

By Rabbi Avrohom Lipszyc

A Rebbe's Smallness

Jacob, upon hearing that Esau is coming towards him with an army 400 men strong, to avenge his hatred and grievance upon him, prays to G-d (-Genesis 32:11; Rashi), *"I have become small from all the acts of kindness': My merits have become diminished through the acts of kindness and the truth that You have already done for me. I am therefore afraid that after You made (these) promises to me, I might have become tainted by sin (and forfeited the promises), which would cause me to be delivered into the hand of Esau."*

The Alter Rebbe wrote this to his followers (-Tanya, Igeret HaKodesh, Epistle 2), *"Upon his arrival from Petersburg,"* meaning, upon his release from the Czarist Prison where he was imprisoned:

"I have become small from all the acts of kindness and from all..." This means that by every favor (kindness) that G-d bestows upon man, (man) is to become very humble. For 'kindness is the right arm,' and 'His right arm embraces me,' -which refers to the state of G-d actually bringing him close (to Himself), far more intensely than before. And whoever is close to G-d, with ever exceeding uplifting and elevation, must be ever more humble- to the lowliest plane, as it is written: 'From afar the L-rd has appeared to me.' And as known, 'All that are before Him are esteemed as nothing.' Hence, whoever is more 'before Him' is that much more as nothing, naught, and non-existent... This (humility) is also the trait of Jacob, and therewith he justified himself for his fear of Esau and did not rely on the promise given to him— "And, behold, I am with you..." (That is), because Jacob regarded himself as utterly insignificant [because of the multitude of favors, 'for with my staff...'], and as unfit and unworthy to be saved ... and as the saying of our sages, of blessed memory, 'maybe sin will cause' for it appeared to him that he had sinned.... Therefore I come with a general announcement to inform all our followers regarding the multitude of favors - 'The great things that the L-rd has done with us': to hold on to the attributes of Jacob, the 'remnant of His people' and the 'remainder of Israel,' who regards himself truly as remnants and excess that is of no use. They are not to become haughty-minded in relation to their brethren ... not to speak defiantly against them or hiss at them, Heaven forbid. A strict warning: Hold your peace! No mention is to be made! Rather, they are to subdue their spirit and heart before everyone according to the attribute of 'Truth unto Jacob,' with humility and a 'Soft answer that turns away anger,' and with a restrained spirit ... And, maybe, through all that G-d will put into the heart of their brethren that 'as waters (reflect) the face..."

Simply speaking, Jacob had said this verse in a prayer too G-d in beseeching G-d's protection from his brother Esau, and thus, Jacob's meaning in the verse, *"I have become small from all the acts of kindness,"* is to be simply understood as Rashi explains Jacob's concern, *"My merits have become diminished, I might have become tainted by sin (and forfeited the promises), which would cause me to be delivered into the hand of Esau."* While, the Alter Rebbe is quoting this verse as a lesson in one's service to G-d, how to respond to all the kindness and miracles G-d has performed, *"This means that by every favor (kindness) that G-d bestows upon man, (man) is to become very humble."*

Questions: Mystically speaking we need to understand, how is it possible that Jacob was wary lest, *"I might have become tainted by sin"?! True, that when one is a recipient of a miracle (-Shabbos 32a), "they will deduct it from his merits,"* however, this only explains why Jacob was worried that, *"they will deduct it from his merits."* However, this is not the cause for any sin that should cause a nullification of G-d's promises to Jacob?!

