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Yaakov's Misdirection

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EXTEND THE ROUTE

The mishnah (in tractate *Avodah Zarah*) states:¹ “A person should not be alone with them (with those gentiles identified earlier in the mishnah) because they are suspected of bloodshed.”

Halachic authorities² explain that this refers to ancient peoples. Nowadays, however, gentiles are not suspected of bloodshed. On the contrary, etc.

The Gemara elaborates:³ “If on his way, a Jew encounters a gentile, the Jew should position the gentile to his right side, etc.” The Gemara then continues:

“If the gentile asks, ‘Where are you going?’ the person {when replying} should prolong his journey⁴ as Yaakov, our forefather, did with Esav the wicked. As the verse says,⁵ ‘Until I come to my master in Seir,’ and as it says,⁶ ‘Yaakov traveled to Sukkos.’”⁷

Rashi comments:⁸ The Gemara justifies this deception by saying, “as Yaakov, our forefather, did,” which means that Yaakov told Esav something apparently duplicitous due to a life-threatening situation. Yaakov said to him, “Until I come to my master in Seir,” but then, “Yaakov {only} traveled to Sukkos,” “and he **never traveled** to Seir.”⁹ From this narrative, we derive a halachah relevant to all Jews. Namely, if a gentile questions a Jew, “Where are you headed?,” the Jew should answer that he is traveling somewhere else — “prolong the journey for him.” “If¹⁰ the Jew needs to travel a *parsah*,¹¹ he should reply, ‘I need to travel **two** *parsaos*.’”¹² This way, perhaps the gentile {if he insists on traveling with the Jew} will delay attacking the Jew until the second *parsah*, and the Jew will part from him before then.”

¹ {Mishnah, *Avodah Zarah* 2:1; in the Gemara:} 22a.

² See *Encyclopedia Talmudis*, entry, “goy”; *Teshuvos Haram Shtern* in *Sheeilos Uteshuvos “Chavas Yair,”* sec. 66.

³ *Avodah Zarah* 25b.

⁴ {In the original, “נִרְחֵיב לוֹ אֶת הַדֶּרֶךְ,” an expression conventionally understood to mean that he should mislead the gentile by claiming to be traveling to a place beyond his actual destination.}

⁵ *Bereishis* 33:14.

⁶ *Bereishis* 33:17.

⁷ {Rather than meeting Esav in Seir, Yaakov traveled to the nearer location of Sukkos.}

⁸ *Ran* and *Rabbeinu Chananel* explain the Gemara similarly.

⁹ Rashi’s wording *Avodah Zarah* 25b, s.v. “*nasah*”; *Ran* writes similarly; *Rabbeinu Chananel* writes, “and he went to another place.”

¹⁰ Rashi’s wording *Avodah Zarah* 25b (*Ran* there writes similarly).

¹¹ {A halachic measure of distance equivalent to approximately 3 miles.}

¹² {The plural of *parsah*.}

The midrash,¹³ however, comments on the verse, “Until I come to my master in Seir,” as follows: “We have searched all Scripture, and we do not find that during his lifetime, Yaakov ever went to Esav at Mount Seir. Could it be that Yaakov, the personification of truth, deceived Esav? Rather, when will Yaakov go to Esav? In the Future Era, as it says,¹⁴ ‘Deliverers will go up to Mount Zion to judge {those residing on} the mountain of Esav.’” From **this midrash**, it is clear that from the outset, Yaakov was entirely honest. (Thus, the midrash asks, “**We do not find** that during his lifetime, Yaakov ever went to Esav at Mount Seir.”)

2.

RASHI SAYS BOTH

Understood simply, the explanations offered by the midrash and the Gemara mentioned above represent differing opinions: According to the Gemara, Yaakov perceived Esav as a mortal threat. Therefore, despite Yaakov’s actual travel plans, Yaakov had to tell Esav he was traveling to Seir. In contrast, according to the midrash, Yaakov no longer feared Esav. Accordingly, he had no reason to prolong his journey by saying he was going to Seir. Thus, the midrash concludes that Yaakov spoke veiledly about an event in the Future Era.

