



Likkutei Sichos

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And Yud Tes Kislev

Unlimited Blessing

Translated by Rabbi Kivi Greenbaum

General Editor: Rabbi Eliezer Robbins | Copy Editor: Rabbi Y. Eliezer Danzinger

Content Editor: Rabbi Sholom Zirkind

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1.

TWO EXPLANATIONS OF “MY STAFF”

The verse,¹ “I have become small from all the kindnesses... for with my staff, I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become...,”² has two opposite explanations:

- a. The straightforward explanation (as explained by the *Targum Onkelos* and by Rashi in his first comment, as well as others) is that Yaakov crossed over the Jordan river with nothing but his “staff.” From this explanation, we can derive that the words “with my staff, I crossed this Jordan” emphasize (not the kindness that Hashem had shown *Yaakov*, but rather, on the contrary,) Yaakov’s state of material poverty when he crossed the Jordan. This {mention of the staff} is {only} an introduction to further emphasize the greatness of the latter kindness — “And now I have become two camps³” — mentioned next in the verse.
- b. The *midrashic* explanation⁴ (which is also quoted by Rashi): “He put his staff into the Jordan and the Jordan split” fits well with the words “with my staff, I passed...,” and itself is the kindness of Hashem {which the verse refers to}.

These explanations are completely contrary to each other. According to the first one Yaakov was utterly poor⁵, while according to the second

¹ *Bereishis* 32:11.

² {After working for his father in law, Lavan, and marrying Lavan’s two daughters, Yaakov has left Charan with his family and is about to meet his brother Eisav. He hears that Eisav is coming to kill him and so he opens up to Hashem with the following prayer: “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. Now deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Eisav, for I am afraid of him, lest he come and strike me, {and strike} a mother with children. And You said, ‘I will surely do good with you, and I will make your seed {as numerous} as the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted because of multitude.’”}

³ {Originally, he was so poor that he owned only a staff; now he is so successful that his party can be split into two camps.}

⁴ *Aggadas Bereishis* 45:4.

⁵ {Which implies that he is certainly unworthy of any special treatment.}

Yaakov was worthy of a great miracle. In the words of our Sages,⁶ “This man {Rabbi Pinchas Ben Yair} was as great as Moshe and the six hundred thousand Israelites for whom the Sea of Reeds parted.”⁷

2.

EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED

We need to understand the connection between these two explanations. (We have mentioned many times that when there are several explanations of the same word, verse or concept, they must share a common theme).

This is particularly true since in *Aggadas Bereishis*,⁸ these {two explanations} are quoted in succession.

First, we must introduce an expression used by the Alter Rebbe in his famous letter “*katonti*”⁹ (which he wrote when he returned from Petersburg after being released {from prison} on the 19th of *Kislev*):¹⁰ “Because *Yaakov* was exceedingly small in his own eyes due to the many kindnesses {that Hashem had performed for him} because with my staff, etcetera.” (This is the part of that letter that relates to our topic).

Seemingly, this is unclear. Since the Alter Rebbe wanted to emphasize the “many kindnesses” which Hashem had performed for Yaakov (for

⁶ *Chulin* 7:1; Rashi’s commentary loc. cit.

⁷ {The Talmud relates that the sage Rabbi Pinchas Ben Yair was on his way to help with the *mitzvah* of redeeming captives when he encountered the Ginai River. There was also another Jew who was travelling to prepare Matzah for Pesach, and a third person, a gentile, who was accompanying Rabbi Pinchas. Rabbi Pinchas ordered the river to part so they could pass, which it did. Regarding this event, the Sages said the line above. The Rebbe is using this quote to highlight that Yaakov, too, must have been of such stature to have had the Jordan part for him.}

⁸ {Ch. 45:4. *Midrash Aggadas Bereishis* is a collection of early *Midrashim* on *Bereishis*.}

⁹ *Iggeres HaKodesh*, ch. 2, 103b.

¹⁰ {In the fall of 1798, under Czarist Russia, the founder of Chabad Chassidim, Rabbi Shneur Zalman was arrested on charges that his teachings and activities threatened the imperial authority of the Czar. He was imprisoned in an island fortress in the Neva River in Petersburg. In his interrogations, he was compelled to present to the Czar’s ministers the basic tenets of Judaism and explain various points of chassidic philosophy and practice. After 53 days, he was exonerated of all charges and released.}

which he considered himself “*katonti* {small},” the Alter Rebbe should have also quoted the end of the verse (to which his lesson primarily relates): “I crossed this Jordan and now I have become two camps.”

