

The Rebbe's Discourses

Free Summaries of the Rebbe's Chassidic Discourses בלי אחריות כלל וכלל
ד"ה וישלך יעקב פרשת וישלח תשמ"ג בלתי מוגה
Published for Shabbat Sedra Vayishlach
16 Kislev 5783, 10 December 2022¹

TRANSFORMING ESAU

THE SEDRA BEGINS WITH JACOB SENDING MESSENGERS BEFORE HIM TO ESAU and this leads up to Jacob being left alone, before wrestling with the angel. The Sages tell us that in their wrestling 'they raised dust to the Throne of Glory'², which indicates the force of the *birur*, the spiritual 'sifting' which was being achieved. For the Sages tell us this was the Angel of Esau, and through the 'wrestling', Jacob was transforming Esau to good.

The mode of sifting was through 'wrestling', which means direct confrontation, Jacob and the Angel struggled closely together, for the task of spiritually 'sifting' and elevating the world requires direct involvement and being enfolded in that process.

Through the process of the *birur*, sifting, we will come to the Redemption, and that is the connection to the Haftorah of Vayishlach, the Prophecy of Obadiah, which ends on the note of the Redemption: 'G-d will have the Kingship'.

Rabbi Shneur Zalman and his son Rabbi Dov Ber discuss the opening verses of this Sedra. They comment on the fact that Jacob sent a message to Esau that 'I sojourned with Laban'. The Hebrew word 'sojourned', *garty*, has the same letters as Taryag, the number 613. Chassidic teachings state that he was intimating to Esau that 'I sojourned with Laban, but I kept the 613 Mitzvot'³.

בברכת רפואה שלמה וקרובה בשביל האשה העניא בת ברכה דבורה לאה תחי'
Praying for a Refuah Shelemah for Henya bas Brochah Devorah Leah 'תחי'

¹ Maamar Vayishlach Yakov 5743 (1982). Printed in Sefer HaMaamarim 5743. It was not edited by the Rebbe.

² Chullin 91a, Zohar I, 170a.

³ See Torah Or 24a and ff.

This refers to his service while he was with Laban, the *birurim*, the sifting. He achieved this through the Mitzvot, which he observed in a spiritual way.

Jacob's message to Esau was that from his point of view, the *birurim*, the process of transformation was complete, and he is now ready for the Redemption. From Jacob's point of view, Esau too was ready for the Redemption. For Esau represents the World of Chaos, Tohu, and Jacob felt that Esau had surely completed his sifting of the positive aspects of the World of Chaos, namely the 'great illumination' which characterizes that realm.

That is why he continued in his message to Esau that he had 'oxen, and donkeys, and servants and maid-servants'. These terms express the details of his Divine service, for Jacob was communicating to Esau that in each of these areas he had been able to transform and elevate that which needed to be transformed. He shared this with Esau expressing to him the idea that our personal service to G-d, such as contemplation in prayer, should not just be in general terms, relating to the highest levels of one's soul, but also in terms of the details, connecting with the lower and more practical aspects of one's being⁴.

Jacob was hinting to Esau that he, Jacob, was ready for the Redemption. Indeed, the Sages comment, that his mention of 'donkeys' suggests the coming of the Messiah, who is described as riding a donkey (Zach 9:9).

But all this was just in the thought of Jacob. From his point of view, he was ready for the Redemption, and, he wanted to imagine, so was Esau.

But this was not the case. His messengers returned saying that Esau did not consider him as a brother, and was approaching with four hundred men. Now, in fact Jacob had known earlier about these four hundred men. But he thought they were on a high spiritual level, that of the 'four hundred worlds of yearning' relating to the 'four hundred silver shekels' of Abraham, which, the kabbalists say, relate to the exalted realm of Keter. Instead, he learnt that the four hundred men were on a low physical level. They were hostile and from the realm of unholiness. For them, and for Esau himself, the 'sifting' transformation had not yet taken place.

Now comes the fact that 'Jacob was left alone'⁵. The Sages tell us, quoted in Rashi on this verse, that he was there for 'little vessels'. Why should he be worrying about these "little vessels"? In fact, they were the 'little' or 'few' vessels of Tohu, the realm of Chaos. In Tohu there is great radiance, and few vessels. The vessels are not only few in number; they are also small in quality, meaning they are self-abnegated and insignificant. Jacob wanted to learn that

⁴ See the RaShaB's *Tract on Service*.

⁵ Gen.32:24.

quality of abnegation from the insignificant vessels of Tohu. Hence he remained alone.

The Torah text states that Jacob passed his wives and children across the river Yabbok. In Rabbi Dov Ber's Torat Chaim we see two interpretations of this move. One is that he was sending them away from Esau, to safety. The second is that he was sending them *towards* Esau, while he, Jacob, was left alone to battle with the Angel of Esau, to bring him Tikkun, healing and repair, and to elevate him.

Which interpretation is to be preferred? The idea that they were being sent away from Esau is less in accord with the quest to make a dwelling for the Divine in this world. Hence the Rebbe suggests choosing the second interpretation: to go towards Esau and work for his 'sifting', Tikkun and positive transformation, while Jacob wrestles with Esau's Angel and prevails.

Through this service of sifting in our time of Exile, we will reach the time when "G-d will have the Kingship", through the true and complete Redemption. Even before them, we taste the taste of Redemption as people taste the food before Shabbat, especially by spreading the wellsprings of Chassidic teachings.

Through this we come to the idea that 'Jacob sent messengers/angels', that G-d gives angels to each Jewish individual (who is an inheritor of Jacob) so that each individual, who is now himself or herself like Jacob, can send them to Esau to give the message that the service of 'sifting' is complete. In other words, we are spiritually empowered to act and deal in a positive way with the world around us, even with its most challenging aspects. Through this we will be able to greet Moshiach, the time which is completely Shabbat, swiftly in our days.

Torah teachings are holy – please treat these pages with care