse “You have granted him his heart’s desire” is understood literally: God intentionally gave human beings freedom of choice, allowing them to follow the impulses of the heart. Likewise, “You did not withhold the request of his lips” teaches that a person is not restrained in speech. This freedom is not a flaw in creation, but a deliberate kindness, designed for humanity’s ultimate benefit.

Because a person possesses free will, the evil inclination actively entices and pressures him, stirring desires, urges, and distracting thoughts. When a person restrains himself, subdues his impulses, and chooses holiness, this inner victory becomes the very source of divine blessing. Through overcoming the evil inclination, the Holy One, blessed be He, brings blessings and reward upon the person, drawn from the Divine Name Havayah, whose numerical value is “good.” Even during bitter exile, when the Divine Name is revealed only in a diminished state, it remains a source of goodness and kindness. In the future, when that Name will be revealed in full greatness, its outpouring of blessing will be limitless.

This idea is further illustrated through Jacob’s blessing to Issachar. “Issachar is a strong-boned donkey” is read as “there is reward,” meaning that when the physical body, likened to a donkey driven by material craving, is restrained and disciplined, it generates immense spiritual reward. “Crouching between the boundaries” refers to the tongue, situated between the lips, emphasizing that speech too lies within human choice. When a person uses restraint in desire and speech, seeking only inner calm and freedom from intrusive urges, he merits goodness and blessing drawn from the Attribute of Mercy.

Thus, “And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt” is explained as spiritual vitality achieved through struggle. Egypt represents the realm of constriction and the forces of impurity. By breaking the power of desire and resisting the pull of the evil inclination, Jacob drew vitality and divine flow from the Name associated with mercy and goodness, symbolized by seventeen. True life, according to Rabbi Elimelech, emerges not from comfort, but from disciplined choice and inner conquest.

Practical Takeaway:

Spiritual reward is not only earned through visible mitzvot, but through the hidden battles of self-control. Restraining desire, guarding speech, and choosing calm over impulse are themselves acts of holiness. Every moment of inner discipline draws divine kindness into a person’s life, even when no external action is visible. One should therefore value inner restraint as a central pillar of avodat Hashem.

Chassidic Story:

It is related that a chassid once came to Rabbi Elimelech and confessed that he felt discouraged. He said that although he tried to avoid wrongdoing, he rarely felt elevated, inspired, or spiritually accomplished. Most of his effort, he said, went into holding himself back.

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Rabbi Elimelech replied by asking him how a dam works. The chassid answered that it blocks the force of water. Rabbi Elimelech smiled and said that it is precisely because the water is held back that it can later generate immense power and blessing. Without restraint, there is no strength, only waste.

He explained that every time the chassid restrained his tongue, checked a desire, or turned away from a harmful thought, he was storing spiritual energy that Heaven treasures deeply. Those unseen moments of self-control, Rabbi Elimelech taught, are counted Above as true life and become channels for divine blessing, even in the darkest places of exile. **END NOTE]**

מאמר ו

“And the days of Israel drew near.” We shall preface by explaining the verse: “Satisfy us in the morning with Your kindness.” At first glance, would it not be better for us to pray that He satisfy us with His kindness the entire day?

However, it appears that kindnesses are called “morning.” This is the meaning of “And Abraham arose early in the morning,” meaning that Abraham our father, peace be upon him, who was a great tzaddik, through his good deeds preceded and brought about the morning, that is, he aroused the kindnesses that are called “morning.”

But we, poor in deeds and lacking in heart, pray to the Holy One, blessed be He, that He satisfy us with His kindness in the morning, meaning that He Himself should arouse the kindnesses upon us.

And the Holy One, blessed be He, in His abundant mercy, hears the prayer of His people Israel and accepts our prayer with mercy and favor.

One may also intend this meaning in what they instituted for us in the first three blessings to say “Who bestows good kindnesses.” “Good kindnesses” means the kindnesses that the Holy One gives to the righteous, who are called “good.”