So too, concerning the Alter Rebbe. The Alter Rebbe does not just quote the Sages with, *"This (humility) is also the trait of Jacob,"* but goes on with their explanation of the verses, *"and therewith he justified himself for his fear of Esau and did not rely on the promise given to him, 'And, behold, I am with you...,' because Jacob regarded himself as utterly insignificant because of the multitude of favors, 'for with my staff...,' and as unfit and unworthy to be saved..."* and quotes, *"and as the saying of our sages, of blessed memory, 'maybe sin will cause..."* and then the Alter Rebbe added on his own words to the quote of the Sages, *"for it appeared to him that he had sinned."* By the Alter Rebbe doing this, we understand, (i) The Alter Rebbe sees that this which, *"I have been made small..."* is the outcome of, *"And whoever is close to G-d, with ever exceeding uplifting and elevation, must be ever more humble,"* is directly connected with that which, *"'maybe sin will cause' for it appeared to him that he had sinned..."* (ii) That the Alter Rebbe sees this (*"'maybe sin will cause' for it appeared to him that he had sinned..."*) concerning his own, *"Upon his arrival from Petersburg,"* as well.

The Alter Rebbe is pointing out with this, that even though (-Beis Rebbi, Vol 1, Chapter 16) will be still in prison, he already received a promise from the Baal Shem Tov And the Mezritcher Magic, that he will be liberated, and the he could continue disseminating the wellsprings of Chasidus, nevertheless, *"Upon his arrival from Petersburg,"* the Alter Rebbe is requesting of G-d that he be granted permission to do so. And the reason for requesting, even after he had previously received a promise that he could do so, is because of, as with Jacob praying even after he had received a promise from G-d, because of, *"'maybe sin will cause' for it appeared to him that he had sinned...."*

Thus, here too we have the question: How could there be by there Alter Rebbe an honest concern go, *"'maybe sin will cause' for it appeared to him that he had sinned...."?!*

General Explanation: When one rises to a higher plane of spirituality, then that which on a lower plane is not considered a sin, now becomes considered a sin. Meaning, that now only must he from here forward live on a higher plane of particularity, but rather, even his past deeds must now be accounted for on a higher plane of judgement. Thus, once on the higher plane of spirituality, he must do teshuvah for his past actions!

Note: Footnote 10 quotes a source, Pri Eitz Chaim, Gate of Tefillin, Chapter 10, which is mentioned numerous times in the sicha, and hence, I will quote the source here:

"And you already knew, whenever a person's soul ascends above its level, they punish him for minor offenses, as the value of ascending that level, and once my teacher (the Arizal), of saintly and blessed memory, saw the soul of a great and wise tzadik, who was being judged, when they wanted to raise him to a greater upper level, and they were punishing him, because once he was intent on the holiness of (the part of the prayer), 'And came to Zion,' because while saying 'so that he not labor in vain, nor produce (that this will cause) dismay,' then because of his (focused) intention (on the prayer) he forgot and was distracted from his consciousness upon his tefillin, and therefore one must be very, very careful^(c).

"(c) In another format, in greater length: My teacher (the Arizal), of saintly and blessed memory, saw that they were punishing a wise and great one of his generation, when they wanted to elevate him to a very high court, and they were punishing him upon meticulous details of mitzvot. For at the first time (when he performed the mitzva) they didn't punish him for these meticulous details, only now when they wanted him to perceive his elevation, above higher than where he was, and then they return to judge him on those meticulous details of mitzvot. And so too every time that they elevate him from level to level, even after many years, they return to punish him on these meticulous details of mitzvot. For in accordance with the parameters of the elevation, so are they meticulous with him. And therefore, there is no rest for the righteous in the World to Come. And even Samuel the Prophet was afraid of judgement when the necromancer of Oiv brought up his soul, months after his (Samuel's) passing. However, the aforementioned wise one was judged upon his being distracted from his consciousness upon his tefillin due to his intention when saying (the prayer) 'so that he not labor in vain, nor produce (that this will cause) dismay.'"

Thus, on the one hand, this was not a sin, but only of lacking comparatively to his new higher level of holiness. While on the other-hand, there was the original lacking (albeit not a sin, being that it was due to his focused intentions on the words of prayer that he was saying) of, *"However, the aforementioned wise one was judged upon his being distracted from his consciousness upon his tefillin."* And therefore the sicha continues with,

However, this is not sufficient enough of an explanation concerning our patriarch Jacob, nor concerning the Alter Rebbe. Being that albeit at the time of the performance of the mitzva this was not a sin, nevertheless, on his level now it is considered a sin. Thus we must say that even on the original level when he performed the mitzva, it wasn't *"all that smooth"* (at least on the level of *"meticulous details of mitzvot"*), for was it originally done absolutely as the mitzvot was meant to be done, then why would he have to later return to it and do teshuva?

