



Likkutei Sichos

Volume 15 | Vayeitzei | Sichah 5

Road Tripping

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YAAKOV WENT ON HIS WAY

As known, there is an adage of our Rebbeim¹ that the *avodah*² of “Yaakov went on his way”³ begins right after Simchas Torah (and Shabbos *Bereishis*). A Jew continues on his way (and {resumes} the order of his *avodah*) for the entire year.

As explained several times,⁴ throughout the month of Tishrei, Jews are occupied primarily with **holiness** (the festivals, their associated mitzvos, and preparations for them). After the month of Tishrei concludes, the days are again ordinary days, when people are involved in mundane matters — most of these days are regular weekdays with most Jews working for a livelihood, etc.

This transition from the month of Tishrei to the *avodah*⁵ of the rest of the year is alluded to in the maxim, “Yaakov went on his way.” The emphasis on the words “his way” brings to mind two contradictory ideas: On the one hand, it alludes to the idea that throughout the routine of the entire year following Tishrei — a Jew conducts himself differently than how he conducted himself during Tishrei. After Tishrei, it is “**his** way” — the person’s path: His time is spent mainly on pursuing a livelihood, eating, drinking, sleeping,⁶ and the like — a path on which holiness is not (openly) evident. In this respect, seemingly, there is no difference between Jew and Gentile.

On the other hand, the **same** term, “his way,” emphasizes that it was **his** way — the **unique** way of our forefather Yaakov, who paved this path for the entire Jewish people. Meaning that even a Jew’s daily conduct — the way he conducts himself in his material matters, the way he eats, the way he drinks, the

¹ See the *sichos* of: Simchas Torah 5686; Simchas Torah 5697 (Sec. 13); Acharon shel Pesach 5695 (*Sefer HaMaamarim* 5711, p. 240); Simchas Torah Day 5699; First night of Shavuos 5708 (*Sefer HaMaamarim* 5709, p. 173).

² {Divine service.}

³ *Bereishis* 32:2.

⁴ See the *sichah* of *Motzaei Shabbos Bereishis* 5735 (printed in *Likkutei Sichos*, beg. of vol. 9); *Likkutei Sichos*, vol 20, p. 266 ff. and p. 282, fn. 15*.

⁵ {Lit., “work,” this word also denotes “Divine service.”}

⁶ On the weekdays, which is different than eating, drinking, and sleeping on Shabbos and Yom Tov.

way he conducts business, and the like⁷ — is different from the conduct of a Gentile. In all of these matters, a Jew conducts himself “for the sake of Heaven”;⁸ and {he adheres to the maxim,} “know Him in all of your ways.”⁹

On this basis, we can appreciate the connection between “Yaakov went on his way” and the month of Tishrei — when we declare (customarily in many places) “Yaakov went on his way.”¹⁰ For the ability of a Jew, when conducting himself in “his way” — in mundane matters — to evoke the feeling that this is “**his** way” — the unique manner of a Jew’s conduct — derives from the sanctity, the Torah, and mitzvos that a Jew absorbs throughout Tishrei, a comprehensive month {encompassing the entire year}.

2.

IN CONTEXT

The words of our Rebbeim are exact. Therefore, we must say that the words “Yaakov went on his way” express the transition from Tishrei to the routine *avodah* of the year not only because these **words** themselves allude to this *avodah* but because this dimension of *avodah* also fits the context of this verse in our *parshah*, “Yaakov went on his way,” as recorded in our Torah, the Torah of life (*horaah*, instruction in the conduct of one’s life).

The following, however, is unclear: The verse, “Yaakov went on his way” speaks of Yaakov’s journey from the **diaspora**, from Charan, חָרָן — from “the place of Hashem’s אַף, anger, in the world”¹¹ — to the land of Israel, the **Holy** Land. It turns out that “Yaakov” going “on his way,”¹² as described in this verse, has the opposite meaning of the journey of a Jew (from the **holiness** [of the month of Tishrei] to the mundane pursuits [of the rest of the year]) mentioned earlier!