However, we find that Rashi, in his Torah commentary on the verse, “Until I come to my master in Seir,” combines both interpretations: “Yaakov prolonged the journey for him {for Esav}, as Yaakov planned to travel only as far as Sukkos. He said to himself, ‘If Esav intends to harm me, let him wait until I come to him. But Yaakov did not go.’” (And immediately afterward, Rashi continues,) “And when will Yaakov go? In the days of Mashiach, as it says, ‘Deliverers will go up to Mount Zion to judge the mountain of Esav.’”

Thus, the Gemara’s interpretation (that Yaakov had no immediate plans of traveling to Seir and said that he was going there to prolong the journey so that Esav would not harm him {on the way}) aligns with what the midrash says — that Yaakov’s words were truthful: “He will go in the days of Mashiach.” That is, in the Future Era, Yaakov will go to Seir.

However, we need to clarify: Rashi teaches here (in his Torah commentary) that Yaakov spoke *truthfully*. Yet in the Gemara, Rashi himself explains that we deduce that since Yaakov “prolonged the journey for him,” a person may and should answer a gentile falsely to protect himself.

¹³ *Bereishis Rabbah* ch. 78, sec. 14 (at the end); *Yalkut Shimoni*, on the verse here (*remez* 133).

¹⁴ *Ovadiah* 1:21.

Commentaries¹⁵ explain that, indeed, we deduce this halachah from Yaakov's response to Esav. Nonetheless, since Yaakov exemplified the attribute of truth — as the midrash emphasizes, “Yaakov personified the truth” — even when he said something that **Esav** misconstrued, Yaakov's words were, in fact, still technically true. In contrast, other Jews who are not on Yaakov's level may say something altogether untrue to deflect danger.

But it is difficult to frame the Gemara's view this way: The Gemara's wording is that “he should prolong the journey for him **as Yaakov, our forefather, did,**” indicating that the law, “he should prolong the journey,” pertains to every person the **same** way as it did to Yaakov. So, on what basis may the dispensation to tell a blatant falsehood in such circumstances be extended to all Jews?¹⁶

3.

EVERY JEW MUST BE JUST LIKE YAAKOV

We can resolve this question by examining Rashi's interpretation that Yaakov “prolonged the journey for him, etc.” At first glance, this clause in Rashi's commentary seems superfluous: Rashi's intent would have been clear if he had sufficed with his concluding remarks: “(Until I come to my master in Seir —) He said to himself, ‘If Esav intends to do me harm, let him wait until I come to him.’ But he did not go.”

The explanation is as follows: By prefacing with, he “prolonged {הִרְחִיב} the journey for him, etc.,” Rashi clarifies, right at the beginning of his remarks, that Yaakov's statement, “Until I come to my master in Seir,” was not a false declaration **at all**.¹⁷

It was merely that he “הִרְחִיב the journey for him, etc.,” according to the **simple** meaning of the word, “הִרְחִיב” — the journey became “drawn out.”¹⁸

¹⁵ See *Chiddushei Aggados* and *Etz Yosef* commenting on the *Gemara, Avodah Zara* 25b; et al; see *Nachlas Yaakov*, commenting on Rashi; *Yefeh Toar* (the long ver.) *Yedei Moshe, Neizer Hakodesh* (the long ver.) commenting on the *Midrash*; et al.

¹⁶ *Iyun Yaakov* on *Ein Yaakov, Avodah Zarah*, loc cit., writes: It is also possible that the phrase “as Yaakov our father did” intimates that our response should mirror that of Yaakov {including his decision} not to lie to Esav, as his intention was for the future.... See there. However, Rashi in his commentary on the *Gemara* does not explain it this way, as mentioned earlier.

¹⁷ Note *Maasei Hashem* (“*Maasei Avos*,” ch. 33) states that, in truth, Yaakov fulfilled his word since {according to his interpretation} Yaakov camped in the kingdom of Seir {on the way to Sukkos}. See there. *Abarbanel* interprets the verse by rearranging its words: “Let my master please go ahead of his servant to Seir, while I continue at my slow pace” (“in order to distance {and exonerate} Yaakov from falsehood and lies”).

