

Ohr Torah- Rabbi Dov Ber of Mezeritch

Parshas Vayetzei

Siman #38

Explanation of the Verse "And Jacob went out from Be'er Sheva and went to Charan"

This verse can be understood through a well-known introduction: The Torah is primordial and exists beyond time. The question arises, what relevance does a narrative tied to a specific event have in a text that transcends time? The answer is that these narratives are eternal and always applicable. Moreover, within a person—referred to as a "microcosm" (a small world)—the story unfolds as well.

It is written, **"You made them all with wisdom"** (Psalms 104:24), signifying that all divine influence emanates from wisdom (*chochmah*). We have already explained the concept of *tzimtzum* (contraction), which was necessary for the world's creation and sustainability. Without this contraction, beings could not endure the intense divine radiance, and existence would cease.

It is known that the attribute of awe (*yirah*) serves to contract and limit, yet this occurs through the wisdom that is clothed within it. Furthermore, it is said, **"The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord"** (Psalms 111:10). Wisdom is symbolized by the letter *yud*, the smallest of the letters, because it minimizes and contracts itself. This is because it is the origin of everything and closest to the Cause of All Causes.

As the Zohar and *Tikkunei Zohar* explain, even the Supreme Crown (*Keter Elyon*), described as a pure and radiant light, is perceived as "dark" in its presence—not literal darkness, Heaven forbid, but rather a diminishment due to its overwhelming proximity to the Infinite. This humility and self-diminishment arise from awe and reverence. The great radiance and grandeur of the Infinite compels *tzimtzum* (contraction), so that the lower realms can receive it.

We can compare this to a teacher (*rav*) instructing a student (*talmid*). If the student is deeply attentive and reverent towards the teacher's words, the teacher can open the "gates of wisdom" for the student. While the teacher cannot reveal the fullness of their vast and profound knowledge, the student—by virtue of their reverence and status as an engaged learner—can grasp almost everything, approaching close to the teacher's level.

This interplay of humility, awe, and contraction allows the divine flow of wisdom and sustenance to reach even the lowest levels, enabling the eternal relevance of the Torah's stories within every individual and moment on the Wisdom of the Teacher.

If the student has limited comprehension and understanding, the teacher must reduce and contract their wisdom to teach in alignment with the student's capacity. If the teacher were to teach extensively or reveal profound and hidden ideas, the student would become confused and overwhelmed, losing even the small amount they might have been able to grasp. Therefore, the teacher must minimize their wisdom to match the student's level of understanding.

This aligns with the verse, **"He shone forth from Seir to them"** (*Deuteronomy 33:2*), which the Sages explain as: "There is only a hairbreadth between the upper waters and the lower waters." This refers to the relationship between the upper *yud* (the higher realm of wisdom) and the lower *yud* (the wisdom as it is transmitted to the recipient).

It is known that the letter *yud* comprises three parts: the upper thorn, the lower thorn, and the main body of the *yud*, representing the head, the middle, and the end. We have explained elsewhere that there exists a subtle and supreme intellect that influences wisdom, with various reasons elaborated in that context. Additionally, wisdom (*chochmah*) is referred to as "head," which implies that it is not primordial, as the primordial is beyond enumeration, while the "head" is within the framework of enumeration and implies the existence of a second.

Thus, the three components of the *yud* can be understood as follows:

1. **The upper thorn:** Represents the supreme intellect that influences wisdom.
2. **The body of the *yud*:** Represents wisdom itself.

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3. **The lower thorn:** Represents the reduction of wisdom, as the teacher minimizes their wisdom to convey it to the student. This aspect corresponds to Jacob (*Yaakov*), where *yud* is connected to *akev* (heel), signifying wisdom as it descends and is contracted.

This explains the phrase **"There is only a hairbreadth between the upper waters and the lower waters"**, highlighting how the teacher must contract their wisdom to align closely with the student's level, leaving only a minute gap between the teacher's wisdom and the student's comprehension. This is the connection between the higher and lower *yud*.

The verse **"He shone forth from Seir to them"** refers to the illumination of the higher light to the lower levels. The word *Seir* (*sha'ar*, meaning "hair" or "threshold") symbolizes the minimal connection, like two entities connected by a single strand. The term *l'mo* (to them) is interpreted as "lamed-mem-vav," alluding to a mystical explanation discussed elsewhere.