⁷ Note *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Deos*,” beg. of ch. 5; *Likkutei Dibburim*, vol. 3, 421a ff., 605a ff.

⁸ *Avos* 2:12.

⁹ *Mishlei* 3:6; see *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Deos*,” end of ch. 3; *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch*, end of sec. 231.

¹⁰ See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 20 (pp. 260 ff), which says that this declaration empowers, etc., our *avodah*.

¹¹ Rashi on *Bereishis* 11:32 (some editions omit the words “in the world”); see *Zohar*, vol. 1, 147a.

¹² Note *Alshich* on *Bereishis* 32:4.

3.

LAVAN IN PURSUIT

The explanation of the preceding: The verse “Yaakov went on his way” is recorded at the end of the narrative describing Yaakov’s flight from Lavan, Lavan’s pursuit of Yaakov, their claims and counterclaims, and their dispute,¹³ until the narrative’s conclusion: “Lavan arose early in the morning; he kissed his sons and his daughters and blessed them; then Lavan went and returned to his place. Yaakov went on his way....”¹⁴ The verse, “Yaakov went on his way” is not a continuation of Yaakov’s *avodah* **in** Lavan’s **house**. Rather, it refers to the time *after* Yaakov had departed from Lavan’s house in Charan, when Lavan was in hot pursuit.

This is the connection between the clause, “Yaakov went on his way” in our *parshah*, and the declaration made at the end of Tishrei: The mystical idea behind Lavan’s pursuit of Yaakov is that it fortified Yaakov, enabling him to subdue Eisav later. (In the next *parshah*, the Torah chronicles this encounter, describing Yaakov’s exploits upon meeting Eisav.) Lavan’s pursuit of Yaakov made Eisav’s {subsequent} refinement possible, analogous to Tishrei, which fuels our *avodah* to refine {the world} throughout the rest of the year.

4.

REFINING LAVAN’S SPARKS

To understand this, we must preface with the Mezritcher Maggid’s explanation¹⁵ (of the mystical ideas behind) Lavan’s pursuit of Yaakov: Yaakov had left behind “Torah letters” that he had not yet extracted from Lavan. Lavan chased Yaakov to give him the letters that he had left in Lavan’s possession. With these letters, an entire *parshah* was added to the Torah.¹⁶

¹³ *Bereishis* 31:17 ff.

¹⁴ *Bereishis* 32:1-2.

¹⁵ *Or HaMeir*, cited and explained in *Or HaTorah*, “*Vayeitzei*” (vol. 5), 869a ff.

¹⁶ See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 1, p. 80 regarding the comparison to (and clarification of) the explanation given in *Tanya*, “*Iggeres HaKodesh*,” ch. 25.

The following is unclear:¹⁷ The “Torah letters” Yaakov left behind with Lavan were the sparks of holiness in Lavan’s possession. Since Yaakov’s twenty-year stay with Lavan was to refine the sparks of holiness found there, why did Yaakov leave **these** sparks behind and not refine them? And why were these sparks specifically elevated by Lavan pursuing Yaakov?

This indicates that Lavan possessed two types of sparks of holiness: (a) sparks that Yaakov could refine through his *avodah*; and (b) sparks that Yaakov couldn’t refine through his *avodah* alone. These sparks could only be refined through Lavan’s pursuit of Yaakov.

These two types of sparks correspond to two types of mitzvos: (a) “Regular mitzvos” such as *sukkah*, *lulav*, and so on, whose performance is contingent upon a person’s cognizance of the mitzvah and his will to perform it — the mitzvah is fulfilled by a person wanting and intending to perform it; and (b) mitzvos, whose performance is not contingent upon a person’s will and cognizance. Moreover, the fulfillment of these mitzvos happens specifically unknowingly, such as the mitzvah of *shichechah*¹⁸ and the like (similar to “honor” and “greatness”).¹⁹