¹⁸ The sluggish pace occurs **at that very spot** (neither before nor after his destination).

Yaakov did **not** intend to **lengthen** the journey by implying that his destination was further than it was. (If this were the case, Rashi would have said, “הֶאָרִיךְ {he lengthened} the journey for him.”)¹⁹

However, according to Rashi, the distance remained the same, but Yaakov told Esav that the journey would be “drawn out.” It would take more time, with pauses, stops, etc. In any event, this is evident from the fact that Yaakov told Esav, “I will make my way **at my slow pace** according to the pace of the work that is before me and according to the gait of the children.”²⁰ In other words, the journey would be plodding — with frequent stops due to the work and the children — until he eventually arrived in Seir.

Thus, according to this, Rashi’s conclusion, “He will go in the days of Mashiach,” is not a contradiction to “יִרְחִיב {he should prolong} the journey for him,” at the beginning of his commentary. On the contrary! “He will go in the days of Mashiach” clarifies the meaning of “הֶרְחִיב, he prolonged the journey for him”: The ultimate goal and end of this protracted journey will be in the days of the Mashiach.

[As for Rashi’s statement that “he intended to go only as far as Sukkos,” this does not mean that Yaakov intended to go only to Sukkos **and no further**. This would **contradict the explicit** scriptural account. The Torah records that Yaakov later continued to Shechem, **etc.** Rather, Yaakov meant that on the **current** journey, when Esav had gone on his way to Seir and arrived there (“Esav returned {on his way to Seir}”),²¹ Yaakov intended to go only as far as Sukkos. Indeed, he “traveled to Sukkos” and lingered for a specified period;²² as Rashi²³ **writes explicitly**, Yaakov “**lingered** there (in Sukkos) for eighteen months” — it was just a **stop** on the way.]

Based on this understanding, we need to clarify the reverse view: Why does Rashi, in his Talmud commentary, interpret “יִרְחִיב the journey for him,” as, “If the Jew needs to travel a *parsah*, he should say, ‘I need to travel two *parsaos*’” (which is dishonest)?

[And since we learn this deceptive strategy from Yaakov’s conduct, it is clear, as explained above, that this also applies to Yaakov (according to Rashi’s Talmud commentary). How does this dovetail with the above explanation?]

¹⁹ Like the commonly used phrase — “a **long** journey.”

²⁰ {*Bereishis* 33:14.}

²¹ {*Bereishis* 33:16.}

²² For he was on the way to fulfill Hashem’s instruction (*Bereishis* 31:3) “return to **the land of your fathers and your birthplace**,” returning to the place of his father Yitzchak.

²³ *Bereishis* 33:17.

4.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN RASHI ON TORAH AND GEMARA

We also need to explain the difference between Rashi's Talmud commentary and his Torah commentary:

In his Talmud commentary, on the phrase, “הַרְחִיבֵהּ the journey for him,” Rashi writes that as a result of the Jew saying: “I need to travel two *parsaos*’ ... perhaps the gentile will delay attacking him until the second *parsah*.” This wording indicates that we presume that the gentile unquestionably wants to harm the Jew. And by the Jew answering that he needs to travel two *parsaos*, the gentile **might** postpone his assault (“perhaps the gentile will delay”). Because these details are deduced from what “Yaakov, our forefather, did,” this implies they must have also been present in Yaakov's situation.

However, in his Torah commentary, regarding “הַרְחִיבֵהּ the journey for him” concerning Yaakov, Rashi's wording is precise: “He said: ‘If Esav intends to do me harm, let him wait until I come to him.’” This means that the precaution was taken because of a doubt — “**if** he intends to harm me” — Yaakov was uncertain that Esav wanted to harm him.

[Seemingly, this also has a practical halachic implication: There is a difference as to whether one may use the strategy of “prolonging the journey” even in a situation where it is uncertain “if his (the gentile's) intention is to harm,” or if he must (at least initially) seek another strategy.]