Conceivably, we could explain that by writing, “because with my staff, etcetera,” the Alter Rebbe alludes to the previously mentioned **explanation** of the *Midrash*: “He put his staff into the Jordan and it split.” However, this can’t be correct, because: a) we are still left with the difficulty as to why the Alter Rebbe doesn’t **also** mention the second act of kindness which is **explicitly** stated in the verse “And now I have become two camps”; and b) primarily, if the Alter Rebbe is out to prove from the verse (as interpreted by the *Midrash*) {that Yaakov felt small as a result of the} miracle of “splitting the Jordan,” then he should have quoted the continuation of the verse — “**I crossed this Jordan**” — because this {clearly} hints to the miracle which was accomplished with “my staff”!

We cannot say the Alter Rebbe means to refer to the entire verse, but in order to be concise, he quotes only the first part of the verse and adds the word “כו” “etc” {to include the rest, for the following reasons}: a) He should have at least added **one** word more “I crossed” {which would have made his point clearer}; and b) if this were the case, then as we have explained at length on a previous occasion, he should have written “וכו” — “and etc.” (with an inclusive “vav”). By writing “כו” (without a “vav”), he makes evident that the continuation of the verse is not relevant to the topic at hand (and the addition of “כו” or “גו,” is {merely} to be careful with that which our Sages say,¹¹ “Any verse that Moshe did not divide, we may not divide.”)¹²

In light of all this, the phrase, “because with my staff,” by itself, **without** considering the ideas in the rest of the verse, was enough to engender in Yaakov a feeling of humility — “*katonti*.”

¹¹ *Megillah* 22:1.

¹² {A Torah scroll is not punctuated, and thus there is no visible beginning or end to any verse. Nevertheless, a received tradition from Moshe dictates where each verse begins and ends, and thus can never be changed. To reinforce this point, the Alter Rebbe would include the word “etcetera,” when quoting part of a verse.}

3.

JUSTICE AND CHARITY

In *Or HaTorah*¹³ the *Tzemach Tzedek* quotes the *Shelah*¹⁴ who says that “Because with my staff” — “כי במקלי” is an acronym for “ברוך כבוד ה'” “Blessed is the glory of Hashem from His place.¹⁵ For your salvation I hope, O L-rd.”¹⁶ The *Tzemach Tzedek* adds, “That is to say, according to the explanation in *Torah Or*¹⁷... regarding {the verse},¹⁸ “the justice and the righteousness of Yaakov, You have made,” there are two qualities necessary: righteousness and judgement, which relate to ברוך כבוד ה' and לישועתך קויתי ה' etc.

The explanation: Based on the verse, “the justice {*mishpat*} and the righteousness {*tzedakah*} of Yaakov, You have made,” it is clear that Yaakov had **both** qualities, and the Divine influence from Above was given to him with both *mishpat* and *tzedakah*, even though they are opposites. *Mishpat* suggests that what a person demands, he **deserves**, while *tzedakah* suggests that according to the law and justice, he is **not** {deserving, and a giver is not} obligated to give, but rather he is given as a charity.¹⁹

At first glance, we could say that {*mishpat* and *tzedakah*} refer to two different facets {of a person}. From the perspective of the soul, a Jew can **demand** his needs from Hashem as “justice”; the soul should get what it needs because it deserves it. The body on the other hand can only **ask** for {its needs as} *tzedakah*²⁰.

This answer is untenable because the verse says, “the justice and the righteousness of Yaakov, You have **made**, עשית.” This implies that both

¹³ *Or Hatorah*, “Vayishlach,” 233a.

¹⁴ 295:b.

¹⁵ {*Yechezkel* 3:12.}

¹⁶ {*Bereishis* 49:18.}

¹⁷ *Torah Or*, 63b.

¹⁸ *Tehillim* 99:4.

¹⁹ {So, when Yaakov asked for things and was given, was he deserving or was he a charity case?}

²⁰ {Perhaps this is because while the soul always wants and tries to do what Hashem wants, the body's nature is to serve itself.}

(opposite) qualities are (connected to the same domain, i.e., the world of) “made,” עשיית, which is the actual material world of עשייה.²¹

The explanation is as follows: A person might reach a level on which he can demand goodness from Hashem deservingly. The Talmud²² explains the verse,²³ “Hear me strong-hearted, who are far from *tzedakah*” to mean that “the entire world is sustained by {Hashem’s} *tzedakah*-charity, while they {the righteous, who are called ‘strong-hearted’ and therefore do not need recourse to Hashem’s charity} are sustained by coercion {as due to their own good deeds, they have earned their sustenance}.” {Even though a person can be so righteous and therefore deserves goodness from Hashem,} nevertheless, we must ask {for things as} ***tzedakah***. As it says,²⁴ “To you, O L-rd, is *tzedakah*.”