“Who bestows” is from the expression “and Abraham weaned,” meaning that the Holy One bestows these good kindnesses and does not wait until the kindnesses are aroused by the righteous.

Rather, “Owner of all,” meaning that the Holy One, in His abundant mercy, receives us all. Moreover, “and remembers the kindnesses of the fathers.”

וְיִקְרְבוּ יְמֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כּו'. וְנִקְדִּים לְפָרֵשׁ הַפָּסוּק “שֶׁבָּעֵנוּ בִּבְקָר חֶסֶדְךָ.” וְלִכְאוּרָה הֲלֹא טוֹב לָנוּ לְהִתְפַּלֵּל שֶׁיִּשְׁבָּעֵנוּ בְּחֶסֶדְךָ חֶסֶד אֵל כָּל הַיּוֹם.

אִם נִרְאָה דְּהֵינָה הַחֶסֶדִּים נִקְרָאִים ‘בְּקָר’, וְזֶה וְיִשְׁבָּעֵנוּ אֲבִרָהֶם בִּבְקָר”, פִּירוּשׁ דְּאֲבִרָהֶם אֲבִינוּ עָלֵינוּ הַשְּׁלוֹם שֶׁהֵיָה צָדִיק גָּדוֹל, הַקָּדִים עַל יְדֵי מַעֲשָׂיו הַטּוֹבִים לְהַשְׁכִּים וְלְהַקְדִּים אֶת הַבְּקָר, הֵינּוּ לְעוֹרֵר הַחֶסֶדִּים הַנִּקְרָאִים בְּקָר אֲכָל אֲנַחְנוּ דְּלִי מַעֲשִׂים וְחֶסְרֵי לֵב, אָנוּ מִתְפַּלְּלִין לְהַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ שֶׁהוּא יִשְׁבָּעֵנוּ בִּבְקָר חֶסְדִּי, שֶׁהוּא יְעוֹרֵר עָלֵינוּ הַחֶסֶדִּים.

וְהַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ בְּרַב רַחֲמָיו שׁוֹמֵעַ תְּפִלַּת עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל וּמִקְבֵּל בְּרַחֲמִים וּבְרָצוֹן אֶת תְּפִלָּתָנוּ.

וְיֵשׁ לִכְנוֹן הַפִּרוּשׁ בְּמָה שֶׁתִּקְנוּ לָנוּ בְּשִׁלֵּשׁ בְּרָכוֹת רִאשׁוֹנוֹת לומר “גּוֹמֵל חֶסֶדִּים טוֹבִים”, רָצוֹן לומר ‘חֶסֶדִּים טוֹבִים’, הֵינּוּ הַחֶסֶדִּים שֶׁהַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ נוֹתֵן לְצַדִּיקִים הַנִּקְרָאִים טוֹבִים.

וְגּוֹמֵל הוּא מְלֻשׁוֹן “וַיִּגְמַל אֲבִרָהֶם כּו’”, פִּירוּשׁ שֶׁהַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ הוּא גּוֹמֵל אֶת הַחֶסֶדִּים הַטּוֹבִים וְאֵינוּ מְמַתִּין עַד שֶׁיִּתְעוֹרְרוּ הַחֶסֶדִּים עַל יְדֵי צַדִּיקִים.

רַק “קוֹנֵה הַכֹּל”, פִּירוּשׁ שֶׁהַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרַךְ בְּרַב רַחֲמָיו מִקְבֵּל אֶת כָּלֵנוּ, וְלֹא עוֹד אֵלָּא “וְיִזְכֹּר חֶסְדֵי אֲבוֹת”.

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The first three blessings are called “fathers,” and they correspond to the three mochin, which are called “head.” In these three blessings there is no request, as explained in the Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim.

One can give a good reason for this: because the first three blessings are in the higher worlds, and there there is no accusation at all.

Therefore, no prayer is needed there, only praises and exaltations, for prayer exists only in a place of accusation.