5.

PSHAT

The explanation is as follows: As discussed several times, both in his Torah commentary and in his Talmud commentary, Rashi interprets the text following *pshat*.²⁴ However, in his Torah commentary, he adheres to the *pshat* of **Scripture**, whereas in his Talmud commentary, he adheres to the *pshat* of the **Gemara** (even if it does not align with the *pshat* of **Scripture**).

The above quote from the Gemara discusses gentiles being suspected of bloodshed. On a simple level, this means that when such a gentile asks a Jew, “Where are you going?” it is a clear sign that the gentile intends to attack the Jew.

²⁴ {The straightforward meaning of the text.}

Similarly, this is also evident from the emphasis of the Gemara (regarding Yaakov): “As Yaakov our forefather did with Esav the **wicked**.” Yaakov said something other than what he meant because he was dealing with (Esav) the wicked, and being wicked, Esav certainly intended to harm him.

This is in contrast to the *pshat* of **Scripture**. The narrative does not conclusively indicate that Esav sought to harm Yaakov. On the contrary, starting from the verse at the beginning of this passage²⁵ — “Esav ran toward him, and he embraced him and fell upon his neck, and kissed him, and they wept” — Esav’s demeanor was wholly affectionate and friendly. In particular, Esav’s generous offer that prompted Yaakov’s **response** — “I will come to my master in Seir” also conveyed affection and friendship: “Travel on and let us go, I will proceed alongside you — I will do you this favor.”²⁶ Consequently, Yaakov’s response was merely precautionary. Since Esav had long been Yaakov’s archenemy, Yaakov exercised due diligence, thinking, “**if** he intends to harm me.”

6.

RASHI’S TALMUD COMMENTARY VS. HIS TORAH COMMENTARY

This clarifies the difference between Rashi’s Torah commentary and his Talmud commentary:

When discussing (Esav **the wicked**, and similarly, in general) a gentile who is wicked and suspected of shedding blood, if he asks a Jew, “Where are you going?” it indicates that the gentile intends to assault the Jew. This is a dangerous predicament, and one who finds himself in this situation must resort to using deception to escape the danger: “If the Jew needs to travel a *parsah*,²⁷ he should say, ‘I need to go two *parsaos*.’” This way, he can deflect the danger, as the gentile “will delay attacking him until the second *parsah* and the Jew will part from him before then.”

In contrast, according to the *pshat* of the **verses**, there was merely a concern or doubt — “**if** he intends to harm me.” Thus, to alleviate this **concern**, it was sufficient for Yaakov to say, “Until I come to my master in Seir,” and thereby, “He *prolonged* the journey for him.”

²⁵ Bereishis 33:4.

²⁶ Bereishis 33:12 and Rashi’s commentary.

²⁷ {A halachic measure of distance equivalent to approximately 3 miles}

BRINGING IN RAMBAM

Rashi's words contain wondrous halachic insights. One of them is as follows:

According to the above explanation of Rashi's wording, "הִרְחִיב {he prolonged} the journey for him" [not הִאָּרְיָה {he lengthened}, that is, not by specifying a place farther than his intended destination but by drawing out the journey itself], we can also explain Rambam's opinion on this halachah. Rambam writes:²⁸

If the gentile asks, "Where are you going?" יִרְחִיב {he should prolong} the journey for him, as Yaakov הִרְחִיב {prolonged} the journey for Esav, as the verse says, "Until I come to my master in Seir."

This is difficult to understand: Rambam's work *{Mishneh Torah}* is a book of laws that presents the laws for practical guidance. Why does Rambam not explain what "יִרְחִיב {he should prolong} the journey for him" means in practical terms?

[Many of the commentators on the Gemara²⁹ do spell it out. *Beis Yosef* in *Shulchan Aruch*³⁰ also records the law in clear terms, "If a gentile asks him, 'Where are you going?,' if he needed to travel one *parsah*, he should say, 'I am going two *parsaos*.'"]

