



An Fascinating Allusion from the Holy Maharid of Belz On the Shabbas that We Bless the Month of Elul HKB”H Admonishes the Yetzer: “Beware of speaking with Yaakov either good or bad”

On the upcoming Shabbas Kodesh, we will bless the month of Elul, the month of teshuvah, which prepares us for the judgment of Rosh HaShanah. Thus, it is fitting to begin this essay with a wonderful allusion presented by the Makor Baruch in the name of the holy Admor, Rabbi Yischar Dov of Belz (the Maharid), zy”a. After pursuing Yaakov Avinu, Lavan HaArami catches up with him and remarks (Bereishis 31, 29): **”יש לאל ידי”** לעשות עמכם רע ואלוקי אביכם אמש אמר אלי לאמר השמר לך מדבר עם יעקב **”מטוב ועד רע—there is power to my hand to do you harm; but the G-d of your father spoke to me last night (אמ”ש), saying, “Beware of speaking with Yaakov either good or bad.”**

In his own sacred way, he explains that Lavan HaArami represents the yetzer hara, who entices a Jew to commit aveiros. (His source is the Midrash Ne’elam in the Zohar hakadosh [Toldos 137a]). Thus, he interprets the passuk as follows: When Lavan says: **“There is power to my hand to do you harm”**—he is alluding to the power of the yetzer throughout the year; however, **אמ”ש**—with the arrival of **שבת מ'ברכים א'לול** (the Shabbas on which we bless the month of Elul); **“the G-d of your father spoke to me, saying”**—in other words, HKB”H admonishes the yetzer sternly: **“Beware of speaking with Yaakov either good or bad”**—do not interfere with Yisrael’s efforts to rectify their wrongdoings of the past year by means of teshuvah during the month of Ellul—for good or for bad.

Now, the Yitav Panim (Parshas HaChodesh 16) explains why we bless the new month on the Shabbas prior to Rosh Chodesh. It is because (Zohar hakadosh Yisro 88a): **”כל ברכאן דלעילא”**

”ותתא ביומא שביעאה תליין”—all heavenly and earthly Berachos depend on the seventh day.

In other words, HKB”H endows the Shabbas prior to Rosh Chodesh with abundant, good influence for the upcoming new month. Therefore, we bless the new month on the Shabbas prior to Rosh Chodesh. It is precisely for this reason that HKB”H admonishes the yetzer hara on the Shabbas that we bless the month of Ellul: **“Beware of speaking with Yaakov either good or bad”**—because all of the positive influence of Rosh Chodesh Ellul comes from the Shabbas preceding it.

Yaakov Avinu’s Struggle to Confiscate the Month of Elul from Eisav

It is with great pleasure that we will now explore together the sacred insight of the holy Maharid, zy”a. Note that the passuk specifically mentions Yaakov Avinu, even though according to the allusion, the passuk is referring to all of Yisrael, Yaakov’s descendants.

To explain the matter, we will present what the Bnei Yissaschar (Tamuz-Av 1, 6) writes in the name of the Megaleh Amukos on Vaeschanan (107). Originally, Yaakov and Eisav divided up the months of the year between them. Yaakov Avinu took as his portion for the sake of kedushah the three months of **Nissan, Iyar and Sivan**. Yisrael’s exodus from Mitzrayim was in Nissan; during the days of the sefirah in Iyar, Yisrael cleansed themselves of all spiritual shortcomings in preparation for

receiving the Torah; in Sivan, Yisrael received the Torah at Har Sinai on Chag HaShavuot.

Correspondingly, Eisav took as his portion the three months of **Tammuz, Av and Elul**. Eisav was elated that the month of Elul fell to him, because it would enable him to prevent Yisrael from performing teshuvah before Rosh HaShanah. Hence, Yaakov Avinu fought fiercely and strategically to take possession of the month of Elul from Eisav. As a result of his efforts, Yisrael was able to perform proper teshuvah during this special month and be exonerated on the Day of Judgment. This only left Eisav with the two months of Tammuz and Av, the months associated with the destructions of the first and second Batei HaMikdash.

Based on this scenario, the Bnei Yissaschar interprets the words of David HaMelech, a”h, (Tehillim 30, 2): **”ארומם ה' כי: דליתני—I will exalt You, Hashem, for You have lifted me up—**by keeping the door (“delet”) of teshuvah open during the month of Elul; **”ולא שמחת אויבי לי—and You did not allow my enemies to rejoice at my expense—**referring to Eisav down below and his guardian angel above. For, they were elated when the month of Elul fell into their hands, because they intended to prevent Yisrael from performing teshuvah. HKB”H, however, thwarted their malevolent plans and assisted Yaakov to confiscate the month of Elul from them.