This is the meaning of “and remembers the kindnesses,” that immediately at the very beginning of our praises, which are the first three blessings, He immediately remembers His kindnesses to fulfill all our needs.

Thus, already in “the fathers,” meaning the first three blessings, before the conclusion of our prayer, He answers us before we call.

This is the explanation of “You have granted him his heart’s desire,” for the desire and yearning of the righteous person is always that all Israel should be filled and satisfied with every good. The Holy One, blessed be He, places these desires in the heart of the righteous person so that he will pray before Him, for the Holy One desires the prayers of the righteous.

“And the request of his lips You have not withheld, Selah,” meaning that the Holy One, blessed be He, hears the prayer of the righteous. Moreover, “For You precede him with blessings of goodness,” meaning that even before he prays, He already precedes him with all blessings of goodness.

“For You place upon his head a crown of pure gold,” meaning that immediately at the beginning of the first three blessings, which are called “head,” You make of them a crown of pure gold. Therefore, before he calls, You answer, since there prayer is not required, as explained above.

This is the meaning of “Boast in the Name,” referring to the worlds where there is only praise. Consequently, “the heart of those who seek the Lord will rejoice” immediately, even before they pray.

דְּשִׁלַּשׁ בְּרָכוֹת הָרִאשׁוֹנוֹת נִקְרָאִים ‘אָבוֹת’, וְהֵם הַשְּׁלֹשׁ מוֹחִין הַנִּקְרָאִים ‘רֹאשׁ’, וּבְאוֹתָן שְׁלֹשׁ בְּרָכוֹת אֵין שָׁם תְּפִלָּה כְּמוֹ שֶׁמִּבְאָר בְּשִׁלְחַן עֲרוּךְ אוֹרַח חַיִּים.

וְיֵשׁ לָתֵן טַעַם לְשִׁבַּח לָזֶה, מִפְּנֵי שֶׁשְּׁלֹשׁ בְּרָכוֹת הָרִאשׁוֹנוֹת הֵם בְּעוֹלָמוֹת הָעֲלִיּוֹנוֹת וְשָׁם אֵין קִטְרוֹג כָּלֵל.

לָכֵן אֵין צָרִיךְ שָׁם שׁוֹם תְּפִלָּה רַק תְּהִלּוֹת וְנִתְשַׁבְּחוֹת, כִּי אֵין תְּפִלָּה אֵלָּא בְּמָקוֹם קִטְרוֹג.

וְנִהוּ “וְזוֹכֵר חֲסִדֵי כו’”, פְּרוּשׁ תִּכְף וּמִיד בְּהִתְחַלּוּתֵינוּ שְׂבָחִים, הֵם הִגִּי רִאשׁוֹנוֹת, מִיד הוּא זוֹכֵר אֶת חֲסִדּוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת כָּל צְרִכֵינוּ.

מִיד בְּ‘אָבוֹת’, הֵינּוּ שְׁלֹשׁ רִאשׁוֹנוֹת, קִדְּם גָּמַר תְּפִלָּתֵנוּ הוּא יַעֲנֵנוּ טָרָם נִקְרָא.

וְנִהוּ פְּרוּשׁ “תַּאֲוֹת לְבוֹ נִתְּנוּ לוֹ”, דְּהִתְאַוָּה וְהִתְשׁוּקָה שֶׁל הַצַּדִּיק תָּמִיד שִׁיְהִי כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל מְלֵאִים וּשְׂבָעִים כָּל טוֹב, וְהַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרֵךְ נוֹתֵן הַתַּאֲוֹת הָאֵלּוּ בְּלֵב הַצַּדִּיק כְּדִי שִׁיִּתְפַּלֵּל לְפָנָיו, שֶׁהַקְדוּשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא מִתְאַוָּה לְתַפִּלָּתוֹ כו’.

