

## Ohr Torah- Rabbi Dov Ber of Mezeritch

### Parshas Vayishlach

#### **Siman #44**

In the Midrash on the verse **"And I have oxen and donkeys"** (Genesis 32:6), it is explained: the ox refers to Joseph, and the donkey refers to Issachar, etc. Furthermore, it is said: the ox refers to Mashiach ben Yosef, as it is written, **"His firstborn ox, majesty is his"** (Deuteronomy 33:17); and the donkey refers to Mashiach ben David, as it is written, **"A poor man riding on a donkey"** (Zechariah 9:9).

Our sages said about the verse **"And it was when Rachel gave birth to Joseph..."** (Genesis 30:25) that the adversary of Esau was born, as it is written, **"The house of Jacob will be fire, the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau straw"** (Obadiah 1:18). And our sages commented that fire without a flame does not spread far.

It is possible to interpret this in light of the saying of our sages: **"Who is strong? One who conquers his inclination"** (Pirkei Avot 4:1). (It is known that there are two types of evil inclinations, as explained elsewhere.) The first incites a person to commit transgressions, God forbid, while the second prevents one from performing positive commandments. Corresponding to these, the Holy One, blessed be He, created remedies in the form of Torah and mitzvot, as our sages said: **"If the evil inclination confronts you, drag it to the study hall"** (Kiddushin 30b). Engaging in Torah with awe and love enables a person to conquer both inclinations.

Concerning the statement of our sages, **"If it is like iron, it will shatter; if it is like stone, it will break"** (Kiddushin 30b), they were referring to the evil inclination that prevents the performance of positive commandments. This inclination weighs down a person's limbs and body like iron or stone, discouraging them from fulfilling mitzvot. Against this type of evil inclination, our sages instructed: **"Be as strong as a lion to do the will of your Father in heaven"** (Pirkei Avot 5:23), countering its heaviness and sluggishness by fulfilling God's will with strength and great enthusiasm.

Elsewhere, our sages said: **"Lazy but rewarded"** (Sanhedrin 26b). This means a person should be lazy when it comes to committing transgressions, as it is written, **"The lazy man says, 'There is a lion in the streets'"** (Proverbs 26:13). The evil inclination, likened to a lion, frightens the person. The righteous person, however, is compared to a child who has great yearning and love for their father and refuses to leave their father's side even for a moment. Similarly, the righteous person is constantly engaged in holy thoughts, never distracted, and thus avoids transgressions entirely. For how could they sin, which would mean turning away from their Father in heaven? Such a person is truly "lazy" when it comes to sin, and this laziness is their reward.

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It is known that one who serves out of love has enthusiasm, while one who serves out of awe may lack such fervor, instead acting out of reverence and humility. However, everything must be sweetened at its source, and enthusiasm should be strengthened to counter the fervor of the evil inclination. Similarly, awe should be used to counter the laziness induced by the second type of evil inclination. Earlier, we mentioned the opposite approach, but there is an intermediate state—a balance between the two traits, like fire without a flame. This state represents a middle ground between enthusiasm and the heaviness of laziness.

Jacob's ultimate aim was to subdue the "shell" (klipah) of Esau, representing the evil inclination. This is the meaning of **"And I have oxen"**—referring to Joseph's attribute of fire, which burns away the straw (Esau). However, Jacob also mentions, **"And I have donkeys"**—representing Issachar's attribute of materiality and laziness. This type of "laziness," when directed towards avoiding transgressions, indeed has its reward, as our sages said: **"One who sits idle and refrains from sin receives a reward as if they performed a mitzvah"** (Kiddushin 39b). This is Issachar: "There is reward" (שִׁכָּר). Even if one does not actively perform a mitzvah, their restraint and laziness, stemming from their attachment to God, still earns them a reward. How much more so if they actively fulfill mitzvot with great enthusiasm, which impacts the upper worlds, as our sages said: **"Israel sustains their Father in heaven"** (Pesachim 118a). This is the meaning of **"For the Lord your God is a consuming fire"** (Deuteronomy 4:24): the fire and enthusiasm of the righteous below provide sustenance above. This enthusiasm is referred to as "seraphim" (burning ones).

It is possible to interpret differently, based on what our sages said regarding the verse **"He called him El, the God of Israel"** (Genesis 33:20). They explained that the Holy One, blessed be He, called Jacob "El." At first glance, this is difficult to understand, as it seems problematic to refer to the lower Jacob as "El."

However, it may be understood literally, as the term "El" connotes **strength** or **capability**, as in the phrase **"It is within my power"** (Genesis 31:29). Similarly, Jacob was called "El" because he had such capability, as it is written, **"A righteous person rules with the fear of God"** (2 Samuel 23:3). We find this exemplified in Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, who could bring rain or withhold it according to his will. This is the meaning of "rules," for he governs even the upper worlds, as our sages said: **"The Holy One, blessed be He, decrees, and the righteous nullifies the decree"** (Moed Katan 16b). Clearly, a righteous person elevates the worlds through their prayer and speech.

If the speech of a righteous person is pure and free from any blemish or ulterior motive, as is the way of the righteous, their words naturally ascend on high without any effort. As it is written, **"And He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life"** (Genesis 2:7),

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which is interpreted as "**a speaking spirit**" (Onkelos). This breath comes from within the person's essence, as all who exhale do so from within themselves. This breath, called the "breath of life," represents a state of **reaching and withdrawing** (*mati v'lo mati*), as explained elsewhere at length.