Hence, we return to our question, how can we say as such concerning Jacob or the Alter Rebbe?!

Explanation: The *Panim Yafos* explains the verse, *"I have become small from all the acts of kindness"*:

"We can explain this in accordance with the 'writings' there are levels in the cleaving to G-d, smallness and greatness. So too, when one rises from one world to another world, as it is stated (-Brochos 64a), 'The righteous have no rest, have rest neither in this world nor in the World-to-Come, as in both worlds they are constantly progressing, as it is stated (-Psalms 84:8): 'They go from strength to strength, every one of them appears before G-d in Zion.' they return to the 'smallness' which is called 'Second Smallness' until they reach the 'Second Greatness'. And while he is in the 'smallness' even though it is the 'Second Smallness' which is greater than the 'First Greatness' nevertheless, one needs great protection and trust, and great faith, as it is stated (Isaiah 26:4), 'Trust in the L-rd forever and ever...' And when Jacob went up from outside of the land (of Israel) to the Land of Israel, even though he was in his 'First Greatness' of outside of the land, he returned to a 'Second Smallness', and thus he said, 'I have been made small by all the acts of kindness and of all the truth'..."

In other words, before one is elevated to a higher level, he returns to a lower level, as the Alter Rebbe explains (-Tanya, Chinuch Kattan) on the verse (-Proverbs 24:16), *"For a righteous man can fall seven times and rise."* Which in the language of the *Panim Yafos* is, between the first greatness and the second greatness there is a second smallness. And this is the meaning of the verse, *"I have been made small by all the acts of kindness and of all the truth,"* that as Jacob was being elevated from outside of the land into the Land of Israel, he experienced an, *"I have been made small."*

Note: Footnote 15 explains how this interpretation in which, *"even though it is the 'Second Smallness' which is greater than the 'First Greatness,'"* coincides with the Alter Rebbe's explanation in *'Chinuch Kattan'*

in which the "Second Smallness" is truly a descent, seemingly even in regards to the 'First Greatness':

"For the fall between one world and the other is as that of the 'River of Dinur' and the 'Beam' (in which the River of Dinur sheds the reality of the lower world, and the Beam enters one into the reality of the higher world), and as the ascent (from one level of intellect) into a greater and deeper intellect, which is through questions that confuses him completely of the first intellect, that even though externally and on a revealed (manner) this is a confusion of the first intellect (which is why he then is in need of a great protection, as the Panim Yafot states there) however, in truth, this falling is not a descent, (on the contrary, these questions come through that which there opens by him new logical reasoning by him, which he did not know before; thus,) but rather part of the ascent.

Meaning that the very 'Second Smallness' of questions which completely confuses him out of his 'First Greatness', and creates a present need for a great protection, is in essence from a higher and greater intellectual power of reasoning than the 'First Greatness' had. Thus, at the moment of the questions, (i) he is confused, and lost even from the 'First Greatness,' and nevertheless, (ii) the questions themselves come from having a greater intellectual perception that the 'First Greatness'.

This explains why Jacob prayed (-Genesis 32:12), "Save me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau," even though he had previously received a promise, and had gone through elevations. Nevertheless,

now Jacob was experiencing a, "I have been made small," and as the Panim Yafos explains, "even though it is the 'Second Smallness' which is greater than the 'First Greatness' nevertheless, one ne needs great protection and trust, and great faith."

So too, we can explain what the connection between what the Alter Rebbe is saying and what Rashi is saying.

"I might have become tainted by chet (חַטָּה)," is related to the verse (-Kings I 1:21), "I and my son Solomon shall be chatoim (חַטָּיִם)," which means not sin, but lacking, in other words, a 'smallness' in his service.