וְאַרְשֵׁת שְׂפָתָיו כֹּל מִנְעֻת סָלָה”, פְּרוּשׁ וְהַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרֵךְ שׁוֹמֵעַ תְּפִלָּתוֹ שֶׁל הַצַּדִּיק, וְלֹא עוֹד אֵלָּא “כִּי תִקְדָּמוּ בְּרָכוֹת טוֹב”, פְּרוּשׁ וְקוֹדֵם שִׁיִּתְפַּלֵּל עֲדִין הוּא מִקְדִּים כָּל בְּרָכוֹת טוֹב.

עַל יְדֵי שֶׁ“תַּשִּׁית לְרֹאשׁוֹ עֲטֻרַת פָּז”, פְּרוּשׁ מִחֲמַת שְׂמִיד בְּהִתְחַלַּת שְׁלֹשׁ רִאשׁוֹנוֹת הַנִּקְרָאִים ‘רֹאשׁ’ אֵתָּה עוֹשֶׂה מֵהֶם עֲטֻרַת פָּז, וְלָכֵן טָרָם יִקְרָא אֵתָּה תַעֲנֶה, כִּי שָׁם אֵין צָרִיךְ לְתַפִּלָּה כְּנִל.

וְנִהוּ “הִתְהַלְלוּ בִשְׁמִי”, פְּרוּשׁ בְּעוֹלָמוֹת שְׁשָׁם רַק תְּהִלָּה, וּמִמִּילָּא “יִשְׁמַח לֵב מִבְּקָשִׁי הִ” מִיד קִדְּם שִׁיִּתְפַּלְלוּ.

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This is “And the days of Israel drew near to die,” meaning that Jacob our father would constantly consider the day of death as near, thinking that perhaps he might die that very day.

This is the meaning of “and the days drew near,” that all his days were in his eyes close to death. Through this, he refined his body, and all his thoughts were in the upper worlds.

This is “And he called his son Joseph,” which hints that even when he was involved in matters of this world, such as “his son,” nevertheless all his thoughts were “to Joseph,” meaning the upper world that is called “Joseph.”

[NOTE Summary:

Rabbi Elimelech explains that the deepest desire of the tzaddik is not personal benefit, but that all of Israel be filled and satisfied with goodness. God Himself implants this yearning in the heart of the tzaddik so that he will pray, for the Holy One desires the prayers of the righteous. Thus, “You have granted him his heart’s desire” refers to God placing holy desire within the tzaddik, and “You did not withhold the request of his lips” teaches that God listens attentively to such prayer.

More than this, God precedes the prayer with blessing. Already at the very beginning of prayer, in the first three blessings known as the “head,” which are entirely praise and contain no requests, divine kindness is awakened. These blessings correspond to the upper worlds, where there is no accusation and therefore no need for supplication. Because praise alone suffices there, God responds even before a request is voiced, fulfilling “before they call, I will answer.” This is the meaning of placing a “crown of pure gold upon his head,” transforming the opening praises into a channel of immediate blessing.

Rabbi Elimelech then turns to Jacob’s inner life. “And the days of Israel drew near to die” does not merely describe chronology, but Jacob’s constant awareness of mortality. He lived each day as if death were near, which refined his body and elevated his thoughts to the upper worlds. As a result, even when he engaged in worldly matters, symbolized by calling “his son,” his inner consciousness remained directed “to Joseph,” representing attachment to the higher spiritual realm. Jacob’s physical life and spiritual awareness were never separated.

Practical Takeaway:

True prayer begins with praise, trust, and alignment, not with demands. When a person cultivates sincere devotion and awareness of life’s fragility, blessing can be drawn down even before words are spoken. Living with constant spiritual awareness transforms ordinary actions into vehicles for holiness, allowing one to remain inwardly connected to higher purpose even while engaged in the practical affairs of this world. **END NOTE]**

וְזֶהוּ “וַיִּקְרְבוּ יְמֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לָמוּת”, פְּרוּשׁ יַעֲקֹב אָבִינוּ עָלָיו הַשְּׁלוֹם הָיָה מְחַשֵּׁב תָּמִיד אֶת יוֹם הַמִּיתָה שֶׁהוּא קָרוֹב וְשָׂמָּה יָמוּת הַיּוֹם.

