בס"ד

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Vayishlach
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טיב הקהילה

English edition

באנגלית

טיב הפרשה

הדרך להתעלות במעלות העבודה

The way to elevate in levels of Avodah

יַעֲבָר נָא אֲדֹנִי לִפְנֵי עַבְדּוֹ וַאֲנִי אֶתְנַהֲלָה לְאִטִּי לְרֶגֶל הַמְּלָאכָה אֲשֶׁר לְפָנַי וּלְרֶגֶל הַיְלָדִים עַד אֲשֶׁר אָבֹא אֶל אֲדֹנִי שֵׂעִירָה: (לג,יד)

Let my master go ahead before his servant, and I will move at my own slow pace, according to the pace of the animal workforce, and according to the pace of the children, until I come and meet my master at Se'ir. (33:14)

Yaakov Avinu was hinting here to his descendants at a profound lesson: they are different from all other nations. The nations of the world resemble donkeys, which are considered fully developed immediately upon emerging from their mothers' wombs. As the Gemara states (Bava Kama 65b): "Rava said: A bull that is one day old is called a bull, and a ram that is one day old is called a ram." This is because animals do not possess a neshama that requires refinement from the physical body. They do not need to undergo a process of purification and refinement in order to reach their intended purpose. Therefore, immediately upon emerging from their mothers' wombs, they are already worthy of the designation that expresses their purpose. The nations of the world, too, were not granted the level of a neshama, since they do not possess the Torah, which emanates from His very Essence. They therefore have no need to refine their physical nature and character traits in order to become worthy of cleaving to it. Consequently, they reach their state of completion at the very moment of birth. They were created solely for physical pursuits, for which they are already suited even while remaining at their lowest level, immediately upon entering the world. Thus, a non-Jew who is one day old is already called a non-Jew.

The nation sanctified to Hashem and His Torah, however, is entirely different. Its completion can only be achieved through Torah. In order to merit Torah, a Jewish person must remove all the barriers created by the coarseness of his physical nature. These barriers can only be eliminated through accepting upon oneself the yoke of Heaven and through refining and disciplining the physical body.

For this reason, his journey is long and gradual. As long as his physical nature has not been sufficiently refined, he cannot attain the lofty levels intended for him, because he will not have the strength to maintain them. Therefore,

טיב המערכת

ויאבק איש עמו (לב:כו)

And a man wrestled with him (32:26)

There was once a young man who had strayed from the proper path, until, to the great dismay of everyone, he became involved with a non-Jewish woman and decided to marry her, רח"ל. His shocked parents tried speaking to him and persuading him to abandon his decision, but the young man remained firm. He had already made up his mind, and there was nothing more to discuss. In their desperation, his parents tried turning to anyone who might possibly be able to influence him. Everyone made an attempt, each in his own way, but nobody succeeded in preventing the terrible decree. One of his former friends from his yeshivah days decided that he, too, would try. He arranged to meet with him.

When they met, the friend said to him, "I see that you have already made your decision, and therefore I am not going to try to change your mind. I would only like to ask you one thing: In honor of our deep friendship, would you agree to come and receive a blessing from my Rebbe?" The young man agreed, and he accompanied his friend to the Rebbe. The Rebbe looked at him and said, "You are greater and more important than I am!"

The young man was astonished. "I am more important than the Rebbe? But I am about to marry a non-Jewish woman, רח"ל!"

The Rebbe replied, "It is well known that HaKadosh Baruch Hu does not test a person with a challenge that he is incapable of overcoming. Now, despite all my years and all my Torah knowledge, I have never been tested with this particular challenge. Yet you are being tested by HaKadosh Baruch Hu with such an enormous challenge! This is a sign that HaKadosh Baruch Hu knows that you possess the strength to overcome this test!"

After hearing these words, the young man changed his mind and returned with complete teshuvah.

Yaakov Avinu returned after many long and difficult years with Lavan and after enduring countless hardships along the way. Then the angel of Esav came to fight against him.

At first glance, one might think that Yaakov Avinu should have been broken by this. It was simply unfair! I am only one person, and after everything I have already endured, I must now fight an angel as well?

But Yaakov Avinu not only did not break; he actually defeated the angel!

This teaches us an important lesson as well. When a difficult test comes our way, it reminds us that we are actually greater and stronger than we realize. For Chazal teach us: "Whoever is greater than his fellow, his yetzer hara is greater than his."

The very fact that we are being confronted with such a difficult challenge is a sign that HaKadosh Baruch Hu "trusts" us to be able to withstand the test!