The Alter Rebbe's connection between the concept of, "I have been made small by all the kindness," that, "which refers to the state of G-d actually bringing him close (to Himself), far more intensely than before. And whoever is close to G-d, with ever exceeding uplifting and elevation, must be ever more humble," with the concept of, "because Jacob regarded himself as utterly insignificant and as unfit and unworthy to be saved ... and as the saying of our sages, of blessed memory, 'maybe chet (חַטָּה) will cause' for it appeared to him that he had chet (חַטָּה)...." Meaning, that not only was there a diminishing of his merits because of the magnitude of kindness upon him, but even more so, his service to G-d, once there was the, "G-d actually bringing him close (to Himself), far more intensely than before," needs to be, "even greater than before," and if it is not so, then this now becomes a falling into 'smallness,' lacking and chet.

Note: Footnote 19 the sicha equates this "chet" with the "meticulous details of mitzvot," of the Pri Eitz Chaim quoted earlier. The the footnote explains:

"And according to this explanation (that of "meticulous details of mitzvot"), we can better understand why Jacob was afraid that he would be delivered into the hands of Esau. For according to the explanation of 'chet - lacking' there is only an absence (as that of, 'diminishing his merits') of which the outcome is absence - the absence of reward, however, also the absence of punishment.

"And especially tat the pri etz chaim changes his wording, in which previously he stated 'light sins' (and here he speaks only of "meticulous details of mitzvot"), for even this ("light sins") there isn't. Thus, it is feasible to say that it seemed to Jacob (and the Alter Rebbe) that they had this (in relation to their new higher spiritual level, they had issues of, "meticulous details of mitzvot." But we can never say that it seemed to Jacob and the Alter Rebbe that they never had "Light Sins"!).

"So too it is explicit in the Pri Eitz Chaim ibid, that he divides (with concerning all people) and he enumerates in order: Severe sins, sins more lenient than those, meticulous details of mitzvot, which are as that of 'a strand of Hair' (To point out that which he explains afterwards with a wise great one who was punished on 'light meticulous details' was 'also punished' for walking four cubits on Shabbat in a 'Public Domain' with a drop of dust on his shoes without his knowledge (it is forbidden to carry four cubits in a Public Domain on Shabbat, and hence, walking with dust on his shoes, for one on an extremely exalted level, would constitute a punishable carrying on Shabbat, while this in Jewish Law is not even a light issue at all!))

"In the wording of Igeret HaKodesh (the Epistle of the Alter Rebbe): It seemed in his (Jacob's) eyes that he sinned. This that it seemed in his eyes is as that of our Sages (Moed Kattan 18b) ("Rabbi Yosei said: May my portion (in the future world) be with one who is suspected (of a certain wrongdoing) but is innocent"), which can also be explained in one of two ways: (i) He is suspected because there is something there - albeit (only) in a kind of it (and not it itself). (ii) He has nothing of it at all, only that his is suspected

(in our case, in their own eyes (Jacob and the Alter Rebbe)) due to a side issue (extreme humility and an intermittent 'smallness')."

Meaning, (a) Just *lacking* in itself would not have led to any concern of punishment ("Save me from being delivered into the hands of Esau"), thus, the footnote connects this to the, "meticulous details of mitzvot," of which the righteous, on their new exalted level, are punished for. (b) We are speaking of "meticulous details of mitzvot" if which there is not even any "Light Sins" at all. Hence, Jacob and the Alter Rebbe could have erroneously have seemed that they are now dealing with. (c) This is the prayer of Rabbi Yossi, "May my portion (in the future world) be with one who is suspected (of a certain wrongdoing) but is innocent," in a manner that the suspicion comes only from a side issue, that of extreme humility, and of an intermittent 'Smallness' as they are entering into a new unprecedented higher level.