וְזֶהוּ “וַיִּקְרְבוּ כו’”, רִצְיוֹן לומר שְׂכָל יָמָיו הָיוּ בְּעֵינָיו קְרוֹבִים לַמִּיתָה, וְעַל יְדֵי זֶה הָיָה מְזוּכָּר אֶת גּוֹפוֹ וְהָיוּ כָּל מַחְשְׁבוֹתָיו בְּעוֹלָמוֹת הָעֲלִיוֹנִים.

וְזֶהוּ “וַיִּקְרָא לְבְנוֹ יוֹסֵף”, פְּרוּשׁ זֶה רָמַז אֶף כְּשֶׁהָיָה בְּעֵינָיו עוֹלָם הַזֶּה, דִּהְיָנוּ “לְבָנוֹ” וּכְדוּמָה, אֶף עַל פִּי כֵן הָיוּ כָּל מַחְשְׁבוֹתָיו “לְיוֹסֵף”, דִּהְיָנוּ עוֹלָם הָעֲלִיוֹן הַנִּקְרָא “יוֹסֵף”.

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מאמר ז

Alternatively, one may explain “And the days of Israel drew near... place your hand under my thigh.” Behold, the essential matter is to truly unify His great Name, which means that a person must give over his soul for the sanctification of His blessed and exalted Name.

Therefore, there is a positive commandment in the Torah to recite the Shema in the evening and in the morning, for this is the unification of His Name, through which we give over our souls to His great Name, blessed be He.

A person must truly imagine in his soul as if at that moment his soul is being given over for the unification of His great Name. This is the way of the righteous.

This is “And the days of Israel drew near to die,” meaning that he was constantly giving over his soul so truly that he was close to death.

“And he called his son Joseph.” Seemingly, it should have said “his son Joseph.” Rather, the explanation is that one who fulfills the Torah merely by not transgressing its commandments is only on the level of a servant, who does not violate his master’s commands.

But to be called a “son” of the Omnipresent, one must create boundaries and safeguards for himself and add to his service, ascending from level to level according to his refined understanding.

This is “And he called his son,” meaning: who is truly called his son? “To Joseph,” meaning one who constantly adds and increases, as explained.

“Place your hand,” meaning all your strength, which is the Torah and mitzvot that you fulfill, must be guarded carefully.

A great tzaddik who constantly adds to his service must protect himself from falling into arrogance, thinking that he is good and beneficent because of his constant spiritual growth.

The remedy is to constantly remember that all one’s merits are not sufficient to save him even once from a serious failing, if such were to occur.

או יאמר “ויקרבו ימי ישראל כו' שים נא ידך תחת ירכי”, נראה דהנה העיקר הוא ליחד שמו הגדול באמת, והוא שימסר אדם נפשו על קדושת שמו יתברך ויתעלה.

ולכן מצות עשה בתורה לקרות קריאת שמע ערב ובקר, שזהו יחוד שמו שאנו מוסרים נפשנו לשמו הגדול יתברך.

רק שצריך האדם לדמות בנפשו באמת כאלו עתה נמסרת נפשו על יחוד שמו הגדול, וכן הוא דרך הצדיקים.

ונהו “ויקרבו ימי ישראל למות”, פרוש שתמיד היה מוסר נפשו כל כך באמת שהיה קרוב למיתה.

ויקרא לבנו ליוסף”, לכאורה היה לו לומר “לבנו יוסף”. אף הענין הוא, מה שהאדם מקיים התורה שאינו עובר על מצוותיה, אינו אלא בדרך גת ‘עבד’ שאינו עובר על מצוות אדוניו.

אבל להיות נקרא ‘בן’ למקום, צריך לעשות לעצמו גדרים וסגייגים ולהוסיף בעבודה לפי שכלו הנה ממדרגה למדרגה.

ונהו “ויקרא לבנו”, פרוש מי הוא בנו, “ליוסף” שמוסיף תמיד כנ”ל.