We could answer, albeit with difficulty, that according to Rambam, "he should prolong the journey for him" includes two things: "He should prolong" does not only refer to the **words** he must **say** to the gentile; יִרְחִיב also refers to a course of action. The Jew should **distance himself** from the gentile (during the journey), in line with the verse, "וְנָרוּחַ תְּשִׂימֶנּוּ", and put a space between herd and herd."³¹

[On this basis, we can appreciate Rambam's nuanced wording: "As Yaakov prolonged the journey for Esav, **as the verse says**,³² 'Until I come to my master in Seir.'" Rambam, seemingly, could have used more precise wording (as the *Tosefta*³³ does): "**As he said**, 'Until I come to my master in Seir.'"]

²⁸ "Hilchos Rotzeiach Ushmiras Nefesh," ch. 12, par. 8.

²⁹ Rashi, *Ran* and *Rabbeinu Chananel* on *Avodah Zarah* 25b.

³⁰ "Yoreh Deah," sec. 153, par. 3; see *Levush*, ad. loc.

³¹ *Bereishis* 32:17.

³² Similarly, the Gemara writes, "**as the verse says**, 'Until I come to my master in Seir,'" and not, "as he said," or, "as Yaakov said" (like the wording used in *Tosefta*, *Avodah Zarah*, ch. 3, par. 1 (end), and *Jerusalem Talmud*, "Avodah Zarah," ch. 2, sec. 1.

³³ *{Tosefta*, "Avodah Zarah," ch. 3, par. 1.}

However, reading this interpretation into Rambam's words is a significant stretch. Moreover, Rambam already recorded **this** idea — that while traveling, a person must distance himself from a gentile (suspected of shedding blood) — in the **previous** halachah:³⁴ “And do not accompany them on the way.”

Therefore, it is clear that also, according to Rambam, “he should prolong the journey for him” refers to the **words the Jew must say** (in response to the gentile's question, “Where are you going?”).

Thus, the question resurfaces: Why doesn't Rambam spell out the practical meaning of “he should prolong the journey for him”?

8.

NUANCES IN RAMBAM'S WORDS

There are also several nuances in Rambam's wording:

- a) Rambam only quotes the verse, “Until I come to my master in Seir,” and not the second verse (quoted in the Gemara), “Yaakov traveled to Sukkos.” This is difficult to understand: The proof that Yaakov **prolonged** the journey by saying, “Until I come to my master in Seir,” lies in the fact that {in reality} “Yaakov traveled (not to Seir but) to Sukkos.” Why does Rambam omit the verse describing this journey?
- b) In the Gemara, the wording is, “as Yaakov, our forefather, **did**,” while Rambam **changes** the verb and writes, “as Yaakov **הִרְחִיב** {prolonged}.”
- c) In the Gemara, the wording is, “Yaakov, our **forefather**, to Esav the **wicked**,” while Rambam omits the epithets and writes simply, “Yaakov... for Esav.”

9.

EXPLAINING RAMBAM

Based on the above (explanation of Rashi's Torah commentary), we can suggest that Rambam maintains that the parameters of the law, “he should prolong the journey for him” — as it applies to all Jews — accords with this explanation {of Rashi's Torah commentary}. As a result of a gentile's inquiry, he should convey to the gentile that the journey will be drawn out,

³⁴ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Rotzeiach Ushmiras Nefesh*,” ch. 12, sec. 7.

so it will take a considerable amount of time until he reaches the specified place (prolonging the time to travel the {originally planned} journey). This way, the gentile will abandon his plan to harm the Jewish traveler (because the gentile will not know how long the Jew will be delayed on the way).

On this basis, we can appreciate Rambam's nuanced wording: "As Yaakov יַרְחִיב {prolonged} the journey for Esav, as the verse says, 'Until I come to my master in Seir.'" Yaakov prolonged the journey by saying, "**Until I come** to my master in Seir" (implying that it would take an indefinite amount of time ["according to the pace of the work that is before me and {according to to the gait of} the children"] until he would arrive there). From this, we learn that every Jew should (speak in such a manner as to) stretch out the journey. (In this context — prolonging the duration of the {originally planned} journey — the verse, "And Yaakov traveled to Sukkos," is irrelevant).

