

Singing in Exile?!

On our *parsha's* verse (-Genesis 28:11), "And he lay down in that place," our sages teach (-Bereishis Rabba, Portion 68:11) two opinions: "Rabbi Yehuda said, 'He lay here, but all fourteen years that he was hidden in the house (Torah-Study Academy) of Ever, he did not lie.' Rabbi Nechemya said, 'He lay here, but all twenty years that he stayed in Laban's house, he did not lie.' What would he recite (all night)? Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said, 'The fifteen Songs of Ascent in the book of Psalms (-Chapters 120-134). What is his source? (-Psalms 124:1), 'A song of ascents, by David. (If the L-rd had not been with us), Let Israel now say': 'Israel the Elder' (a title used for Jacob, who's name G-d changed to Israel). Rabbi Shmuel bar Nachman said, 'He would say the entire book of Psalms.' What is the source? (-Psalms 22:4) 'Yet You are holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel': 'Israel the Elder'."

The question of, "What would he recite," is not about, "What was Jacob occupied with in the house of Laban," for the verse tells us that his occupation was with the sheep of Laban (-Genesis 31:6 & 40), "with all my might I served your father... I was (in the field) by day when the heat consumed me, and the frost at night, and my sleep wandered from my eyes." Rather, our sages are asking, being that Jacob was negatively effected by Laban's house --as Rashi teaches us (-ibid 29:12) that Jacob said, "If he (Laban) comes to deceive me, I, too, am his brother in deception,"-- hence, the question, of what measures did Jacob take in order to protect himself and to give himself the strength to overcome his exile. And being that (-ibid 27:22), "The voice is the voice of Jacob and the hands are the hands of Esau," thus, the question becomes, "What would he recite," in prayer. To this the midrash answers, either (i) The fifteen Songs of Ascent, or (ii) the entire book of Psalms.

Questions: (a) While opinion (ii) carries the logic of Jacob's not being able to do any in-depth study Torah during his years of, "with all my might¹ I served," therefore he turned to the recital of the *Book of Psalms*, being that (-Yalkut Shimoni, Tehilim, Remez 613), "Should read them and labor in them and take for them the reward (as if studying the laws of purity/impurities of) skin legions and tents." However, what is the reasoning of opinion (i) of Jacob's specifically saying the 15 Songs of Ascent chapters? (b) Especially so, Jacob's saying these chapters is in order to be able to combat the exile, thus, why specifically chapters² of Songs of Ascent?!

In order to understand this, let us see the teaching (-Yoseph Tehillos, Tehillim, Psalm 120) of the Rabbi Chaim Joseph David Azulai, known as the ChID" A (-Link), "The Fifteen Song of Ascents were said by David to correlate with the fifteen years that the forefathers lived together."³ Thus, the intent behind Jacob's saying Fifteen chapters of Psalms is to evoke (not only his own merit, but also) the merit of Abraham and Isaac, bringing about the unity of all three patriarchal attributes of Love (Abraham), Fear (Isaac), and Compassion (Jacob), as Jacob said (-ibid 31:42), "Had not the G-d of my father, the G-d of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, been for me..." But why did Jacob specifically want the attributes of Abraham and Isaac joining him in order to overcome his exile?

The answer lay in the military tactic used in the Seven Year War⁴ (-Link). The way of war was that the legions of an army were divided in three, one placed in the center, and the other two, to the right and to the left. The opposing army would do this as well, and they waged war legion against opposing legion. The tactic used to win that war was to bring all the three platoons together against one platoon of the enemy, encircling the enemy's one platoon. And through this tactic they won over the enemy's platoon with certainty. Doing this to the second and the third platoons of the enemy, eliminating the enemy. So too, with the *Spiritual War* against our *Evil Inclination*, we need to arouse and gather together our three emotions of Love, Fear, and Compassion, against one of our *Evil Inclinations* emotions, win over it. After this, to then arouse all three holy emotions against the next emotion of the *Other Side*, until all are eliminated. This is what Jacob was employing with his reciting the Fifteen Songs of Ascent, evoking the fifteen years of all three holy emanations of Love (Abraham), Fear (Isaac), and Compassion (Jacob), functioning together on this world.

Deeper yet, the specific number 15, the numerical value of the first two of the four letters of the *Ineffable Tetragrammaton*: letter 'yud' (10), which represents the *Intellect of Wisdom Emanation*, and the letter 'hai' (5), which represents the *Intellect of Understanding Emanation*. While the latter two letters ('vov' and 'hai') represent the *Emotion Emanations*. And being that *emotions* are born through intellectually understanding, contemplating, and concentration upon the virtues or the exaltedness of G-d, giving birth to either Love, Fear or Compassion for G-d, therefore, the *Intellects* are called the *Parents* of the *Emotions*, and the *Intellects* also nurture and direct the *Emotions*. This is why, in order to evoke the unity of the 'Three (primary) *Emotion Emanations*,' of the 'Fifteen Years' that our 'Forefathers Lived Together,' the *Fifteen Value* of the *Intellect Emanations* letters of G-d's name, would need to be drawn and shining within the *Emotion Emanations*. Hence, Jacob recited the *Fifteen Songs of Ascents*, to give him the strength to conquer the exile of Laban's house.