This idea is reflected in the liturgy of Shabbat, where we say: **"He opens every day the gates of the east and breaches the windows of the firmament."** At first, the light is compared to the opening of doors and gates, then to windows and an aperture, which is a fraction of the door's size. The term *breaches* (*boka*) suggests a piercing or contraction.

In light of the above, this sequence is understood: the contraction of light is necessary for the lower levels to receive the divine wisdom, descending through progressively smaller and narrower channels, ensuring the flow of divine energy is appropriate for each recipient.

Initially, it says, **"He opens the gates..."**, referring to the radiance and influence on the higher worlds. These elevated worlds can receive the light and brilliance to a greater degree, akin to the advanced student (*talmid chaver*) who learns from the teacher. The teacher can reveal and open great doors and gates of wisdom for such a student, who is capable of grasping and enduring it.

"And breaches the windows of the firmament" refers to the lower level, the lower world, which is like the second type of student mentioned earlier. This student cannot grasp the profound teachings of the teacher unless the teacher contracts and diminishes their wisdom to align with the student's capacity.

However, there are students who, despite the teacher contracting and adapting their words to the student's level, are still unable to grasp or receive the teachings. In such cases, the teacher must further elaborate, adding explanations upon explanations, letters upon letters, and providing analogies. The teacher must educate the student according to their path, adding reasons, parables, and simpler ideas so the student can understand even a small portion.

This is comparable to someone attempting to split a thick and hard piece of wood. If they cannot accomplish the task, they add a thinner piece of wood and wedge it in. This additional tool allows them to complete the task. Similarly, **"breaches the windows of the firmament"** signifies even a small illumination, akin to the size of a window compared to a door or gate, which must still be diminished and pierced for it to be received.

The radiance and influence are called *firmament* (*rakia*), as is known, which corresponds to the *vav* of *rakia*, representing something that extends and spreads.

This is the meaning of **"And Jacob went out"** (*vayeitzei Yaakov*). The phrase *"Yaakov"* (י' עקב) signifies the lower *yud*, which is called *maskil* (understanding), or the lower wisdom that receives from the higher wisdom. This higher intellect comes forth **"from Be'er Sheva"**, meaning it receives from the upper worlds, from a wellspring that flows with all goodness, kindness, and mercy.

This is also the interpretation of the statement by the Sages: **"The departure of a righteous person leaves an impression."** They alluded to this concept. It is further explained elsewhere in greater detail.

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Siman#39

"And Hashem will be my God"—this means "In all your ways, know Him," whether in good times or bad. When, God forbid, something bad happens to a person, they should think that it is surely to atone for their sins. However, a righteous person, even when experiencing good, should worry, for perhaps their merits are being diminished. This is the meaning of "And Hashem will be my God"—that even the Name of Hashem (Havayah), which represents the attribute of mercy, may perhaps actually reflect the attribute of judgment, which is called Elohim. Therefore, one must continually add merits

Siman#40

"And Jacob lifted his feet and went to the land of the people of the East." This means that "feet" symbolizes guidance, as in lifting his feet—his guidance—and he went to the land of the people of the East. This indicates that he moved away from his own earthliness, meaning his physicality, and turned toward the service of the Blessed Hashem, the divine portion, and toward the people of the East, meaning the attribute of the righteous who turn to cleave to the primordial origin of the world.

Siman#41

"And Rachel came with the flock"—it is stated in the Midrash that this was so that he would be drawn to her beauty, which seems difficult to understand. But the true explanation is that Rachel refers to the supernal Rachel, and by seeing this Rachel (the lower Rachel), Jacob would cleave to the supernal Rachel, from whom all the beauty of the lower Rachel originates. This is also the meaning of "And Joseph came (to the house) to do his work," and the Sages said that he saw the image of his father's likeness. This means that, as is known, the wife of Potiphar would constantly boast before him in an attempt to seduce him, as stated in the Midrash, that the garments she wore in the morning she would not wear in the evening, in her efforts to tempt him. Yet Joseph the righteous had no desire for this kind of physical beauty but instead was inspired and enflamed by this beauty to turn toward the supernal beauty, which is the likeness of his father, Tiferet Yisrael.

This is the meaning of "and he fled and went outside"—that he fled from this physical beauty and was enflamed to flee outside, beyond this world, and to cleave to the supernal Tiferet.