The deeper reason for this distinction between mitzvos: Mitzvos contingent upon a person’s cognizance and will are rooted Above in the level of *kesser*,²⁰ “*arich anpin*,”²¹ which is the Supernal *ratzon*.²² Thus, these mitzvos are also connected with the cognizance and will of the person fulfilling the mitzvah, and by fulfilling the mitzvah, he evokes an efflux from the Supernal *ratzon* into the world. In contrast, mitzvos that are specifically not contingent upon a person’s cognizance, such as *shichechah*, are rooted in the lowest level of the

¹⁷ *Or HaTorah*, “*Vayeitzei*” (vol. 5), 869a ff.

¹⁸ {Lit., “forgetting,” this is the prohibition of returning to harvest one or two stalks of produce that one inadvertently left unharvested.}

¹⁹ See *Eruvin* 13b. {“Anyone who pursues greatness, greatness flees from him; and anyone who flees from greatness, greatness pursues him.”}

²⁰ {*Kesser*, lit., “crown,” is the sublime, encompassing level of Divine emanation which transcends the ten *sefiros* (Divine emanations). *Kesser* is similar to a crown, which sits on the top of the head. In a human being, the two components of *kesser* — *ratzon* (will), also known as *arich anpin*, and *taanug* (delight) — control and motivate the other faculties; see Rabbi J.I. Schochet, *Mystical Concepts in Chassidism* (Kehot Publication Society, Brooklyn, 1988), pp. 59-71.}

²¹ {The lower level of *kesser*; see previous fn.}

²² {Lit., “will.”}

Emanator (which transcends *ratzon*). Thus, also in this world, these mitzvos transcend the connection a person makes with a mitzvah through his cognizance and will, as explained in *Likkutei Torah*.²³

The two types of sparks that Lavan possessed can be understood similarly: During his stay in Lavan's house, Yaakov refined sparks that had to be refined by engaging with them willingly and knowingly. However, Lavan also possessed such lofty sparks that Yaakov couldn't elevate them utilizing his *avodah* based on will and knowledge. Therefore, these sparks remained in Lavan's possession. Such sparks could only be refined and elevated by a Supernal power (through an "*isarusa dileila*").²⁴

5.

WHITE AS SNOW

The level from which the Supernal power is drawn — *isarusa dileila* — is alluded to in the name "Lavan," as our Rabbis remark²⁵ about the verse:²⁶ "*Do you know Lavan?* — Do you know the One who, in the future, will whiten your sins like snow?"

This is explained (in *Torah Or*)²⁷ to mean that in the realm of holiness, *Lavan* {lit., "white"} denotes *loven ha'elyon* {lit., "supernal whiteness"}, which is "the light of the Essence of *Or Ein Sof*,"²⁸ alluded to by the color white. White is different from other colors: Other colors are created by the substance of a **colorant** that determines the particular color of an object. In contrast, the color white shows off the essential character of an object, unaffected by a colorant.

²³ *Likkutei Torah*, "Berachah," 99b ff.

²⁴ {Lit., "an awakening from Above," refers to Hashem initiating a process by which a person engages in *avodah*; in our context, this term refers to Hashem Himself refining these sparks.}

²⁵ *Bereishis Rabbah*, "Vayeitzei," ch. 70, sec. 10.

²⁶ *Bereishis*, 29:5.

²⁷ *Torah Or*, end of "Vayeitzei," 24b; see also 23a.

²⁸ {*Or Ein Sof*, lit., "The Light of That which has No End" — "Know that before the emanations were emanated and the creations were created, there was a supernal, simple light filling all of existence. There was no vacant space . . . rather, all were filled with that simple, endless light. There was no beginning or end; all was one simple light with a single equivalence. This is what is called the *Or Ein Sof* (the Infinite Light)." (Rabbi Chaim Vital, *Eitz Chayim*, opening chapter.)}

“And so it is, by way of analogy, concerning the *Ein Sof*-light in essence and in its glory. It has no colors whatsoever.”