Tiv HaTorah - Vayishlach

in the beginning, he must accept upon himself small commitments. Successfully maintaining these commitments brings him to a certain degree of refinement. He can then add further commitments, both in quantity and in quality, and thus elevate himself little by little.

The commitments bring about refinement, and refinement leads to further commitments. The degree of refinement determines how much of the light of Torah and mitzvos a person merits.

This is what Yaakov told Eisav: "Let my master pass ahead of his servant." Eisav and those like him do not require a gradual process, since they can quickly arrive at "Se'irah"—that is, a state of completion. (The word Se'irah is related to the concept of completion, as Rashi explains earlier, 25:25, s.v. Vayikre'u Shemo Esav.)

"But I will proceed at my own slow pace"—I, Yaakov, cannot rush in order to attain completion. I must conduct my affairs gradually.

"According to the pace of the work that is before me"—for there are many levels I must traverse before I merit completion, and an enormous amount of work lies ahead of me.

"And according to the pace of the children"—in addition, a Jewish person is obligated to dedicate time to teaching his descendants the proper path upon which they must walk.

As a result of all these considerations, the journey of the Jewish people is a long one, "until I come to the level of my master, which is called Se'irah"—that is, completion.

Indeed, the words of the Arizal are well known: The sheep that were in Yaakov's flock eventually became elevated until they were transformed into the souls of the Jewish people. Even before they reached the level of chai (living creatures), Yaakov elevated them from the level of domem (inanimate) to tzome'ach (growing things), then from tzome'ach to chai, from chai to nefesh, and ultimately they were transformed into the level of nishmos Yisrael (Jewish souls). We see that Yaakov had a long journey ahead of him before they could attain one lofty level after another.

This is a fundamental principle in serving Hashem. A lack of awareness of this principle causes many young people who wish to advance in Torah and avodas Hashem to become discouraged and lose their motivation.

At the very beginning of their journey, they set their sights on extremely lofty levels without first recognizing the nature and limitations of their animal soul. When they discover that they do not have the strength to maintain those levels, despair takes hold of them. They abandon all their aspirations and end up doing virtually nothing at all.

There is a clever saying commonly repeated among people: A person wants to elevate himself and, in a single moment, reach the level of Pinchas ben Elazar ben Aharon HaKohen—that is, to become a tzaddik crowned with every possible virtue. If he cannot achieve that, however, he chooses instead to become like "Haman ben Hamdasa, the enemy of all the Jews."

Initially, he sets his sights on lofty spiritual levels. When he discovers that he does not possess the strength to attain them, he is unwilling to settle for small accomplishments. Instead, he prefers to give free rein to his soul and become like Haman ben Hamdasa, the enemy of all the Jews.

All of this results from a lack of understanding from the outset that one cannot reach lofty spiritual levels in a single moment. Only a gradual journey enables a person to elevate himself.

Therefore, those who are older and more experienced must caution the younger ones and show them how to proceed gradually, step by step. They must teach them not to grab onto spiritual levels that are beyond their capabilities. Only then will they merit seeing the light.

This is what Chazal teach us (Eruvin 54b): "When Rav Dimi came, he said: This can be compared to a hunter who catches birds. If he breaks the wings of each bird as soon as he catches it, the birds will remain in his possession. If he does not do so, they will not remain in his possession.

Rava said in the name of Rav Sechora, who said in the name of Rav Huna: What is the meaning of the posuk (Mishlei 13:11), הון מהבל ימעט וקובץ על יד ירבה - 'Wealth gained through vanity will diminish, but one who gathers little by little will increase'? -

If a person studies Torah in large bundles, all at once, his Torah will diminish. But if he gathers it little by little, he will increase.

Rava said: The Rabbis knew this principle, yet they disregarded it.

Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak said: I applied this principle, and it remained with me."

These are the words of the Gemara.

'צדקה ממני' 'She is more righteous than me'

It was the night before the holiday of Succos. My father called me and painfully related that some of our relatives had fallen into a very difficult financial situation. They did not have even a single dollar with which to purchase their Yom Tov necessities. The husband had not received his paycheck, and, unfortunately, his wife, who works as a company manager, had also not been paid on time. As a result, with Yom Tov just hours away, their home was completely devoid of any preparations or atmosphere of the holiday.

"We must help them!" my father concluded the conversation firmly.

I immediately took action. I emptied my pockets of everything I had, and even more than I could afford, in order to fulfill the mitzvah of tzedakah that had come my way. At the same time, I quietly and quickly began raising additional funds. HaKadosh Baruch Hu helped me, and by eleven o'clock the following morning, they already had several thousand dollars in their possession, enabling them to make all their Yom Tov purchases comfortably.

