

SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 20

Vayishlach - Yud-Tes Kislev

The Verse:

As Yaakov was leaving the Land of Israel for Charan, he spent the night at Mount Moriah where he experienced his famous vision:

The Context:

As Yaakov prepared to confront Eisav, he prayed to G-d:

“I have become small from all the kindnesses and from all the truth that You have rendered Your servant, for with my staff I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. (Bereishis, 2:11)

Rashi comments: *I have become small* — My merits have diminished because of the kindnesses and the truth that You have rendered me. Therefore, I fear lest I have become sullied with sin since [the time that] You promised me, and it will cause me to be delivered into Eisav’s hand.

The Alter Rebbe, in his letter to chassidim after his release from Czarist prison, offered a different interpretation of this verse: “with

every single favor that G-d bestows upon a man, he ought to become very humble.” The closer a person is to G-d, the more that person recognizes how insignificant and unworthy they are. Thus, the Alter Rebbe concluded, the chassidic community should react humbly to the great kindness G-d had shown them with his miraculous release.

But the Alter Rebbe still frames Yaakov’s prayer in Rashi’s conventional understanding: “As our Sages, of blessed memory, expressed it, “[Yaakov was apprehensive,] lest sin would cause [him not to be saved],” for it appeared to him that he had sinned.” Thus, it appears that the Alter Rebbe’s explanation, that our “smallness” is a result of G-d’s closeness, is still related to the simple understanding that our “smallness” is a sense of apprehension about our unworthiness of G-d’s blessing because of our sins.

The Question:

How can Yaakov, and the Alter Rebbe, honestly presume that their behavior is sinful enough to warrant G-d’s withholding of blessing? While their previous behavior

may be considered inadequate compared to their current state, that does not mean that behavior was in itself negative, it just means it was not as lofty as their matured state. But that is not a reason for punishment!

The Explanation:

The *Panim Yafos* explains this “smallness” as being an intermediate state between two ascensions. There is the first attainment, and then there is a relative fall, which is part of, and leads to, the second, higher attainment. This fall may be indispensable to the eventual ascent, yet it is still a period of diminishment. In the Alter Rebbe’s case, the imprisonment eventually led to his vigorous efforts in spreading the teachings of chassidus, in a more comprehensive and thorough fashion than he did previously. Yet, still, throughout the duration of his

imprisonment, he could not teach chassidus, there was an absolute concealment of his influence.

Because this is a time of diminishment, the person is vulnerable and needs to appeal for increased Divine protection. This is why Yaakov appealed to G-d, even though he had been promised safe passage, because during his time of smallness, he recognized that he was in a dangerous state of transition to a higher stage.

So, too, the Alter Rebbe felt that he had a period of smallness, a time when he could not fulfill his deepest desire to share the light of chassidus with others, and therefore appealed to G-d to provide him with protection until he could emerge into the second, higher ascension.
