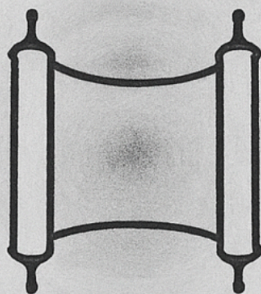


בס"ד

**Rabbi Menachem Mendel  
of Horodak  
Parshas Vayishlach**



*Dedicated To:*

טנייה מלכה בת דינה דבורה  
דפואה שלמה

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# Menachem Mendel of Horodak

## Pri Ha'Eretz

### Parshas Vayishlach

#### Introduction

Menachem Mendel Horodaker (1730–1788), a leading early Chassidic master and foundational disciple within the circle of the Maggid of Mezeritch, was known for penetrating spiritual insight and the ability to reveal the inner dimensions of fear, humility, and divine service. In this maamar, he explores the Midrash describing the fear of Yaakov Avinu and Moshe Rabbeinu despite direct divine promises, showing how the highest tzaddikim experience awe rooted in profound awareness of “lest sin cause.”

In the Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah 76:1), Rabbi Pinchas son of Rabbi Reuven said: We find that the choicest among the Patriarchs and the choicest among the Prophets were afraid, as it is said: “And Jacob was very afraid” (Psalms 135:4), and it is written: “For Jacob, God chose for Himself,” etc.

And concerning Moshe our teacher, peace be upon him, it is written: “If not for Moshe, His chosen one, who stood...” (Psalms 106:23), and it is said regarding the war with Sihon and Og: “Do not fear him” (Numbers 21:34), which implies that he was afraid.

Behold, this Midrash removes all questions and resolves all difficulties: for despite the Torah’s assurance regarding the righteous who suffer, since the Holy One, blessed be He, Himself promised them, “Behold, I am with you and will guard you wherever you go” (Genesis 28:15, English source), and likewise Moshe our teacher in several promises.

And they feared lest sin cause the promise to be withdrawn, as Rashi explains (Genesis 32:11).

And behold, the matter of “lest sin cause” — to understand it in terms of true avodah: every righteous person, the essence of his intention in all the deeds of his will is to “bring satisfaction to his Creator, Who said and His will came into being” (Rashi, Zevachim 46b, English source).

And even if the Holy One, blessed be He, promises him all goodness and exalted protection, he fears lest sin cause—inflating his heart through this promise itself and distancing him from Him, blessed be He.

במדבר (בְּרֵאשִׁית רַבָּה עו, א), אָמַר רַבִּי פִּנְחָס בֶּן רַבִּי רֵאֲוֵבֶן: מִצִּינוּ בַּחוּר שֶׁבְּאֲבוֹת בַּחוּר שֶׁבְּנְבִיאִים שֶׁהָיוּ מִתְּנִירָאִים, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "וַיֵּרָא יַעֲקֹב מָאֹד" (תְּהִלִּים קל"ה, ד), וּבְתִיב (תְּהִלִּים קל"ה, ד): "כִּי יַעֲקֹב בָּחַר לוֹ יְהוָה" וְכו'.

וּמֹשֶׁה רַבֵּינוּ עָלָיו הַשְּׁלוֹם כְּתִיב (תְּהִלִּים קו, כג): "לֹוֹלִי מֹשֶׁה בַּחֲרִירוֹ עָמַד" וְכו', וְנֶאֱמַר בְּמִלְחָמָת סִיחֹן וְעֹג: "אַל תִּירָא אוֹתוֹ" (בְּמִדְבָּר כ"א, לד), מִשְׁמַע שֶׁהָיָה מִתְנַרָּא.

הִנֵּה בְּמִדְרַשׁ הַזֶּה מְנִיחַ כָּל הַקְּשִׁיּוֹת וּמַסְלִיק כָּל הַתְּמִיחוֹת שֶׁכִּנְגְּד הַבְּטָחַת הַתּוֹרָה עַל צַדִּיק וְרַע לוֹ, שֶׁהָיָה הוּא הַמָּה שֶׁהַבְּטִיחָם הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּעֶצְמוֹ (בְּרֵאשִׁית כח, טו): "וְהִנֵּה אֲנִי עֹמֵד וְשֹׁמְרֵתִיךָ בְּכָל אֲשֶׁר תֵּלֵךְ", וְכֵן מֹשֶׁה רַבֵּנוּ עָלָיו הַשְּׁלוֹם בְּכַמָּה (הַבְּטָחוֹת) (שְׁמוֹת ג, יב וְעוֹד).