In this light, I would like to propose an explanation for the epic struggle that ensued between Eisav’s guardian angel and Yaakov Avinu. Let us refer to the pertinent pesukim in parshas Vayishlach (Bereishis 32, 25): **”ויותר יעקב לבדו ויאבק איש עמו עד עלות השחר, וירא כי לא יכול לו ויגע בכף ירכו ותקע כף ירך יעקב בהאבקו עמו—and Yaakov remained alone, and a man wrestled with him until dawn; upon realizing that he could not overcome him, he struck a blow to the ball of Yaakov’s thighbone, and it became dislocated, as they wrestled.** We find the following elucidation in the Gemara (Chullin 91a): **”ויאבק איש עמו, מלמד: “a man wrestled with him” teaches us that the dust stirred up by their feet rose up to the Kisei HaKavod.** [Translator’s note: This elucidation is based on the similarity between the words **ויאבק**, meaning he wrestled, and the word **אבק**, meaning dust.]

In keeping with our current discussion, we can suggest that Eisav’s guardian angel was fighting with Yaakov to maintain possession of the month of Elul, which rightfully belonged to Eisav. Furthermore, we have learned in another Gemara (Yoma 86a): **”גדולה תשובה שמגעת עד כסא הכבוד—the power of teshuvah**

is so great that it reaches up to the Kisei HaKavod. This explains Chazal’s elucidation above very nicely: **This teaches us that the dust stirred up by their feet rose up to the Kisei HaKavod.** In other words, the struggle between Eisav’s guardian angel and Yaakov Avinu concerned the month of Elul, the month of teshuvah; hence, its effects were felt all the way up to the Kisei HaKavod. We can suggest that this is alluded to in the passuk chronicling this epic struggle: **”וירא כי לא יכול לו—he realized that he could not overcome him.** If we combine the two words **ל”א** and **ל”ו**, we obtain the word **ל”ל**.

In the Merit of Shabbas the Bad Malach Is Compelled to Answer Amen

We will now endeavor to explain how Yaakov Avinu actually managed to confiscate the month of Elul from Eisav. We learn in the Gemara (Shabbas 118a): **”כל המענג את השבת מותנין לו נחלה: שנאמר אז תתענג על ה' והרכבתוך על במתי ארץ והאכלתוך נחלת בלי מצרים, Whoever delights in the Shabbas is rewarded with a portion without boundaries, as it states (Yeshayah 58, 14): “Then you will delight in Hashem, and I will mount you astride the heights of the world; I will provide you the heritage of your forefather Yaakov.”**

According to the Midrash (B.R. 11, 7), the reason Shabbas is referred to specifically as the **“heritage of Yaakov”** is because he is the first person to whom the Torah attributes Shabbas-observance (Bereishis 33, 18): **”ויבוא יעקב שלם עיר שכם וגו' ויחן את: Yaakov arrived intact at the city of Shechem . . . and he rested (encamped) in front of the city.** According to the Midrash this teaches us that he arrived at twilight on erev Shabbas and set boundaries for Shabbas.

Let us now introduce another teaching in the Gemara (ibid. 119b): **”שני מלאכי השרת מלווין לו לאדם בערב שבת מבית הכנסת לביתו אחד טוב ואחד רע, וכשבא לביתו ומצא נר דלוק ושלחן ערוך ומטתו מוצעת, מלאך טוב אומר, יהי רצון שתהא לשבת אחרת כך, ומלאך רע עונה אמן בעל כרחו.” Two ministering angels accompany a person from the Beis Kenesses to his home on erev Shabbas—a good one and a bad one. When he arrives home and finds a candle lit, the table set and his bed arranged, the good angel says: “It should be His will that it should be so on another Shabbas.” The bad angel is forced to answer: “Amen.”** The Mateh Moshe explains that the bad malach that accompanies a person home on erev Shabbas is the “samech-mem.” As we know, the “samech-mem” is Eisav’s guardian angel, the one who wrestled with Yaakov. As the Midrash Tanchuma explains (Vayishlach

8): **“A man wrestled with him”—this refers to Samael, the guardian angel of Eisav.**

This illustrates for us the incredible power and kedushah of Shabbas, the heritage of Yaakov—“Nachalas Yaakov.” It is capable of transforming a bad malach into a good malach. We can suggest that Yaakov’s name alludes to this fact. For, the gematria of **יעקב** (182) equals two times **מלאך** (91). In other words, in the merit of Yaakov Avinu, we are privileged to receive the Berachos of two malachim on every Shabbas. The good malach bestows the berachah: **“It should be His will that it should be so on another Shabbas.”** And the bad malach is compelled to answer: **“Amen.”**

Now, we can postulate that in the merit of Shabbas Kodesh, Yaakov Avinu managed to take the month of Elul away from Eisav. As explained, Shabbas has the power to compel the bad malach, who is the guardian angel of Eisav, to also concur with the berachah offered by the good malach. Therefore, it is likely that Yaakov also used the power and kedushah of Shabbas to compel Eisav’s guardian angel to relinquish the month of Elul to Yisrael.