שים נא ידך”, פרוש כל כחה, הם התורה והמצוות שאמה מקיים.

לפי שהצדיק הגדול המוסיף תמיד בעבודה צריך לשמור עצמו שלא יפול לגאון מחמת שישבור שהוא טוב ומטיב בעבודה להוסיף בה תמיד.

והתקון לזה הוא לזכר תמיד ולחשב שכל זכויותיו אינם כדאי להנצל פעם אחת מחטא קרי רחמנא לצלן אם נזדמן לו.

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Through this awareness, a person is humbled and subdued. This is “place your hand under my thigh,” hinting to remembering that failing.

ובְּזֶה יִכְנַע וְיִשְׁפָּל, וְזֶהוּ “שִׁים נָא יָדְךָ תַּחַת יָרְכִי”, רִמּוֹז עַל הַחֲטָא הַנִּלְכָּד.

Even if, Heaven forbid, it were to occur, all one’s merits would pass away. Remembering this saves a person from arrogance.

אֲשָׁם חַס וְשָׁלוֹם נִדְמָן לוֹ אִזּוֹ הַכֹּל חָלַף וְעָבַר חַס וְשָׁלוֹם, וּבְזֶה תִּנָּצֵל מִן הַגָּאוֹן.

This is “Do not bury me in Egypt,” meaning in the husks, which are called Egypt. Understand this well.

וְזֶהוּ “אַל תִּקְבְּרֵנִי בְּמִצְרַיִם”, הֵם הַקְּלִיפּוֹת הַנִּקְרָאִים מִצְרַיִם. וְקַל לְהַבִּין.

[NOTE Summary:

Rabbi Elimelech teaches that the essence of divine service is the true unification of God’s Name, which requires a person to give over his soul for the sanctification of Heaven. This is the inner meaning of the mitzvah to recite Shema morning and evening. One must not recite it mechanically, but genuinely imagine and feel as though at that very moment he is surrendering his soul entirely for God’s unity. This constant readiness for self-sacrifice is the defining path of the tzaddik.

This explains the verse “And the days of Israel drew near to die.” Jacob lived in a perpetual state of spiritual self-nullification, so sincere that it was as though he were always close to death. His consciousness was never anchored in self-preservation but in complete devotion.

Rabbi Elimelech then explains why the Torah says “and he called his son to Joseph” rather than simply “his son Joseph.” One who merely refrains from sin and obeys commandments is on the level of a servant. To be called a “son” of God requires active spiritual growth: building safeguards, adding effort, and ascending continuously from level to level. “Joseph” signifies constant increase and addition in avodah. A true “son” is one who always adds.

However, continual growth carries a grave danger: spiritual arrogance. A tzaddik who constantly ascends may come to believe that his accomplishments define him. The remedy is radical humility. A person must remember that all his merits together are not sufficient to protect him even once from severe failure were it to occur. This awareness breaks pride and preserves purity. “Place your hand under my thigh” alludes to placing all one’s spiritual strength, Torah and mitzvot, beneath this humbling awareness. Only through such humility can one avoid being “buried in Egypt,” meaning trapped in the klipot of ego and self-importance.

Practical Takeaway:

True spiritual growth requires two forces held together: constant upward striving and constant humility. One must aim to grow, add, and refine endlessly, yet never identify with achievement. Regularly contemplating one’s fragility and dependence on divine mercy protects growth from turning into arrogance. When devotion is paired with humility, spiritual ascent remains pure and life-giving rather than self-corrupting. **END NOTE]**

The Rebbe, Rebbe Elimelech of Lizhensk

Noam Elimelech

Parshas Vayechi

מאמר ה

“And Joseph took them both, Ephraim with his right hand toward Israel’s left... and Manasseh the firstborn.” One should question this, for the main intention of the verse is to explain that the firstborn was on Israel’s right and the younger on his left. Why then does Scripture mention Joseph’s right and left, which seems superfluous?