וְנִתְנָרְאוּ שְׁמָא יִגְדֵם הַחֲטָא, כְּמוֹ שֶׁמֵּבִיא רַשִׁי (זְכוּרֵנוּ לְבִרְכָּה) (בְּרֵאשִׁית לב, יא).

וְהִנֵּה עֲנִינוּ שְׁמָא יִגְדֵם הַחֲטָא, בְּכַדִּי לְהַבִּינוּ עַל עֲנִינוּ הַעֲבוּדָה אֲמִתִּית הִיא שֶׁכָּל צַדִּיק וְצַדִּיק עֹשֶׂה תְּכֵן כְּוִנָּתוֹ בְּכָל מַעֲשֵׂי רְצוֹנָיו בְּכַדִּי "לַעֲשׂוֹת נִחַת רוּחַ" (לְבוֹרָאוֹ שֶׁאֵמַר וְנַעֲשֶׂה רְצוֹנוֹ) (רַשִׁי זְבָחִים מו, ב).

וְאִפְלוּ אִם הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא מְבַטֵּחַ לוֹ כָּל הַטּוֹבוֹת וְהַשְּׁמִירָה מַעֲלָה, מִתְנַרָּא שְׁמָא יִגְדֵם הַחֲטָא גְּסוּת לְבוֹ בְּהַבְטָחָה זוֹ בְּעֶצְמוֹ, וְיִתְרַחַק מֵאֲמוֹת יִתְבָּרַךְ.

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Automatically, lower fears will branch out and awaken upon him; therefore he must forever fear *even more* because he is a righteous person who trusts in Him, blessed be He — “his fear is toward Him, says God,” and His promise will not distance him.

And behold, regarding the matter “And Jacob sent angels to Esau”: in the holy Zohar (Vayishlach 166a) is explained the depth of wisdom and strategy in the intention of this action; and in the Midrash it is taught that he should have gone on his way, yet here (Bereishit Rabbah 75:3) it implies the opposite — that sending was like “one who grabs a dog by the ears, passing by and becoming angered,” etc. (Proverbs 26:17).

Truly, such mitzvah-work gives life to its doer — “God gives wisdom; from His mouth knowledge and understanding” (Proverbs 2:6) to gain insight: “A good understanding to all who do them” (Psalms 111:10).

“Testimony of God... makes the simple wise” — specifically one who *sees himself* as simple and seeks advice for his soul, the mitzvot enlightening him like “those who shine as the sky” (Daniel 12:3) and “knowing the knowledge of the Most High” (Numbers 24:16).

Thus “Testimony of God is faithful” — the letters of God’s daat, for mitzvot *are* daat, joining the bond of holiness. But one wise in his own eyes is not made wise by mitzvot, for they enlighten only one who seeks wisdom.

One who sees himself wise and complete does not seek light from Torah and mitzvot; if he asks nothing, the mitzvah gives no counsel, for counsel is given only to one who truly seeks.

Regarding Jacob and Esau: Esau represents opposition — standing against divine closeness, seeking to nullify God’s plan with corrupt greatness: “Esau her great son” (Genesis 27:15); then after casting one down, he becomes vengeful and wrathful.

ממילא יסתעפו שאר היראות התחתונות להתעורר עליו, ומעפה יש להתגרא לעולם יותר שהוא צדיק ובטוח מאתו יתברך פחדתו אליו נאם ה' והבטחתו שלא ירחיקוהו.

והנה על ענין "וישלח יעקב מלאכים אל עשו", ומבאר בזהר הקדוש (וישלח כסו, א) גדל החכמה והתחבולה בכוונת מעשה זו, ובמדרש שהיה לו לילך לדרך, ובזה (בראשית רבה עה, ג) משמעותו אפסא [ששלח] היה כ"מחזיק באזני כלב עבר מתעבר" וכו' ((משלי כו, יז)).