Now, we can better appreciate the wonderful allusion of our master, the Maharid, zy”a. On the Shabbas that we bless the month of Elul, HKB”H admonishes the yetzer hara, the guardian angel of Eisav: **“Beware of speaking with Yaakov either good or bad.”** HKB”H mentions the name **Yaakov**, because Shabbas is his heritage. It is specifically in the merit of Shabbas that Yaakov prevailed over the guardian angel of Eisav and prevented him from taking back the month of Elul. Therefore, on the Shabbas that we bless the month of Elul, HKB”H admonishes the guardian angel of Eisav not to interfere with and ruin the efforts of Yisrael during the month of Elul.

HKB”H Accepts Yisrael’s Teshuvah in the Merit of Yaakov Avinu’s Attribute of Rachamim

Now, I would like to present a novel idea to our royal audience. Why does HKB”H admonish the yetzer hara on the Shabbas that we bless the month of Elul: **“Beware of speaking with Yaakov either good or bad”?** To begin with, we will explain why HKB”H arranged specifically for Yaakov Avinu—of all the three Avos—to be the one to take the month of Elul away from the klipah and incorporate it into the domain of kedushah.

To shed some light on the matter, we will introduce a perplexing teaching in the Gemara (Berachos 64a): **“מאי דכתיב**

יענך ה' ביום צרה ישגבך שם אלקי יעקב, אלקי יעקב ולא אלקי אברהם ויצחק, מכאן לבעל הקורה שיכנס בעביה של קורה.” **What is the meaning of that which is written (Tehillim 20, 1): “May Hashem answer you on a day of distress; may the name of the G-d of Yaakov strengthen you”? The G-d of Yaakov but not the G-d of Avraham and Yitzchak?! From here we see that (when several are carrying a beam) the owner of the beam must insert himself under the thick part of the beam.** Since the beam belongs to him, he must bear the heaviest part. The commentaries question why Yaakov Avinu is specifically compared to the owner of a beam and not to the owner of some other part of the building. To unravel this enigma, let us refer to a passage in the Talmud Yerushalmi (Makkos 7a):

“שאלו לחכמה, חוטא מהו עונשו, אמרו להם חטאים תרדוף רעה. שאלו לנבואה, חוטא מהו עונשו, אמרה להן הנפש החוטאת היא תמות. שאלו לקודשא בריך הוא, חוטא מהו עונשו, אמר להן יעשה תשובה ויתכפר לו, היינו דכתיב (תהלים כה-ה) על כן יורה חטאים בדרך, יורה לחטאים דרך לעשות תשובה.”

They asked Chochmah (Wisdom), “What should be the fate of a sinner?” She said to them (Mishlei 13, 21): “Evil pursues sinners.” They asked Nevuah (Prophecy), “What is the punishment of the sinner?” She said to them (Yechezkel 18, 4): “The soul that sins shall die.” [They asked the Torah, “What is the punishment of the sinner?” She said to them, “He should bring an “asham-offering,” and it will atone for him.] They asked HKB”H, “What is the punishment of the sinner?” He said to them, “He should perform teshuvah and it will atone for him.” This is the meaning of the passuk (Tehillim 25, 8): “Therefore, He guides sinners on the way”—He shows sinners the path of teshuvah.****

Chochmah and Nevuah found no tikun for an individual who sinned against HKB”H, because from the aspect of “din,” such a person does not deserve the option of teshuvah. If a lowly being of flesh and blood has the audacity to rebel against the honor of the King of Kings, he does not deserve a tikun. Only HKB”H Himself, in His infinite mercy and kindness, is able to offer us the option of teshuvah to make amends for our sins. Therefore, only HKB”H, Who is willing to overlook the slight to His kavod, suggested: **“He should perform teshuvah and it will atone for him.”**

With this understanding, we can comprehend the explanation of the Shela hakadosh (citing his father) regarding Rashi’s comment on the first passuk of the Torah (Bereishis 1, 1). Rashi notes that the first passuk of the Torah employs the name Elokim rather than Havaya. This indicates that initially,

He thought to create the world based on the attribute of “din”; however, He saw that the world could not live up to this standard and continue to exist; therefore, He gave precedence to the attribute of “rachamim,” and joined it to the attribute of “din.” (This is evident in Bereishis 2, 4.)