Rather, it appears that Jacob our father’s primary intent was to draw down upon Israel after him continual influence and blessing for all generations. He wished to draw this through these two righteous sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, as it is said, “Through you shall Israel bless, saying: May God make you like Ephraim and like Manasseh.”

The reason it had to be specifically through these two righteous ones is that the world always requires two types of tzaddikim. One thinks constantly in the upper worlds and in unifications, adding light above and above. The other thinks of the needs of the world: livelihood, blessing, life, and all necessities. Through these two types of tzaddikim the world is sustained.

Manasseh, the firstborn, was on the level of constantly ascending from level to level and not thinking of worldly matters at all. Ephraim, by contrast, was younger in that he did not rise as much in levels, but constantly thought about drawing down influence and blessing for Israel.

This was more precious in the eyes of Israel our father, because his primary aim was to draw goodness upon Israel. Joseph’s intent was the opposite: he thought Manasseh was greater because of his higher intentions and ascent.

Therefore Joseph placed Ephraim at his own right, thinking that this would suffice to draw blessings to Israel, while Manasseh he placed at his father’s right. But Jacob thought otherwise, precisely the opposite.

ויקח יוסף את שניהם את אפרים בימינו כו' מימין ישראל וישלח כו' והוא הצעיר כו' שכל את ידיו כי מנשה הבכור. ויש לדקדק הלא עיקר פונת הכתוב הוא לפרש שהבכור היה מימין ישראל והצעיר משמאלו, ונמין ושמאל של יוסף הוא מותר.

אף נראה שעיקר מחשבתו של יעקב אבינו עליו השלום היתה להמשיך לישראל אתרי כל הימים השפעות והברכות בלן להיותם קמים תמיד, ורצה להמשיך על ידי ב' צדיקים הללו אפרים ומנשה, כאמרו “בך יברך ישראל כו' באפרים ובמנשה

והטעם למה דוקא על ידי אלו הצדיקים, היות שהעולם צריך תמיד לשני מיני צדיקים, האחד הוא שישב תמיד בעולמות העליונים וביחודים להוסיף אור תמיד למעלה למעלה, ואחד לחשב בצרכי עולם, מה שהעולם צריך פרנסה וברכה וחיים ושאר הצטרפותם, ובשני מיני צדיקים הללו הוא קיום העולם.

ולזה רצה להמשיך ולפעול זאת על ידם, “כי מנשה הבכור” היה במדרגתו לעלות תמיד ממדרגה למדרגה ולא לחשב בעניני העולם הזה כלל, ואפרים היה צעיר ממנו בעבודה שלא היה כל כך הולך במדרגות, כי אם שהיה חושב תמיד המושכת השפעה על ישראל.

ונה היה חשוב בעיני ישראל אבינו יותר, כי עיקר מגמתו היתה למשך טוב על ישראל, וכונת יוסף היתה הפך, שהיה סבר שמנשה חשוב מחמת רב פונתו ועליתו.

ולזה לקח את אפרים לימין עצמו, כי פונתו היתה גם כן בשביל ישראל להמשיך הברכות על ידי ב' הצדיקים הללו, אבל סבר שדי לאפרים כח ימינו כמה שהעמידו לימין עצמו, ועיקר הנה אצלו מנשה, ולכן העמידו לימין אביו.

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Because Ephraim was the younger, Jacob crossed his hands to bless him with the right, for this was Jacob's essential intention: to bring enduring goodness and mercy to future generations, which was Ephraim's level.

This is why Jacob said, "I know, my son, I know." He acknowledged that Manasseh was indeed greater in spiritual ascent, but nevertheless "his younger brother shall be greater than he," meaning that his influence would fill the nations.

Therefore Ephraim was dearer in his eyes, and so "he placed Ephraim before Manasseh."

This is "The secret of Hashem is for those who fear Him." Those who fear Him are the tzaddikim who draw down influence, and they must do so in secret and concealment, lest accusation arise against the good.

"And His covenant to make it known to them" refers to the tzaddik who conducts himself according to the covenant and the Torah, to make this path known so others may learn from it.