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1. To the point that it is from this work of Jacob that we define the legal obligation of the status of 'work' when being paid by an employer (-Shulchan Oruch ADMUH"Z, The Laws Governing Borrowing, Hiring, and Muzzling Animals, Law 20): "A worker is obligated to work with all his might, as the righteous Yaakov said, 'I served your father with all my might.'"
2. So too with opinion (ii), being that all of Psalms is called, "Israel's songs."
3. Abraham lived for 175 years, Isaac was born when Abraham was 100, Jacob was born when Isaac was 60. Hence, when Abraham died, Jacob was 15 years old: 175 - 160 (100+60) = 15.
4. Many historians refer to this war as the true World War I. The war went on for more than just seven years, in which, each side could not overcome the other side.
5. -See (-Link): "French foreign minister, Choiseul developed a plan to invade Britain in three separate places at Portsmouth, Essex and Scotland. He oversaw the construction of a massive fleet of transports to convey the troops during 1759. Defeats of the French navy at Lagos and Quiberon Bay put an end to these plans and he was forced to call off the invasion in the late autumn." This may be what the war tactic the *sicha* is referring to.

With this we have explained opinion (ii) of Jacob specifically recited the *Fifteen Songs of Ascent*. However, why would Jacob be choosing Psalms⁶ that are "Songs" for his experience in *exile*?! The answer is that, "*The descent is but for the sake of an ascent*," just as the lion crouches back low in order to jump forward and high. Jacob saw the purpose of his descent, the *ascent* that will sprout forth from it, hence, already in Laban's house of exile, Jacob recited, "*Songs of Ascent*".

Being that the *emphases* of a novel concept is found in its *opening*, let us look into the *opening* psalm of the *Fifteen Songs of Ascent*. And being that (-Brochois 12a), "*Everything follows the conclusion*," let us look into its *concluding* (-Psalms 120:7), "*I am at peace, but when I speak, they [come] to [wage] war.*" Meaning, regardless that he is interested in *peace*, nevertheless, "*they come to wage war with me.*" Spiritually speaking, "*they come to wage war with me*," relates to the concealments and the disappearance of divine revelations during the times of exile. And particularly to the tests, the interferences, and the blockages in exile, which challenge us in our service to G-d. While on the other-hand, in reciting the *Song of Ascent* upon the, "*they come to wage war with me*," we are experiencing the mighty ascent brought about through this war? Are we saying that we are *perturbed* by the, "*I am at (want) peace, but... they [come] to [wage] war*," or that we are *gleefully* experiencing the, "*Song of Ascent*"?

The answer is that it is forbidden for one to intentionally place himself into a test or temptation: (-Brochois 60b) "*and lead me not... nor into temptation.*" Therefore he states, "*I am at (want) peace*," to serve G-d in peace, and I do not want to combat with temptations and challenges. Nevertheless, because of the mighty ascent made possible only through combating with challenges, therefore, G-d arranges that it be, "*they* (plural, referring to the *plurality* of our physical realm, in contrast to the spiritual worlds of *unity*) *come to wage war with me.*" And it is upon this (G-d's arranging that, "*they come to wage war with me*"), that he states, "*Song of Ascent*," that not only will these wars not deter him, nor weaken him, but rather, this war will but strengthen him. And knowing this, therefor, already *in exile*, it brings him to an experience of "*song*"!

The Lesson: When one contemplates upon the present darkness of exile, to the point where Torah acknowledges one's asking (-Psalms 121:1), "*from where will my help come?*," can very well lead one to depression and hopelessness. Thus, we are taught that a Jew's descent into exile is like, "*And Jacob left... and he went to Charan*," which was "*but for the sake of an ascent*," so that there be the experience of (-Ecclesiastics 2:13), "*wisdom has an advantage over folly*," and, "*as the advantage of light over darkness*".

However, in order to see the ascent *within* and *during* the descent, and to then experience "*song*" from *seeing* this, one needs to --*while still in exile*--, "*I shall raise my eyes*," to a *higher* contemplation and concentration, upon the true existence and purpose of exile!

--*Not* that one should have joy from being in exile, or to think that exile is the befitting place for a Jew! No! Exile is "*folly*" and is "*darkness*"! Rather, the Torah explains that a Jew in exile is, "*As a prince who has been exiled from his father's table*," and (-Brochois 3a), "*Happy is the king who is thus praised in his house! How great is the pain of the father who exiled his children!*" And the prince not feeling this, is but a sign of how mightily dark exile has become....--

Through this, "*I will raise my eyes*," of contemplating and consecrating on the *purpose* of exile, one then finds the answer to his, "*from where will my help come?*," within the, "*from where will my help come?*," itself.

The word for, "*From where*," is, "*m'ayin* - מַאֲיִן," which mystically means, "*From Ayin* (אֵיִן) *will my help come!*" *Ayin* means *nihilo*, and in the teachings of Kabbala and of Chassidus, refers to the '*nihilo*' of, "*creatio ex nihilo*". Meaning, the *trans-rational* and *illogical Infinite Light*, which can not be reached by the finite capacities ("*rational* and *logic*") of mankind. And through one's victorious war against exile, we then draw this "*Ayin*" to be revealed, and to influence, all of the, "*Order of Evolution*," including *our* realm of the physical *Heaven and Earth*, as the verses continue (-Psalms 121:2), "*My help is from the L-rd, the Maker of heaven and earth!*"

6. See Footnote #2.

7. So too, we find in the Talmud (-end of Makkot) concerning Rabbi Akiva, who upon seeing the depths of the descent of the destruction of the Holy Temple and the exile it brought, Rabbi Akiva *laughed*. And the meaning behind this is that specifically Rabbi Akiva (to the exclusion of all the sages who were there with him) was the one able to see the ascent already within the descent. It is of Rabbi Akiva that we find in the writings of the Arizal, that he was a reincarnation of Jacob!

8. Mystically explained that the *greater* "*advantage wisdom*" and "*advantage light*" comes from "*transformed folly*" and "*transformed darkness*".