4.

NO EGO

On this basis, we can also explain why Yaakov was afraid of Eisav, even though Yaakov already had a promise from Hashem (“behold, I will be with you...”).²⁵ True, he was afraid that “perhaps... I have become soiled with sin”²⁶ {and no longer deserve Hashem’s protection}. However, this itself requires explanation because our Sages say,²⁷ “Once most of a person’s years have passed and he did not sin, he will never sin.” Therefore, Yaakov certainly had no reason to worry that “perhaps I have become soiled with sin,” since “most of his years” have passed.

However, this is all true when a person feels that his existence is significant. Then, he may calculate that “most of his years have passed,” and since he hasn’t sinned, he may be assured that “he will never sin.” And

²¹ {This implies that the demands of deserved justice are also those made by the body.}

²² *Berachos* 17b; Rashi’s commentary, loc. cit.

²³ *Yeshayahu* 46:12.

²⁴ *Daniel* 9:7.

²⁵ *Bereishis* 28:15.

²⁶ Rashi’s commentary on *Bereishis* 32:11.

²⁷ *Yoma* 38b.

if he is indeed one of the “strong-hearted,” he is able to demand “forcefully,” because he deserves {the goodness} coming to him.

When, however, a person is a state of true *bittul*,²⁸ feeling no sense of self, the feeling of smallness and *bittul* leads him to appear “in his own eyes as if he has sinned.”²⁹ He is concerned that he has transgressed, or at least, that his *avodah* is flawed; therefore, he assumes that any beneficence can only be conferred to him as *tzedakah*.

5.

ULTIMATE HUMILITY

However, this is unclear. Since Yaakov’s *bittul* brought him to {feel that he could only receive Hashem’s kindness as an act of} *tzedakah*, then why does it say, “***mishpat*** and *tzedakah* is in Yaakov...,” implying that (Yaakov did so, and consequently) one must also relate {to Hashem} in a way of *mishpat*?

The explanation: When a person truthfully is (or to him it appears that he is) in a state in which he can **only** ask Hashem {for kindness} in a manner of *tzedakah*,³⁰ then asking for *tzedakah* is not proof that he is in a state of *bittul*, because he has no other choice.³¹ On a deeper level, his request for *tzedakah* stems from his own (humbled) existence, which is measured and limited. Measure for measure, the flow {of goodness} from Above will also have the measured and limited quality of *tzedakah*. The *Gemara* says³² that the obligation to give *tzedakah* is to “fulfil a person’s needs in what he is lacking,”³³ but “you are not commanded to make him rich.” We give him what he is missing proportionate to his “*metzius*,”³⁴

²⁸ {*Bittul* connotes self-nullification, humility, and the negation of ego.}

²⁹ The language of the Alter Rebbe in *Iggeres Hakodesh*, loc. cit.

³⁰ {Because he is truly not deserving.}

³¹ {And therefore, his request for *tzedakah* does not reflect a true sense of *bittul*, but rather, it is simply that he doesn’t deserve kindness.}

³² *Kesuvos* 67b.

³³ *Devarim* 15:8; Rashi’s commentary, loc. cit.

³⁴ {Lit., his “existence,” “identity.”}

according to what he is accustomed to. (This could be a lot, but it is commensurate with what is normal for him — even if he normally rides on a horse and has servants to run before him, we also have to furnish these.) Nonetheless, you are not commanded to make him **rich**.

However, if he is in a state and position where he **deserves** to receive influence {of goodness from Above}, and therefore, he could demand this based on “*mishpat*,” yet **still**, he approaches Hashem (not demanding *mishpat* but) with a request for ***tzedakah***, this proves that he has risen above calculation, measure and limitation. He has **gone out** of his own *metzius*.

Then the *tzedakah* will flow {to him} in a manner beyond measure and limitation, not relative to **his** *metzius* {and he will receive more} than just to fill what he is lacking.

6.

TWO VERSES

These two modes [a) When he is in a position to only ask for *tzedakah*; and b) when he is “strong-hearted,” in which case he can demand “forcefully,” yet he asks for *tzedakah*, and therefore the *tzedakah* will be have unlimited value,] correspond to the two verses: a) “For your salvation I hope, O L-rd.”³⁵ b) “Blessed is the glory of Hashem from His place.”³⁶

“For your salvation I hope, O L-rd” means that he can only rely on Hashem’s salvation because he is not worthy of demanding; he therefore hopes for Hashem’s salvation as *tzedakah*.