This is the meaning of "**Let every soul praise God**" (Psalms 150:6)—on every breath (*neshima*), which exists in this state of *mati v'lo mati*. Thus, when the righteous person emits their sacred breath and pure words, it immediately, without any effort, connects their breath to the higher breath, and their speech to the higher speech. This elevates the worlds and creates great delight and pleasure above, as this small creation stirs and activates all the upper worlds and awakens the supreme will.

When the supreme will is awakened, the letters of **ratzon (will)** transform into **tzinor (pipe)**, and the righteous person themselves becomes a conduit through which divine abundance flows.

This is the meaning of "**The righteous shall live by his faith**" (Habakkuk 2:4). It means that this is the craft of the righteous—their speech and breath. They need no other occupation, for through this, they perform their craft, elevating their words on high. The realm of speech is called **faith**, as the Zohar states: "**He is truth, and she is faith**" (Zohar III:290a). As it is written, "**Your word, O Lord, stands firm in the heavens**" (Psalms 119:89). The term "**stands firm**" signifies establishment and permanence, as the heavens were made by the word of God, and their existence is upheld by His words.

This is the meaning of "**I will give you free access among these standing ones**" (Zechariah 3:7). Thus, the verse "**The righteous shall live by his faith**" refers to the craft of the righteous, who elevate their speech on high and draw down divine abundance, similar to the conduit described above.

Behold, many reasons have been given for why it arose in His simple will to create the worlds. The first is so that His divinity and sovereignty would be recognized by the creations, for there is no king without a people. Therefore, all names, aside from the name **Havayah** (Blessed Be He), are called by the term "appellations" for the aforementioned reason. For the appellations are not His essential names but are designated as such through the creations, similar to the titles "king" and "master," which are only applicable if there are subjects and servants.

Thus, these appellations are sometimes referred to in the plural, such as "**Holy Gods**", due to the aforementioned reason. Similarly, the name **EI** signifies strength or capability. The name **EI** is the first of the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy (*Tikkunei Dikna*). Correspondingly, there are thirteen principles by which the Torah is expounded, the first

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of which is "**a fortiori**" (*kal va-chomer*), which parallels the name **EI**. This principle has the power to elevate even material matters, and certainly lighter matters, as explained elsewhere regarding the Mishnah: "**The sacred is stricter than the ordinary**", such as immersing one vessel within another for tithes.

This means that a righteous person not only elevates the holy letters they engage with but also elevates the material letters associated with foreign thoughts. This is the meaning of "**immersing vessels within vessels**"—the material letters, referred to as vessels, are immersed within the holy letters. This is also the explanation of "**a fortiori**", meaning if a righteous person can elevate materiality, how much more so can they elevate holy letters, which naturally ascend and cleave to their source. Just as this principle can elevate all, it also has the power to bring down abundance, like a conduit.

This attribute is called **Di** (דִּי), for the flow of abundance cannot descend without the contraction called **Di**, as explained elsewhere at length. The influence itself is called **Yod** (י), symbolizing its incomprehensibility and its diminutive nature as the smallest of the letters. The abundance cannot be received without contraction, for its great radiance would overwhelm the lower beings. This contraction is called **Daleth** (ד), connoting impoverishment (*dalut*). When the letter **Yod** of influence combines with the **Daleth** of contraction, it forms **Yad** (יָד), meaning "hand," which signifies greatness and kindness, as in the term **Yad Hagedolah** ("the great hand").

When the flow descends from above to below, it is called **Yad**. When it ascends from below to above, it is called **Di**, with the **Daleth** preceding, signifying judgment. This is the meaning of "**until your lips wear out from saying 'Enough' (Di)**". This is the name **Shaddai** (שֹׁדַי), as through the three lines of the letter **Shin**, the abundance flows downward. Even though this is called a "strong hand," it is still a great kindness, for the Holy One, Blessed Be He, contracts His great radiance so that creations can receive it. Thus, He is called **EI Shaddai**, where **EI** signifies kindness, as in the verse "**Kindness of EI**" (Psalms 36:7). This is the kindness that declared to the world "**Enough**" (**Di**), as mentioned. Our sages encapsulated this by saying simply that He declared to His world, "**Enough**", but in truth, all worlds and creations were brought into being through this attribute of contraction, which also sustains them.

Returning to the matter of the Holy One, Blessed Be He, calling Jacob **EI**, even though this is not Jacob's attribute, as is known. However, because Jacob is the central pillar extending from one end to the other, preceding thought and following action, as our sages said: "**For the sake of Israel, who are called the first**". This is the meaning of "**You have formed me before and after**" (Psalms 139:5). Therefore, Jacob has the power to extend from one end to the other, from the beginning of influence, which is **Chokmah (wisdom)**, to the lowest level.

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It is known that **Chokhmah**, represented by the letter **Yod**, is called **Iyoni** ("observant"), related to the word **Ashurenu** ("I behold him") (Numbers 24:17). This is the meaning of the Midrash: "**And I have an ox**" (**Genesis 32:6**)—signifying Jacob's ability to elevate and bring down influence from **Chokhmah**, represented by **Yod Iyoni**, as mentioned. This refers to Joseph (the righteous), who is wise and sustains the land, aligning with the role of Mashiach ben Yosef, as in the verse "**His firstborn ox**". As for "**and a donkey, this is Mashiach ben David, as it says, 'A poor man riding on a donkey'**", this remains incomplete.