



A VORT FROM THE ROSH YESHIVA

פרשת וישלח

וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב וְכוּ' ה' הָאֵמֶר אֵלַי שׁוּב לְאֶרֶץךָ וְלְמִוְלַדְתְּךָ וְאֵיטִיבָה עִמָּךְ. קִטְנִיתִי מִכָּל הַחֲסָדִים וּמִכָּל הָאֲמֻת אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ אֶת עַבְדְּךָ כִּי בְּמִקְלִי עֲבַרְתִּי אֶת הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה וְעַתָּה הֵייתִי לְשָׁנִי מִחֲנוֹת. הַצִּילֵנִי נָא מִיַּד אָחִי מִיַּד עֵשָׂו וְכוּ'. וְאַתָּה אֲמַרְתָּ הֵיטֵב אֵיטִיב עִמָּךְ וְכוּ'. (בראשית לב, י - יג)

Yakov said, "Hashem Who said to me, 'Return to your land and to your birthplace and I will do good with you' – I have been diminished by all the kindnesses and by all the truth that You have done Your servant; for with my staff I crossed the Yarden and now I have become two camps. Rescue me, please, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Eisav etc ... And You had said 'I will surely do good with you etc...' " (Bereishis 32:10-13)

רש"י: קטנתי: נתמעטו זכויותי על ידי החסדים והאמת שעשית עמי, לכך אני ירא שמא משהבטחתי נתלכתי בחטא, ויגרום לי להמסר ביד עשו.

Rashi: I have been diminished. My merits have been reduced through the kindness and the truth that You have done me. Therefore, I am afraid lest since the time You promised me I have become soiled with sin, and it will cause me to be given over into the hand of Eisav.

This week's *parshah* tells the story of Yakov Avinu's return to Eretz Yisroel after receiving a commandment from Hashem to do so. Upon hearing that his brother Eisav still harboured resentment and ill will towards him, Yakov became extremely worried and distressed. He turned to Hashem in prayer and expressed his feelings of unworthiness, saying "קִטְנִיתִי מִכָּל הַחֲסָדִים – I have been diminished by all the kindnesses".

Rashi explains that Yakov was concerned that despite Hashem's promise of protection, his merits may have been diminished due to all the goodness he had received. Whilst when he had crossed the River Yarden he had nothing but the staff in his hand now he had been granted a large family and accumulated immense wealth. Therefore, he feared that his sins may have tainted him since the promise was made, and this could lead to his defeat at the hands of Eisav.

The Ramban questions that if Yakov was worried that his merits were significantly reduced by Hashem's many favours, what value would there have been in invoking Hashem's promise by saying "וְאַתָּה אֲמַרְתָּ הֵיטֵב אֵיטִיב עִמָּךְ, And You had said 'I will surely do good with you'? It would be contrary to the flow of his plea – perhaps he forfeited that promise as well?

Furthermore, questions the Ramban, Yakov had opened his *tefillah* by stating "וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי שׁוּב לְאֶרֶץךָ וְלְמִוְלַדְתְּךָ וְאֵיטִיבָה עִמָּךְ, Hashem Who said to me, 'Return to your land and to your birthplace and I will do good with you', which refers to the directive and assurance which Yakov had received a few weeks earlier in Choron. Since then, Yakov has not received any significant showering of kindness. If so, why was Yakov's rags-to-riches story a cause for concern when just recently Hashem had furthermore reassured him of His Divine protection and promise for goodness?

The Rosh Yeshiva *shlita* introduces a concept mentioned in the Chovos Halevavos (Shaar Avodas Hashem) to shed light on Yakov's apprehension at this time. The Chovos Halevavos teaches that the

more one receives goodness from Hashem, the more one is obligated to serve Him. When someone is granted a unique kindness from Hashem, he must reciprocate with a greater devotion to Him. This results in another reason we find great *tzadikkim* concerned when receiving goodness from Hashem in This World. Firstly, there is a misgiving that perhaps they are using up their merits with the kindness they are receiving. Secondly, since the obligation upon them is greater, they fear that they are not living up to it.

This concept of feeling a sense of responsibility and a higher level of expectation after receiving goodness from Hashem is illustrated by the Chovos Halevavos using Yakov's worry. When Yakov said **מִלֵּל הַחֲסִדִּים**, **קִטְנִיתִי מִלֵּל הַחֲסִדִּים**, he was not worried about diminishing his merits with the goodness he had received. Instead, he was concerned that his behaviour should match up to the level of goodness he had received from Hashem. Yakov realized that he was now expected to live on a much higher level, and was therefore worried that he had been sullied by sin. Even though he knew he had only transgressed minor sins, he was afraid that this did not meet the level of behaviour expected of him and he would fail.

Based on this understanding, the Rosh Yeshiva resolves the Ramban's questions on Rashi. Yakov was not apprehensive that he had exhausted his merits with the kindness, thereby losing the promise of security since he had just recently been reassured of it. Therefore, he was still able to call upon Hashem's promise. Furthermore, he was not referring to the kindness he had received in the short interval since Hashem's most recent assurance. Rather, due to all the kindness he had *ever* received, his behaviour was expected to be on an elevated level. This caused him to fear that even minor *recent* sins may cause him to falter and fall when confronted by Eisav.¹

The lesson we learn from above is crucial. The more blessings we receive from Hashem, the more this must be reflected in our *Avodas Hashem*. We must acknowledge the goodness that we are receiving and express gratitude to Hashem for them. We also must work hard to ensure that our actions and standards are aligned with the Divine blessings we are given from Above.

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¹ The *possuk* says in Tehillim (146:2): **אֶהְלֵלָהּ ה' בְּחַיִּי אֲזַמְרָה לְאֵלֵי בְעוֹדִי**, *I will praise Hashem while I live, I will make music to my God while I exist*. The Malbim offers insight into the different terminologies used in this *possuk*. Firstly, Dovid HaMelech praised Hashem for life itself, and secondly for all the additional goodness he had received. He further explains that the name 'ה' is used to represent Hashem's general *hashgachah* over all of humanity, while the name **אֵלֵי** represents more individualised Divine oversight and protection. Additionally, the Malbim explains how **אֲזַמְרָה** is a greater form of praise than **הֵלֵל**. This can be well understood according to the above concept. Since everyone receives life, praise for this is only on a basic level. On the other hand, the thanks and gratitude that each person needs to recognize for the individual goodness he receives needs to be superior since those kindnesses are an indication of Hashem's personal connection to him.