Therefore, Rambam also omits the words, "(Yaakov) our **forefather** (to Esav) **the wicked**." This is because Rambam believes Yaakov's precaution concerning Esav (by prolonging the duration of the {originally planned} journey) was **not** because he was sure that Esav **the wicked** would harm him. On the contrary, Esav had shown a sense of brotherhood towards Yaakov (as explained above in Rashi's commentary). Instead, Yaakov added a safeguard (as explained above).

10.

TWO NARRATIVES INDICATING THE OPPOSITE

But we still need to clarify: Immediately after the Gemara records the law, "If the gentile asks 'Where are you going?,' he should יַרְחִיב {prolong} the journey for him," the Gemara brings two stories demonstrating (and seemingly indisputably) that the definition of, "יַרְחִיב {prolong}," aligns with Rashi's Talmud commentary. The Gemara writes as follows:

It once happened that Rabbi Akiva's students were traveling to Keziv. Robbers encountered them and asked, "Where are you going?" They replied, "To Akko." Upon reaching Keziv, they parted ways. The robbers asked, "Whose [students] are you?" They responded, "Rabbi Akiva's students." The robbers said, "Blessed are Rabbi Akiva and his students, for no evil person has ever harmed them."

Subsequently, the Gemara presents another similar narrative: "Rav Menashe was traveling to Bei Torsa when thieves ran into him...." The narrative continues **similarly** to the one involving Rabbi Akiva's students.

Understood simply, these narratives serve as a practical demonstration and proof for the earlier **law**, “If they ask him where he is going, he should יַרְחִיב {prolong} the journey for him.” These narratives demonstrate how “prolonging” the journey can save a person’s life.

Note that in these narratives, the Jewish travelers told a lie. They claimed to be traveling to a distant place while actually heading to a closer one.³⁵

Thus, we cannot understand “יַרְחִיב {prolonging}” (in the Gemara) as it was construed above. (Namely, a person should *not* say an untruth by lengthening the journey [telling the gentile that he is traveling further than he plans to]. Instead, he should “draw out” the same journey by taking a longer time.)

11.

DANGEROUS OR VERY DANGEROUS

Perhaps the explanation is as follows: Rashi and the Rambam differ in defining the danger posed to a Jew when a gentile asks, “Where are you going?” This can be understood in two ways: It is either the same sort of danger as discussed in the earlier laws in the Gemara (mentioned above), or it is of a different sort:

Since gentiles are **generally** “**suspected** of bloodshed,” several specific laws apply to a Jew, guiding him as to how to protect himself: “A person should not be alone with them”; “If a Jew encounters a gentile on the way, he should position the gentile to his right side”; “if they are ascending or descending, the Jew should not be below and the gentile above....”

We can propose {two ways of understanding the case that follows}:

a) Like the above cases, the case that immediately follows in the Gemara, “If they ask him where he is going,” is another circumstance in which a Jew must protect himself from a gentile (due to gentiles being suspected generally).

b) This case, “If **they ask him** where he is going,” is different. It is more dangerous than the previous cases in the Gemara, which are based on the presumption that ordinary gentiles are suspected of bloodshed. The question “Where are you going?” indicates that **this** gentile **definitely** harbors malicious intent. By asking, “Where are you going?,” the gentile

³⁵ *Iyun Yaakov* on *Ein Yaakov*, “*Avodah Zarah*,” loc cit., explains that Rabbi Akiva’s students, in fact, planned to travel to Akko afterwards, and thus they did not lie. Perhaps we can explain the situation concerning Rav Menashe similarly. However, ostensibly, this is not in line with the straightforward understanding of the Gemara.

exposes himself and places himself beyond the concern of a general **suspicion**. He shows himself as a source of “certain harm.”

12.