[NOTE Summary:

Rabbi Elimelech explains that Jacob's blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh reveals a foundational principle about how divine blessing is sustained in the world. Jacob's intention was not limited to blessing his grandchildren personally, but to establish a lasting channel of blessing and spiritual vitality for all future generations of Israel. For this purpose, two distinct types of tzaddikim are required.

One type of tzaddik is represented by Manasseh. His service is focused almost entirely on ascent, constant elevation from level to level, attachment to upper worlds, and deep spiritual unifications. He minimizes involvement with worldly concerns. The second type is represented by Ephraim. His service is directed toward drawing blessing, sustenance, mercy, and goodness down into the world for the sake of Israel. He thinks continually about the needs of people and the practical well being of the community.

Joseph assumed that Manasseh was greater, because spiritual ascent and lofty intention appear, on the surface, to be a higher form of service. For this reason, Joseph placed Manasseh at Jacob's right hand. Jacob, however, saw more deeply. He understood that while Manasseh's level was indeed higher in personal ascent, Ephraim's role was more essential for the ongoing life of Israel. The ultimate purpose of spiritual greatness is not self

ולא כן היתה דעת יעקב אבינו עליו השלום, אדרבה להפך, לפי שהיה אפרים הצעיר לכן שפל את ידיו לברכו בימין, כי זה היה עיקר פועל יעקב להיטיב אחריו לדורותיו שהיו מזמנים כל טוב השפעה ורחמים, וזה היה מדרגת אפרים.

ונהו שאמר יעקב "ידעתי בני ידעתי", פרוש שאמר ליוסף הידיעה של בני, ידעתי מזה גם כן שמנשה הוא היותר גדול במדרגתו, "ואולם אחיו הקטן" במדרגתו "יגדל ממנו וירעו יהיה" מלא הגוים.

ולכן הוא חביב בעיני יותר, לזה "וישם את אפרים לפני מנשה".

ונהו "סוד ה' ליראיו", פרוש היראים – הם הצדיקים הממשיכים השפעות, צריכין לעשות בסוד ובהסתתר מפני הקטרוג שלא יקטרג על הטוב שהוא.

ובריתו להודיעם, "הוא הצדיק המתנהג על" פי הברית והתורה, "להודיעם" פרוש שיודיע זאת לבני אדם שילמדו ממנו הדרך הטוב ההוא.

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elevation, but the ability to bring goodness, mercy, and divine flow into the lives of others. Therefore, Jacob deliberately crossed his hands and placed his right hand upon Ephraim.

This explains Jacob's words, "I know, my son, I know." He acknowledged that Manasseh was greater in spiritual stature, yet affirmed that Ephraim would surpass him in impact. Ephraim's influence would fill the nations, meaning that his channel of blessing would spread broadly and sustain the world. This is why Ephraim was placed before Manasseh.

Rabbi Elimelech concludes with the verse "The secret of Hashem is for those who fear Him." Tzaddikim who draw down blessing must often work in concealment, so that blessing is not obstructed by accusation. Yet "His covenant is to make it known" teaches that the tzaddik who lives according to the covenant and the Torah must also reveal the path, so others can learn how to unite inner holiness with responsibility for the world.

Chassidic Story:

It is told that two תלמידי חכמים once came before Rabbi Elimelech. One was known for his intense devotion, fasting, and long hours of secluded prayer. The other was constantly involved in helping people, arranging loans, settling disputes, and ensuring that the poor were fed, often at the expense of his own spiritual quiet.

When they asked Rabbi Elimelech whose path was higher, he replied that Heaven needs both. But he added that when a hungry family receives bread, when a broken heart finds relief, or when peace is restored between people, the gates above open wider than through many private ascents. He said that the highest light is the one that knows how to descend.

The students later understood that Rabbi Elimelech was teaching them the lesson of Ephraim and Manasseh: personal elevation has great value, but the ultimate blessing lies in becoming a channel through which divine goodness flows into the world.

END NOTE]