So too it is concerning the Alter Rebbe himself. It is known that the concept of, "When your wellsprings (Baal Shem Tov's teachings; Chassidus, as made digestible and palatably spiritually profitable in our daily life by the teachings of Chabad) disseminate outside" through the Alter Rebbe started primarily after his liberation in Petersburg. This accentuates the greatness that the Alter Rebbe reached after Petersburg, substantially greater than his greatness prior to Petersburg. In between the greatness of pre-Petersburgh and the higher greatness of post-Petersburgh, while in the prison in Petersburg, there was an, "I have been made small..."

The imprisonment was wrought with mighty and huge suffering. To the point that Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev to the Alter Rebbe, "Why did you take so much of the suffering of the Jewish People upon your shoulders, when we were able to achieve this via 'Encompassing Powers?!'" This was what Rabbi Levi Yitzchok of Berditchev said concerning the grave suffering the Alter Rebbe had while imprisoned. Then there was the three hours of suffering right after the Alter Rebbe was released (when the officers brought the Alter Rebbe by mistake to the wrong house) of which the Alter Rebbe said that these three hours of pain was worse than all the suffering he endured during being imprisoned! On a revealed level of events, this, the imprisonment and the three-hour post-imprisonment, were all a 'smallness' and descent in relation to the Alter Rebbe's previous greatness of pre-Petersburgh. As is evident by the words of Rabbi Sholom Dov Ber of Lubavitch, that revelation of *Light* reached after Petersburg is as that of the teaching of our Sages (-Menochais 53b), "The olive, when crushed, brings forth oil." In which the Alter Rebbe is being compared to the olive spoken of by the Sages. Thus, the state of "crushing" of the imprisonment in Petersburg is a state of 'smallness' even in comparison of the Alter Rebbe's pre-Petersburgh. Just as pre-crushing, the olive is an edible fruit, post-crushing, there is the fine oil. However, during the crushing, we neither have the fruit anymore, nor the oil yet. So too, during the imprisonment, the Alter Rebbe could neither yet begin the greater level of disseminating the wellsprings, nor could him anymore continue with the previous level of disseminating the wellsprings.

This lack of being able to disseminate the wellsprings while in prison is not only about those receiving from the Alter Rebbe, but also concerning the Alter Rebbe himself. This is as we find that when Abraham could not host guests, because there were no guests available to serve, this negatively effected Abraham himself. Now, by Abraham we are speaking of physical hosting and feeding to Arabs, and it was before the giving of the Torah. How much more so was it by the Alter Rebbe when speaking of tending to the spiritual welfare of Jews post the giving of the Torah, and especially the tending to teaching Torah, and of teaching Torah to the masses, and the esoteric teachings of the Torah, how this gravely effected the Alter Rebbe himself!

Thus, the Alter Rebbe wrote, "I have been made small..."

For Us: Every year, the concepts repeat themselves. And being that everything begins with the Torah, thus, we read the Torah-portion of, "I have been made small by all the kindness," either on the Shabbat prior to the 19th off Kislev, or on a Shabbat 19th off Kislev itself. And this is the request of our patriarch Jacob, and so too it is the request of all the *Princes of Israel*, as it is taught in the holy book, *Kehelet Yakov*, that the word *Prince* - *Nasi* (נָשִׂיא) is the acronym for *Spark of Jacob our Patriarch* (בְּיָצוֹן שֶׁל יַעֲקֹב אֲבִינוּ) (meaning that every Rebbe of every generation is a spark of Jacob's soul, as it encompasses all of the souls of its generation, while Jacob encompassed all the souls of every generation. Hence, every Rebbe, which encompasses all the souls of his generation, is a spark of Jacob's all-encompassing soul of all the souls of all generations). And in particular it is the request of the Alter Rebbe:

Which they pray for each and every Jew, regardless of their personal "I have been made small" that they endure for us, that G-d fulfill his promise to each and every Jew (-Genesis 32:13), "And You have already said, 'I will surely make things go well with you, and I will make your descendants like the grains of sand on the seashore, too numerous to count.'"