My father was overjoyed, and, of course, our relatives were deeply moved as well. The money was delivered to them with great dignity through my father, without their knowing who else had been behind the initiative. After all, these were people who had always earned an honorable living, and it was only from Heaven that they had been placed in this particular test.

טיב ההשגחה

On the first night of Yom Tov, we were all sitting together in the succah, while powerful winds were blowing outside. Since I had anticipated the weather conditions in advance, I had reinforced the succah with heavy wooden beams, designed to withstand even unusually strong winds.

Suddenly, my brother-in-law, who was sitting with us, stood up and said anxiously, "Something does not feel right here! The winds are much too strong. Please, everyone, get out!"

We got up from our seats to see whether there was any validity to his concerns. Within seconds, an ear-splitting crash was heard. A massive wooden beam had broken loose from its place and came crashing down with tremendous force, landing directly on the chair where my wife had been sitting just moments earlier. The beam split the chair in two.

Everyone stood frozen in shock and amazement at the open miracle that had just taken place. A cry burst forth from my mouth: "Tzedakah saves from death!"

As everyone looked on in astonishment, I told them about the mitzvah of tzedakah that HaKadosh Baruch Hu had brought my way the previous evening, while taking great care to preserve the dignity and privacy of our relatives. At that moment, everyone witnessed firsthand how the words of Chazal had been fulfilled in their most literal sense.

א.א.

Rashi explains that the remaining camp would escape "against its will." How could Yaakov Avinu be so certain that at least one camp would survive, whatever might happen?

The sefer Toldos Adam offers a chassidic explanation. Every Jew possesses two aspects in his service of Hashem. The first is the practical aspect—serving Hashem through action, with one's entire body and strength. This is the area in which the yetzer hara interferes, acting as the "yeast in the dough" that prevents a person from fulfilling Hashem's will (Berachos 17a).

The second is the inner essence of the heart, rooted in the Jewish soul's eternal bond with Hashem. The Torah declares (Devarim 32:9), כִּי חֵלֶק ה' עַמּוֹ יַעֲקֹב חֶבֶל נַחֲלָתוֹ - For Hashem's portion is His people; Yaakov is the rope of His inheritance. The Jewish soul resembles a rope whose upper end reaches heavenward, constantly yearning to rise and cleave to Hashem through mitzvos and good deeds. This is the meaning of Chazal's declaration (Berachos 17a), "Our desire is to do Your will."

This inner spark of the soul can never be vanquished by the yetzer hara or the forces of impurity. Thus, If Esav comes to one camp and attacks it refers to the practical aspects of serving Hashem, which may be influenced by the sitra achra. Then the remaining camp shall escape refers to the inner point that remains intact within every Jew. Through this point, even the shortcomings of a person's actions can ultimately be rectified, until all evil disappears and the dominion of wickedness is removed from the world (Toldos Adam).

The holy Rebbe Rav Yisrael of Bluzhov zy"a, related that during the Holocaust, he encountered a profoundly wicked and heretical Jew who worked for the accursed Nazis. His task was to remove Sifrei Torah from the shuls wherever the Germans arrived and deliver them to be burned.

One day, the Nazis ordered him to spit upon a Sefer Torah before throwing it into the fire. To their astonishment, this Jew refused. Although he had lived far from Torah and mitzvos, the command to disgrace the Torah aroused the inner spark hidden within his soul.

The Nazis threatened him with terrible torture, but he remained steadfast. Instead, he threw himself into the flames, crying out, שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֱלֹקֵינוּ ה' אֶחָד (Devarim 6:4). He was burned together with the holy Torah, sanctifying Hashem's Name.

A Jew who had sunk to such a low spiritual level gave his life for the honor of the Torah!

This illustrates a fundamental teaching of chassidus: the inner point of the Jewish soul remains pure, even in the simplest Jew. Chazal teach that the sinners of Yisrael must be included in the communal fast, just as the chelbenah, despite its unpleasant fragrance, was included among the spices of the Ketores (Kerisos 6b).

The reason is that the inner point within every Jew is immeasurably precious. As Chazal declare, "Even when he has sinned, he remains a Jew" (Sanhedrin 43b). Bnei Yisrael are Hashem's treasured possession, as the Torah states (Shemos 19:5), וְהָיִיתֶם לִי סְגֻלָּה מִכָּל הָעַמִּים - You shall be My treasured possession among all the nations. This is why we bless Hashem daily as הַבּוֹחֵר בְּעַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאַהֲבָה - "the One Who has chosen His people Yisrael with love."