PRACTICAL HALACHAH

Perhaps we can suggest that (one of) the practical differences in halachah between the two approaches is:

According to the authorities³⁶ who maintain that nowadays, gentiles “do not typically engage in bloodshed) moreover, murderers are punished with the death penalty. Thus, in our times, gentiles are not suspected of bloodshed,” the prohibition against secluding oneself with a gentile, and similar restrictions, do not apply (to the same extent) nowadays.

This raises the question: What is the law in a case in which “they ask him, ‘Where are you going?’” According to the first approach, the law that “he should prolong the journey for him” applies due to the general suspicion of gentiles. Therefore, nowadays, when gentiles are no longer suspected of bloodshed, the suspicion also does not apply when they ask where he is going, and he does not need to take precautions to “prolong the journey.”

According to the second approach, when “they ask him, ‘Where are you going?’” he should not only suspect them of ill intent but also, “there is a certainty of harm.” Thus, the law that “he should prolong the journey for him” still applies nowadays.

13.

THE CORE OF THE DISAGREEMENT

On this basis, we can suggest that this, in fact, is the underlying basis of the dispute between Rashi and Rambam:

Rashi, in his Talmud commentary, accords with the second approach: In a case where a gentile asks, “Where are you going?” he attains a special halachic status — it is clear that he intends to harm the Jew.

Rashi derives this from the *pshat* of the Gemara, which, after recording the law that “he should prolong the journey for him,” mentions the two narratives discussed above in which “**robbers** encountered them” and “**thieves** ran into him.” By arranging these passages in this

³⁶ *Sheilos Uteshuvos Chavas Yair*, sec. 66; *Meiri, Avodah Zarah* 26a, s.v. “*harbeh*,” and “*hagoyim*.”

order, the Gemara (according to Rashi) teaches that when a gentile asks a person about his destination, the gentile is considered a clear and present danger comparable to the danger posed by robbers and thieves.

Therefore, Rashi teaches that in such a case, a person must take all possible precautions: He must not give a vague response (to deter the gentile from harming the Jew). Instead, he must deceive the gentile outright: “If the Jew needs to travel a *parsah*, he should say, ‘I need to go two *parsaos*’; perhaps the gentile will delay attacking him until the second *parsah* and the Jew will part from him before then.”

[Rashi maintains that we derive this law from Yaakov: “As Yaakov, our forefather, **did** with Esav the **wicked**,” as elaborated above.]

As seen from the practical examples in the narratives mentioned above in the Gemara, even when “they ask where he is going,” when harm is certain, prolonging the journey helps avoid danger.

Rambam, however, maintains that the placement of this law (“if they ask”) immediately following the preceding laws in the Gemara indicates that this law is similar in content to the previous laws. Even when they ask where he is going, there is no certainty of harm. This case is merely another detail in the **general** law that gentiles are suspected of bloodshed.

Thus, Rambam teaches that the solution is: “If the gentile asks ‘Where are you going?’ he should *יִרְחֵיב* {prolong} the journey for him, as Yaakov *הִרְחִיב* {prolonged} the journey for Esav, as the verse says, ‘Until I come to my master in Seir’” — he should **draw out** the journey he is taking (as explained above at length). He should not disclose where he is **currently** headed. Instead, he should respond that he has a long way to go. He should explain to the gentile that he will remain traveling for a long while until reaching his destination. This statement will free him from danger, as explained above.

[This parallels the situation with Yaakov and Esav, where there was no imminent, specific danger from Esav. On the contrary, there was a show of affection, as elucidated above.]³⁷

According to Rambam, the Gemara records the two subsequent narratives to teach an additional law. The law is: In a case of definite danger, such as the presence of robbers or thieves, the law is (not to “draw out the journey,” as is to be done with an ordinary gentile who asks where he is going, but) to give a more distant destination beyond where he is truly

³⁷ Meaning, we learn two things from Yaakov’s narrative: a) This case falls under the general law that gentiles are suspected of bloodshed. b) The way to protect oneself in such a case is by saying “until I will arrive” — widening the way.

headed. In this way, perhaps the gentile will delay causing him harm until that distant place, and in the meantime, he will part from the gentile.