“Blessed is the glory of Hashem from His place” refers to eliciting from the “*kvod Hashem*” {Hashem’s glory} which itself comes from “**His**

³⁵ {*Bereishis* 49:18.}

³⁶ {*Yechezkel* 3:12.}

place,” which is the true place {and source} of “Hashem’s glory.”³⁷ This is drawn down (*baruch* means to draw down)³⁸ to the lowest of the low, meaning, the unlimited {energy of Hashem} is channelled into this world.³⁹ This happens because of the self-abnegation of the “strong-hearted, who are far from *tzedakah*.”

7.

GETTING BEYOND YOURSELF

On this basis, it is clear why the Alter Rebbe says, “Since Yaakov was very very small in his own eyes due to the many kindnesses, because with my staff, etcetera,” (yet he doesn't bring the continuation and conclusion of the verse). Since Yaakov had **both** opposite qualities of “*mishpat* and *tzedakah*,” which are {both} alluded to in the phrase “because with my staff,” as discussed, he had reached the level where all of the Divine flow {which came to him} was an expression of {Hashem’s} “kindness” and “unlimited kindness.” The blessing flowed in manner of “ברוך כבוד ה' ממקומו” — a unlimited multitude of kindness. Since the increase and the “many kindnesses” were a result of “because with my staff,” therefore, this “literal closeness to Hashem⁴⁰” brought him to a state of complete “*katonti*” — “very very small.”⁴¹

This is also why the Alter Rebbe continues: “Because Yaakov was very very small in his own eyes due to the many kindnesses because with my staff, etcetera,” “He {felt that he} was not worthy of being saved... as our

³⁷ See *Maamar Ve'ulam Chai Ani (Derech Mitzvosecha, 178b ff.)*

³⁸ *Torah Or, 37c., et al.*

³⁹ {In *Derech Mitzvosecha, Maamer s.v. “Ve'ulam Chai Ani,” 178b, the Tzemach Tzemach explains the verse, “Baruch kavod Hashem mimkomo,” according to Chassidus. “Kavod” refers to the level called “Ana Emloch,” which is Hashem’s initial decision to become ‘King.’ Since Hashem is infinitely beyond any limited creation, this choice to be ‘King’ and thus have a relationship with creation is a huge ‘descent’ for Him. The process of Hashem ‘lowering’ Himself to this level of *kavod*, to be ‘King’, is known as ‘*Baruch*’, which means ‘to be drawn down’, as Hashem has lowered Himself down, so to speak, to this level. The Essence of Hashem, before He decides to be King, is alluded to by the word “*mekomo*,” a level on which an infinite potential of choices exist for Hashem. A human analogy is given to understand this state of *mkomo*; each individual thought that a person conceives comes from his *koach hamaskil*, his potential to think. He has the ability to extract one individual thought at a time, similar to the way Hashem extracts from His Essence the decision to become king.}*

⁴⁰ The language used in *Iggeres Hakodesh*.

⁴¹ {I.e., consummate *bittul*.}

Sages say, {Yaakov was worried} “perhaps sin will cause” {him to be undeserving of Hashem’s protection} — it appeared to him that he had sinned.”

Since Yaakov had perfect *bittul*, he reached a level on which the existence of people and (naturally) their service are insignificant.⁴² Therefore, “it seemed to him that he had sinned”⁴³ — he stood in a state of *cheit*⁴⁴ (a term denoting) deficiency, and complete self-effacement.⁴⁵ He felt that his service was of no import.

8.

IT'S ALL IN THE STAFF

This is also the connection between the two explanations of the phrase, “because with my staff.” (The simple explanation is that “I had nothing with me... except my staff alone,”⁴⁶ and the *Midrashic* explanation is that “he placed his staff into the Jordan and the Jordan split.”) These two explanations depict the two opposite characteristics of Yaakov.

On the one hand, he had nothing; he {therefore} asked of Hashem only as *tzedakah*. On the other hand, standing on such an exalted level, he was deserving of a miracle such as “the parting of the Jordan,” which itself proves that he was worthy to receive kindness according to *mishpat*.⁴⁷

This {quality of embodying both} “the *mishpat* and of *tzedakah* of Yaakov, You have made,” which caused Yaakov to be in a consummate state of “*katonti*,” served as the groundwork for the fulfillment of his prayer, “Now deliver me... and you said... and I will make your seed {as

⁴² {Compared with Hashem’s infinite greatness, man does not register even as a speck.}

⁴³ See at length *Maamar Veyikanue Ami 5651*: because their *avodah* is not true in relation to the truth of Hashem’s Essence.