This is the connection between Lavan and the One who “in the future, will whiten your sins like snow,” as stated in the teaching of our Rabbis, for this whitening — the forgiving of sins — is brought about by drawing an efflux from the Essence of *Ein Sof*-light, which transcends the continuum of creation.²⁹ This is the level of *loven ha’elyon*³⁰ — after many successive descents, the root of Lavan in this world.

This is the explanation of the teaching of our Rabbis,³¹ “*Teshuvah*³² suspends {punishment}, and Yom Kippur atones”: *Teshuvah* alone is insufficient to atone. It is Yom Kippur — the essence of the day — that atones. This is because a person, by his efforts, engaging in the *avodah* of *isarusa delesata*³³ (alone), is unable to evoke an efflux of *loven ha’elyon* from which forgiveness from sin derives, since *loven ha’elyon* transcends the continuum of creation. A person can’t obtain forgiveness even by engaging in the *avodah* of *teshuvah*. Instead, forgiveness comes from Above through an *isarusa dileila* on Yom Kippur.

6.

LAVAN AROSE, YAAKOV WENT

On this basis (that the level of *loven ha’elyon* [that “descended” into “the physical {person of} Lavan”]³⁴ cannot be drawn into the world by a person’s *avodah* through an *isarusa delesata*, but only by an *isarusa dileila*), it is clear that Yaakov’s *avodah* refining the (lowest) sparks in Lavan’s house over twenty

²⁹ {In the original, “*seder hishtalshelus*”; this term which refers to the chain-like descent of spiritual worlds until this world. Each spiritual world denotes a complete realm of existence, resulting from its general proximity to or distance from Divine revelation.}

³⁰ See *Likkutei Torah*, “*Derushim leYom Kippur*,” 68d; the Alter Rebbe’s *maamar*, “*KeTapuach BeAtzei HaYaar*” (Kehot publ., 5714), ch. 4 ff.

³¹ *Yoma* 86a; see the mishnah on *Yoma* 85b.

³² {Repentance.}

³³ {*Isarusa dilesata*, lit., “an awakening from below,” refers to *avodah* that is undertaken by a person on his own initiative.}

³⁴ *Torah Or*, “*Vayeitzei*,” 23a.

years did not bring about a revelation of *loven* from the realm of holiness that “descended” into the physical {person of} Lavan, because Yaakov’s *avodah* was done by **his** efforts of *isarusa delesata*. Only when Lavan **pursued** Yaakov (expressive of an *isarusa dileila*, employing Lavan’s root — *loven ha’elyon*) to impart {to Yaakov} the lofty sparks (the letters) that remained in his possession did the level of *loven ha’elyon*, that were concealed in (the physical) Lavan, within the world, become revealed to Yaakov.

In light of this explanation, the flow of the narrative, “Lavan arose early in the morning; he kissed his sons and his daughters” (as a preamble to “Yaakov went on his way,”) is understandable: After Lavan — *loven ha’elyon* — pursues Yaakov, *loven ha’elyon* is revealed to every single Jew as “*neshikin*³⁵ and cleaving of spirit to spirit,”³⁶ as it says, “he kissed his sons and daughters.” This connotes a consummate cleaving to Hashem.

This is the connection between “(Lavan) arose... he kissed” and “Yaakov went on his way”: On his way to the land of Israel, Yaakov encountered and dealt with Eisav and “wrestled”³⁷ with Eisav’s ministering angel³⁸ — the *avodah* of refining sparks. Yaakov was bestowed with the ability to refine these sparks by {his confrontation with Lavan} — “Lavan arose early in the morning” — the efflux of *loven ha’elyon*.

7.

TRANSITIONING FROM TISHREI

In light of the ideas discussed, we can understand the connection between “Yaakov went on his way” (in our *parshah*) and the *avodah* of every Jew in transitioning from Tishrei to the *avodah* of the rest of the year:

³⁵ {Lit., “kisses,” this is a kabbalistic term referring to a union of the *sefiros* by which spiritual entities emanate.}

³⁶ *Torah Or*, “*Vayeitzei*,” 24b.