ובאמת כי עסק מצות כזה, היא הנותנת חיים לעושה — "וה' יתן חכמה מפיו דעת ותבונה" (משלי ב, ו) להבין ולהשפיל "שכל טוב לכל עשיהם" (תהלים קיא, י).

וזהו: "עדות ה' נאמנה מחכימת פתי" פתי דיקא, מי שמחזיק את עצמו לפתי ודורש עצות לנפשו — המצות משפילו אותו "משפלים בזהר הרקיע" ((דניאל יב, ג) ו"יודע דעת עליון" (במדבר כד, טז)).

וזהו: "עדות ה' נאמנה" — אותיות דעות ה', כי מצות הם הדעת שמחבר מחברת הקדש. מי שהוא חכם בעיניו — אין המצות מחכימות אותו; מחכימות רק לפתי המבקש חכמה.

אבל מי שהוא חכם וצדיק בעיניו ואינו חסר — אינו מבקש מתורה ומצות להאירו, ואם אינו שואל — מה תוסיף לו המצוה, שאין נותנין עצה אלא לשואל בזהו.

והנה יעקב ועשו האמורים בפרשה — ענין עשו התנגדות לקרבת אלקים, להפר עצתו בגדלות הפסולה, "עשו בנה הגדול" (בראשית כז, טו); ואחר כך כשמשפילו — נוקם ובעליחמה.



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“Thus shall you say to my master Esau... I lived with Lavan” (Genesis 32:5). Rashi: “I kept the 613 mitzvot.” Meaning: all mitzvot kept “with Lavan” were battles with the evil inclination, to escape it. “I have ox, donkey...” meaning worldly matters, yet “I did not become a prince,” per Rashi.

Jacob, “a wholesome man dwelling in tents” (Genesis 25:27), fitting for angelic greatness, humbled himself — for he had not yet reached rest. “I lived with Lavan” means all service until now was still in struggle, to escape Lavan and seek counsel for his soul.

This resolves why he sent Esau words of submission and greatness — “I lived with Lavan.” Both are one: humility and struggle. Jacob is “the chosen among the Patriarchs,” Moses “the chosen among the Prophets.” “Chosen” means a mediator joining opposites.

This mediating daat unites all into simple unity: “From Him no evil comes forth” (Lamentations 3:38); He is good, and all seeming evils and measured traits lead to good. Man does not understand — “exiled for lack of daat” (Isaiah 5:13). Daat connects the middot to higher wisdom.

The early Tannaim knew how to *connect*: Nachum Ish Gamzu — “also this is for good” (Ta'anit 21a); Rabbi Akiva — “all God does is for good” (Berachot 60b). Knowledge — faith in simple unity — sweetens judgments.

Thus Jacob and Moshe, called “bachur” — the daat that unites opposites — feared, for one must walk *both* paths, joining gevurot into chasadim as a mediator.

If only kindness existed with no fear, one would walk securely — like the Midrash on “And Jacob sent.” But Jacob, the choicest Patriarch, held both extremes and acted with great wisdom in “And Jacob sent,” as the Zohar explains.

He feared and elevated fear upward — the fear “lest sin cause” — thereby subduing gevurot and external fears. So too Moshe, the “bachur,” whose fear was humility. May God help us be among the complete yirei-Hashem.

וְזֶהוּ שְׂצוּהוּ יַעֲקֹב לֵאמֹר לַעֲשׂוֹ (בְּרֵאשִׁית לב, ד): "פה תאמרון לאדני לעשו... עם לבן גרתי", ופרש רש"י: תר"ג מצות שמרתי — כל המצות עם לבן היצור הרע להנצל ממנו. "ויהי לי שור וחמור..." — היות עולם; "ולא נעשיתי שר" כפרוש רש"י.

והנה יעקב "איש תם ישב אהלים" (בְּרֵאשִׁית כה, כז) — ראוי לגדלה אלקית; אך השפיל עצמו כי לא הגיע למנוחה. "עם לבן גרתי" — כל מה ששמר ונעשה עדין עם לבן, להנצל ולשית עצות בנפשו.

ובזה ניחא: שלח דברי הכנעה וגדלות — "עם לבן גרתי" — והכל אחד. וידוע: יעקב בחר שבאבות, ומשה בחר שבנביאים; "בחור" הוא ממצע המקריע בין תרי הפכים.