⁴⁴ Lit., “sin.”

⁴⁵ Meaning to say, it is not that he felt lacking in his service of Hashem, but rather he was completely *batel* {and therefore, his whole divine service seemed of no account in his eyes}.

⁴⁶ Rashi’s commentary on *Bereishis 32:11*.

⁴⁷ See *Shelah*, loc cit. (294b, 295a, et passim).

numerous} as the sand of the sea which cannot be counted because of multitude.”⁴⁸

9.

WE CAN ALL DO IT

The practical lesson for everyone:

As known,⁴⁹ every Jew inherits qualities congruous with those expressed in the *avodah* of our forefathers (“only the three are called forefathers”).⁵⁰ Apropos our subject, this means that not only is every Jew worthy of asking Hashem to bestow kindness out of “*tzedakah*,” but he is also worthy of receiving it based on “*misphat*.”

“All Jews are the sons of kings.”⁵¹ Therefore (as the Previous Rebbe once said), even when a Jew exerts a small effort, it is equivalent to back breaking work. And so because of even this miniscule exertion, he can charge Hashem all the money in the world in abundance, in terms of children, health, and livelihood.

The Alter Rebbe writes in *Torah Or*⁵² that considering that Nebuchadnezzar was rewarded with three successive generations of kings for the three steps he took to honor Hashem, then certainly Jews, regarding whom it says, “there is no Jew who did not honor Hashem like this” — “are worthy of receiving all the goodness of this world.”

Even though we do see that Jews suffer in this world, it happens only “to break a person, to subjugate him and to subdue his coarse spirit.”⁵³ However, when a Jew is on the plane of “*mishpat and tzedakah*,” meaning he is deserving from the perspective of *mishpat*, yet he asks Hashem for

⁴⁸ *Bereishis* 32:12-13.

⁴⁹ *Torah Or*, beg. of *parshas Va'eira*.

⁵⁰ *Berachos* 16b {i.e., this statement of our Sages highlights that every Jew shares a connection with Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. For this reason, only they are called fathers (and not even the twelve sons of Yaakov, who were the fathers of the tribes). See *Torah Or*, beg. of *parshas Va'eira*}.

⁵¹ *Shabbos* 67a.

⁵² “*Bereishis*” 31c.

⁵³ *Torah Or*, loc. cit.

tzedakah — an expression of *bittul* and humility, as we mentioned — he will access the blessings of Hashem from “His place.”⁵⁴ He will be granted success beyond measure and limits, in all elements of his life: children, health, and livelihood — in abundance. Additionally, all disturbances will vanish so he can “dwell with material serenity.”⁵⁵

10.

THE ALTER REBBE DID IT

This idea is also connected to the redemption of the Alter Rebbe {on the 19th of Kislev}. The Alter Rebbe sacrificed his life to expound the inner dimension of Torah, tearing himself away from his own personal affairs to disseminate Chassidus even to the outside world. Accordingly, he could have certainly insisted {from Hashem} to be freed from prison based on justice and *mishpat*. Still, he requested {that Hashem should deliver him as a form of} ***tzedakah***, as he elucidates in his letters,⁵⁶ explaining that his redemption was due to the **kindness** of Hashem, and declaring, “Hashem did wonders and great acts in the land.”

Therefore, this brought about that his redemption {from prison} was with peace — “my soul was redeemed with **peace**.”⁵⁷ Opposition to the teachings of Chassidus was squashed, and in fact his erstwhile opponents became “עמדי,” on his side, in a way of “*shalom*,”⁵⁸ as the verse concludes, “because of the many {people} who were with me, עמדי.”⁵⁹

Based on a talk delivered on *Yud Tes Kislev*, 5726 (1965)

⁵⁴ {*Yechezkel* 3:12.}

⁵⁵ A term based on *Torah Or*, “*Bereishis*,” 31:c; *Toras Chaim*, “*Miketz*,” 78c.

⁵⁶ {Printed in *Beis Rebbe*, vol. 1, ch. 18 {and in *Igros Kodesh* of the Alter Rebbe (Kehos, 5772), p. 230.}

⁵⁷ *Tehillim* 55:19.

⁵⁸ “*Shalom*,” peace, is something that connects two opposites; see *Iggeres Hakodesh*, end of epistle 30.

⁵⁹ See the exposition of the *Jerusalem Talmud*, *Sotah*, ch. 1, end of *halacha* 8 {explaining that King Dovid’s enemies — “the many people” eventually joined his side, “were with me.”}