³⁷ {*Bereishis* 32:25.}

³⁸ {Rashi on *Bereishis* 32:25.}

After the days of awakening and *teshuvah* experienced by every Jew in Elul, during the days of *Selichos*,³⁹ and especially during the Ten Days of Repentance, when a Jew arouses and evokes through an *isarusa delesata* and his own *avodah* an efflux from Above that is within his ability to draw down — on Yom Kippur, *loven ha'elyon* is revealed through an *isarusa dileila* — “Lavan arose early in the morning.” [Therefore,⁴⁰ the Kohen Gadol wore **white**,⁴¹ a color emblematic of a revelation of *Ein Sof*-light in actuality that is utterly elemental, as discussed above.] As explained in *Likkutei Torah*⁴² on the verse,⁴³ “On this day He shall provide atonement for you... before {*lifnei*} Hashem” — “Hashem’s deeper *ratzon*”⁴⁴ is revealed. This level is called “a cedar in the Levanon,”⁴⁵ because it “whitens {*malbin*} the sins of Israel.”⁴⁶ —

Then, “he kissed his sons and his daughters”: This draws a Divine efflux into all the “supernal *partzufim*”⁴⁷ to the extent that the evil within a person’s animalistic soul, which is called “his sons and his daughters,” is transformed. Thus, a person’s “sins are transformed into actual merits.”⁴⁸

Therefore, the *avodah* of “Yaakov went on his way” begins immediately after Yom Kippur and its lofty efflux of *loven ha'elyon*, as explained in the expositions of Chassidus.⁴⁹

However, the primary *avodah* of “Yaakov went on his way” begins after the conclusion of Tishrei. After *loven ha'elyon* is elicited overtly and inwardly on Sukkos, Shemini Atzeres, and Simchas Torah, the *avodah* begins. Then, the main flow is also elicited from the power Hashem confers to a Jew to engage in

³⁹ {*Selichos* are the penitential prayers recited in the days preceding Rosh Hashanah.}

⁴⁰ *Likkutei Torah*, “*Acharei*,” 28c.

⁴¹ We can posit that this is also the basis for wearing white garments (and a *kittel*) on Yom Kippur; note *Elef LaMateh* on *Mateh Efraim*, end of p. 610, subsection 7.

⁴² *Likkutei Torah*, “*Derushim leYom Kippur*,” 68d.

⁴³ {*Vayikra* 16:30.}

⁴⁴ {The word “*lifnei*” in this verse is interpreted as “inner” or “deeper.”}

⁴⁵ {*Tehillim* 92:13.}

⁴⁶ {*Vayikra Rabbah*, ch. 1, par. 2.}

⁴⁷ {“*Partzufim*” are compound structures of the *sefiros*. A *partzuf* is a symbolic figure of human likeness, used to represent the expansion of an individual *sefirah* (or group of *sefiros*) into an independent configuration of ten *sefiros* of its own.}

⁴⁸ *Maamar KeTapuach BeAtzei HaYaar* (Kehot publ., 5714), ch. 4 ff.

⁴⁹ *Hemshech “VeKacha 5637,”* beg. of ch. 96.

the *avodah* of “Yaakov went on his way.” This is the sacred task whereby a Jew engages with everyday matters to refine the sparks within them and elevate them to a higher state of holiness.⁵⁰ We achieve this by performing all our deeds for the sake of Heaven and cultivating an awareness of Hashem in every aspect of our lives, as guided by the principles of “all your deeds should be for the sake of Heaven”⁵¹ and “know Him in all your ways.”

— From a talk delivered on *Shabbos parshas Bereishis*, 5712 (1951)

⁵⁰ See *Toras Chaim*, end of “*Vayeitzei*”; note gloss on ch. 4 of *Maamar KeTapuach BeAtzei HaYaar* (Kehot publ., 5714).

⁵¹ {*Avos* 2:12.}