A learned man once asked the holy Baal Shem Tov zy"a, about the Splitting of the Reed Sea. He claimed to have found ancient Greek writings describing a rare natural phenomenon that occurs once every several hundred years, when an unusual alignment of the sun and moon produces a tremendous storm. When such a storm strikes the sea, it can create enormous tsunami waves powerful enough to split the waters.

"Perhaps," he suggested, "the Splitting of the Sea was merely a natural phenomenon. What was so miraculous about it?"

The Baal Shem Tov replied that even if this theory were correct, the timing itself would be an extraordinary miracle. The Jewish people would have had to arrive at the seashore precisely when the sea split, and the waters would have had to return to their normal state exactly when the Egyptians entered. Not one Jew would drown, while not one Egyptian would survive.

After the man left, however, the Baal Shem Tov told his disciples that no answer would help someone determined not to believe. His response had merely followed the instruction (Mishlei 26:5), עֲנֵה כְסִיל כְּאִוַּלְתּוֹ - Answer a fool according to his folly. A person who refuses to believe will always find another objection.

True faith is rooted in the inner point of the Jewish soul, beyond the limits of intellect and reason. It is an inheritance passed down from our forefathers, beginning with Avraham Avinu, the first of the believers, and continuing through the generations. Our ancestors stood at Har Sinai and heard Hashem declare (Shemos 20:2), אָנֹכִי ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ - I am Hashem your God. Faith is therefore as natural to the Jewish soul as thirst for water is to the body.

For this reason, it is a mistake to build faith exclusively upon intellectual proofs. Those who attempt to bring Jews back to Torah solely through arguments about the existence of the Creator and the truth of the Torah overlook the deeper source of faith.

The proper approach is to awaken people's hearts through love, closeness, holiness, reverence, Torah, and knowledge. This allows the spark within them to ignite naturally, rather than attempting to impose belief through intellectual debate alone.

Deep within every Jew lies an inviolable point of holiness, guarded by Hashem Himself. No sin or impurity can destroy it. Even when a person strays far from Torah, this point remains intact, though it may become buried beneath layers of wrongdoing and desire. As Chazal teach (Sanhedrin 44a), Yisrael, even when he has sinned, remains Yisrael.

When Hashem brings about the right circumstances, or when experiences break a person's heart and remove the barriers that conceal this light, the inner point can suddenly shine forth. A person may then transform himself completely and begin a new life of teshuvah.

Our task is to illuminate Jewish hearts, speak to them with love, and draw our fellow Jews closer to their Father in Heaven until their inner flame rises of its own accord. This resembles the tending of the Menorah: we prepare the lamp properly, allowing its flame to rise by itself. We cannot force another person's heart to awaken when he is determined to close it.

When the Chiddushei Ha'rim zy"a, began leading the Chassidim in Gur, near Warsaw, tremendous excitement swept through the community. He was renowned throughout Poland as a great gaon and one of the leading tzaddikim of his generation.

Hundreds of guests arrived for the first Shabbos of his leadership. The beis midrash was packed, everyone eager to greet the new Rebbe, and the attendants struggled to maintain order amid the commotion.

Suddenly, the Chiddushei Ha'rim climbed onto a bench and addressed the crowd. He quoted Shlomo Hamelech's concluding words in Koheles (Koheles 12:13): סוֹף

טיב המעשיות

The Inner Spark That Can Never Be Destroyed

וַיֹּאמֶר, אִם יָבוֹא עֵשָׂו אֶל הַמַּחֲנֶה הָאַחַת וְהִכָּהוּ, וְהָיָה הַמַּחֲנֶה הַנִּשְׁאָר לִפְלֵיטָה. (לב, ט)

And he said, If Esav comes to one camp and attacks it, then the remaining camp shall escape (32:9).

דָּבָר הַכֹּל נִשְׁמָע, אֶת הָאֱלֹקִים יְרָא, וְאֶת מִצְוֹתָיו שְׁמוֹר, כִּי זֶה כָּל הָאָדָם - The end of the matter, when all has been heard: Fear Hashem and observe His mitzvos, for this is the whole purpose of man.

The Rebbe explained that the yetzer hara sometimes steals the essence of a matter, leaving only its external shell. A person may become absorbed in outward activities while forgetting their true purpose.

"Standing here amid all this excitement surrounding the new Rebbe, we might imagine that the essence of chassidus lies in the large following, the new leadership, or a magnificent beis midrash. But we must never confuse what is secondary with what is essential!"