14.

THE INNER DIMENSION

The explanation of the preceding according to the deeper dimensions of the Torah is as follows:

As known, when one Torah concept is derived from another, the original is the cause of the derived concept.

The same holds in our case: The fact that a Jew living in any era or generation is saved from a gentile who asks where the Jew is traveling is a result of the fact that (on a deeper level) this circumstance incorporates {the spiritual dynamic symbolized by} the journey prolonged by Yaakov³⁸ — “until I come to my lord in Seir.”³⁹

The explanation:

Gentiles (and a foreign mindset) can, G-d forbid, control a Jew when a Jew departs himself in a way that reflects {an exile attitude,} that his “place” is in exile, alongside the gentile. Hence, the gentile thinks the Jew is **truly** under his control.

However, {this is not the case} when a Jew “prolongs the journey for him” — when he tells the gentile that his presence in exile is merely a **temporary stop along** the way. He is in the midst of the journey, “until I come to my master in Seir” — toward redemption when the situation will be reversed: “Deliverers will go up to Mount Zion **to judge the mountain of Esav**, and sovereignty will be Hashem’s.”

The Jew’s presence in exile is the **preparation**, the journey toward redemption. He is engaged in the work of refining the world, breaking through the darkness of this world through the candle of mitzvah and the light of Torah.⁴⁰ The Jew is preparing the world for the

³⁸ Note the saying of our sages, “the narratives of the fathers are signs for the children” (see *Tanchuma*, “*Lech Lecha*,” sec. 9; *Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 40, par. 6; *Ramban*, *Bereishis* 12:6; *Toras Chaim*, “*Lech Lecha*,” 83c ff.; see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 15, p. 76.

³⁹ Note *Paneiach Raza* on *Bereishis* 33:14: “I will make my way at my slow pace — to bear the suffering of the exiles....”

⁴⁰ {*Mishlei* 6:23.}

future redemption when⁴¹ “Hashem will be an eternal light for you.”⁴² As it says,⁴³ “Nations will walk by your light, “and “the glory of Hashem will be revealed, and all flesh together will see that the mouth of Hashem has spoken.”⁴⁴

If a Jew adopts this approach, then during this time of preparation for redemption, the power of the gentile mindset is undermined. Consequently, the gentile loses his dominion over Jews.

Then, the Jewish people will experience tranquility, even while journeying from exile to redemption, even before reaching the “dawn of the redemption”:⁴⁵ “Yaakov came whole to the city of Shechem,” “whole in his body... in his possessions... and his Torah.”⁴⁶ Jewish people will be healthy and whole in their bodies — literally — in their wealth, their children, and their livelihood. They will study the Torah amidst peace, and {as Yaakov did when he returned from Charan, concerning which Rashi comments}, “his Torah learning was intact”:⁴⁷ The Torah learning is whole — the Jewish people will learn both the revealed and hidden parts of Torah (which in our generation has been revealed in the teachings of Chassidus), in the manner of “one Torah,”⁴⁸ and a “complete Torah.”⁴⁹

This hastens the coming of Mashiach, when, as mentioned earlier (in Section 2), the prophecy, “until I come to my master in Seir,” will be fulfilled, as in the promise, “Deliverers will go up to Mount Zion to judge the mountain of Esav, and sovereignty will be Hashem’s.”⁵⁰

May it happen speedily these days.

— From talks delivered *Shabbos parshas Vayishlach*, and *Shabbos parshas Vayeshev*
5741 (1980)

⁴¹ See *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 36.

⁴² *Yeshayahu* 60:19

⁴³ *Yeshayahu* 60:3.

⁴⁴ *Yeshayahu* 40:5.

⁴⁵ {In the original Aramaic, “*ischalta degeulah*.”}

⁴⁶ *Bereishis* 33:8 and Rashi on this verse.

⁴⁷ {Rashi, *ibid.*}

⁴⁸ {*Shemos* 12:49.}

⁴⁹ {Cf. *Tehillim* 19:8.}

⁵⁰ *Ovadiah* 1:21.