והוא הדעת המסביר לאחדות פשוט: "מאתו לא תצא הרעות" (איכה ג, לח), כי טוב ומטיב; כל הרעות המתדמים והמדדות הנמדדות — הפל לטובה. האדם אינו מבין "גולה מבלי דעת" (ישעיה ה, יג); הדעת מסביר המדות על-ידי התקמה העליונה.

וכן תנאים הראשונים היו יודעים ומחברים, כמו נחום איש "גם זו לטובה" (תענית כא, א), ומעשה רבי עקיבא (ברכות ס, ב) שפל המאורע לטובתו — כי הידיעה-אמונה באחדות פשוטה היא המתקת הדינים.

לבן יעקב ומשה הנקראים "בחור" — הדעת המסביר — היו מתיראים, שצריכים ללכת בזה ובה כדרך המכריע ומחבר גבורות בחסדים.

ובאמת אם חסדים בלי יראה — הנה הולך לבטח בדרך המדרש על "וישלח יעקב". אבל יעקב בחור-שבאבות — אוזן שני קצות ותקמה גדולה עשה ב"וישלח" כמבאר בזוהר.

שהיה מתירא והעלה היראה למעלה — "שמא יגרם החטא". בזה הכניע גבורות ויראות חיצוניות. וכן משה ה"בחור" — יראתו יראת השפלות. וה' יזכנו להיות מתיראי השלמים אמן.

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#### [NOTE Summary:

The Midrash teaches that both Yaakov Avinu and Moshe Rabbeinu—each the “choicest” of their respective spiritual lineages—experienced deep fear despite explicit divine assurances of protection. Yaakov was promised, “Behold, I am with you and will guard you wherever you go,” and Moshe received repeated promises during his mission, yet both trembled. The Midrash states: Yaakov was afraid before meeting Esav; Moshe was afraid before Sihon and Og, necessitating the command “Do not fear him.”

This maamar explains that their fear was not contradiction, doubt, or weakness; rather it was rooted in the spiritual principle of **shema yigrom hacheit**—the fear that a person’s subtle spiritual failing, even the slightest inner imperfection, could distance him from divine closeness and thereby interrupt the flow of promised goodness. Yaakov’s fear, according to Rashi, was not that Esav was stronger but that “sin might cause” the divine promise to be withheld. The maamar further clarifies that true avodah is not resting on divine assurances but remaining sensitive, humble, and inwardly vigilant. The higher the tzaddik, the more acute his awareness of how delicate the bond with the Divine is, and how even an inner stirring of self-importance could weaken that connection. Their fear was thus a form of elevated awe—fear not of danger but of distance.

In this light, Yaakov’s and Moshe’s fear becomes a hallmark of supreme righteousness. Their humility and inward trembling allowed them to unite opposites: confidence in God’s promise together with trembling before the Infinite. Their example reveals that spiritual greatness is not self-assurance but the constant renewal of one’s bond with God through humility, vigilance, and a sense of being held entirely by divine mercy.

#### Practical Takeaway:

A person should never rely on spiritual status, past accomplishments, or feelings of certainty. Instead, the path of Yaakov and Moshe teaches that true growth comes from humility—remaining aware that closeness to God must be continuously renewed through sincerity and watchfulness. By cultivating the fear of “lest sin cause,” not as anxiety but as refined awareness, one remains open to guidance, protected from spiritual complacency, and aligned with the divine presence.

#### Chassidic Story:

It is told that when Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev once praised a simple Jew for a small mitzvah done with sincerity, another chassid asked him why he celebrated such a minor deed. Rabbi Levi Yitzchak replied that a person who serves God with true humility resembles Yaakov Avinu on the night before meeting Esav. “A humble person,” he said, “does not rely on yesterday. Every mitzvah is new, every step uncertain, and he fears only that he might lose his connection for even a moment.” The Berditchever explained that this trembling is not fear of punishment but fear of separation—an echo of the awe of the great tzaddikim. By watching even the simplest Jew guard that bond with care, he saw the trembling of Yaakov and the humility of Moshe preserved in the heart of Israel. **END NOTE]**