These fiery words made a lasting impression. Throughout his leadership, the Chidushei Ha'rim taught his followers to seek the inner point in everything rather than be captivated by outward appearances.

The elder chassidim applied this lesson to a seemingly repetitive pasuk concerning the construction of the Mishkan. The Torah commands (Shemos 25:21), וְאֶל הָאָרֹן תִּתֵּן אֶת הָעֵדֻת אֲשֶׁר אֶתֵּן אֵלֶיךָ - And into the Aron you shall place the Testimony that I shall give you. Rashi asks why this instruction is repeated, since the Torah had already commanded that the Testimony be placed inside the Aron (Shemos 25:16; Rashi).

The explanation is that the Mishkan and its vessels were magnificent, fashioned from gold, silver, copper, and beautiful fabrics. Their splendor could cause people to become preoccupied with their external beauty and forget their purpose.

The Torah therefore emphasizes that the Aron's essential purpose was to contain the Testimony—the holy Torah—signifying Hashem's presence among Israel and their bond with Him through His Torah.

The lesson is clear: outward beauty and impressive appearances have value only when they serve the inner purpose. We must never allow the external trappings of holiness to overshadow the holiness itself.

A renowned, experienced mohel once related a remarkable story about a bris milah through which he was privileged not only to remove the physical foreskin, but also to awaken the inner spark of a Jewish soul and help a lost Jew return to Hashem.

The mohel regularly performed bris milah on adults who had never been circumcised, including immigrants from the former Soviet Union who had been afraid to observe mitzvos under the Communist regime. Before such a bris, he would explain the mitzvah and its significance, beginning with the covenant Hashem established with Avraham Avinu. Every Jew who undergoes milah enters that same sacred covenant, as expressed in the berachah, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַכְנִיסוֹ בִּבְרִיתוֹ שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ - "Who has sanctified us with His mitzvos and commanded us to bring him into the covenant of Avraham Avinu" (Shabbos 137b; Sefer HaChinuch, mitzvah 2; Acharonim).

On one occasion, the mohel was invited to circumcise a fifty-four-year-old Jew from the former Soviet Union. Having grown up estranged from Torah and mitzvos, the man had married a non-Jewish woman, Rachmana litzlan. After the Soviet Union collapsed and religious observance became possible, he decided to undergo a bris as a Jew belonging to the Chosen People.

As the mohel explained the mitzvah, he described Avraham Avinu and the covenant the man was about to enter. The explanation deeply moved him, igniting the inner spark in his heart. He declared that he wanted his bris performed exactly as Avraham Avinu had performed his own at the age of one hundred.

The mohel explained that an adult bris is generally performed with local anesthetic and may involve other practical measures, such as stitches. The man repeatedly asked whether Avraham Avinu had used anesthesia, stitches, or similar aids.

"No," the mohel answered. "Avraham Avinu fulfilled Hashem's command exactly as it was given, without such additional measures."

The man insisted that he, too, wanted his bris performed in precisely the same manner, without anesthesia or other measures to ease the pain. He wanted to enter the covenant of Avraham Avinu exactly as he understood it.

Several days later, after recovering, the man visited his elderly mother and excitedly told her that he had undergone a bris like Avraham Avinu. She burst into tears.

"Until now, I was afraid to tell you anything because of the KGB," she said. "But you come from a distinguished family! Your late father was a righteous rabbi, your grandfather was one of the great tzaddikim of his generation, and all your ancestors were people of exceptional holiness. They must surely have been praying for you in Heaven, that you would return to your roots and enter the sacred covenant of Israel."

The man was deeply shaken. He immediately contacted the mohel again and asked for help returning to authentic Jewish observance. The mohel returned to guide him through this second bris—the inner circumcision, the removal of the foreskin of the heart.

Within a short time, the man left the non-Jewish woman he had married and transformed his life, returning to Hashem in sincere teshuvah.

This fulfilled the teaching that a physical bris can bring about an inner circumcision of the heart. The gaon Rav Akiva Eiger zt"l, discusses this principle in his responsa (Mahadura Kama, 42), citing Ollolos Ephraim (maamar 392).

This man fulfilled the theme of the pasuk (Devarim 30:6), וּמָל ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ אֶת לְבָבְךָ וְאֶת לְבַב זַרְעֶךָ, לְאַהֲבָה אֶת ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ בְּכָל לְבָבְךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ לְמַעַן חַיֶּיךָ - Hashem your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, to love Hashem your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live!".