Let us explain. The wisest of all men said (Koheles 7, 20): “כי אדם אין צדיק בארץ אשר יעשה טוב ולא יחטא”—**for there is no man so wholly righteous on earth that he always does good and never sins.** Since a sinner does not deserve a tikun via teshuvah from the strict aspect of “din,” the world cannot endure based on “midas hadin.” Therefore, HKB”H gave precedence to the attribute of “rachamim,” and joined it to the attribute of “din.” Thus, if a sinner performs teshuvah, it atones for his sins; if he fails to do so, he dies as a result of his sins.

This explains very nicely David HaMelech’s statement (Tehillim 25, 11): “למען שמך ה' וסלחת לעוונתי כי רב הוא”—**for the sake of Your name, Havaya, forgive my sin, though it is great.** In other words, for the sake of Your name Havaya, which You gave precedence to over the name of Elokim during the process of creation to teach us that a sinner is afforded tikun via the process of teshuvah. This is also apparent in the passuk (Devarim 4, 30): “ושבת עד ה' אלקיך”—**you will return unto Hashem (Havaya), your G-d (Elokim).** The option to return to the good graces of HKB”H stems from the fact that He prioritized the name **Havaya** over the name **Elokim**.

The Atonement Afforded by Teshuvah Comes from Midas HaRachamim

Notwithstanding, it behooves us to take note of Rashi’s language: **He gave precedence to the midah of “rachamim” (divine mercy) and joined it with the midah of “din” (strict judgment).** He specifies the midah of “rachamim” rather than the midah of “chesed.” This implies that HKB”H accepts the sinner back via teshuvah exclusively from the aspect of “rachamim” and not “chesed.” It appears that Rashi deduced this fact from the passuk (Bereishis 2, 4): “ביום עשות ה' אלקים ארץ: ושמים—**on the day when Havaya Elokim made the earth and the heavens.** Here, HKB”H specifically mentions the name **Havaya** before the name **Elokim**.

Now, we know that the name **Havaya** represents the midah of “rachamim,” as it is written (Tehillim 40, 12): “אתה: הויה—**You, Havaya, do not withhold Your “rachamim” (mercy) from me.** It also says (ibid. 119, 156):

“רחמיך רבים הויה”—**Your “rachamim,” Havaya, are abundant.** The name א”ל, on the other hand, represents the midah of “chesed,” as it is written (ibid. 52, 3): “חסד אל כל היום”—**the “chesed” of G-d (“El”) is all day long.** Thus, we find that HKB”H did not join the name **El** to the name **Elokim**, but rather the name **Havaya**. Hence, we can deduce that HKB”H preferentially prioritized the name of “rachamim” to the name of “din.” It is now incumbent upon us to explain why HKB”H accepts the teshuvah of a sinner with the midah of “rachamim” rather than with the midah of “chesed.”

We will rely on the fact that the three holy Avos served Hashem with the three principal midos with which HKB”H manages His universe. Avraham Avinu served Hashem with the midah of “chesed”; Yitzchak Avinu served Hashem with the midah of “gevurah,” which is “din”; whereas Yaakov Avinu, whose midah is “Tiferes,” served Hashem with the midah of “rachamim,” an amalgamation of “chesed” and “din.”

The pure midah of “chesed” does not discriminate between good people and bad people; it wants to treat even reshaim with kindness. Therefore, Avraham Avinu, the paradigm of “chesed,” prayed on behalf of the wicked, sinful people of Sedom. Conversely, the pure midah of “din” intends to punish to the full extent of the law anyone who has sinned, in keeping with the pronouncement: **“The person who sins shall die.”** The only ones it views benevolently are consummate tzaddikim who have never sinned.

The midah of “rachamim,” however, which combines both “chesed” and “din,” is able to compromise. According to “midas hadin,” total reshaim who did not perform teshuvah deserve to be punished, as was the case with the generation of the mabul and the people of Sedom. Even if they had performed teshuvah for their transgressions, from the viewpoint of “din,” they would still deserve to be punished. HKB”H, however, is willing to forgive them and go beyond the strict letter of the law. Now, we have an important principle (Berachos 43b) that the halachah is determined by the third opinion. Therefore, HKB”H accepts the teshuvah of the sinner with the midah of “rachamim.”

Thus, we have learned a vital, new principle. The fact that HKB”H accepts a sinner back via the mechanism of teshuvah is solely in the merit of Yaakov Avinu whose midah was “rachamim.” He settles the matter by finding a compromise between the midah of “chesed” and the midah of “din.” This allows a sinner

to perform teshuvah. Therefore, HKB”H prioritized “midas harachamim” and joined it with “midas hadin,” so that the world would be able to endure thanks to the process of teshuvah.

The Image of Yaakov Avinu is Etched on the Kisei HaKavod

In this light, we can explain very nicely the Gemara’s statement (Chullin 91b) that the image of Yaakov Avinu is etched on the Kisei HaKavod. This teaching also appears in the Midrash (B.R. 68, 12) in relation to the passuk (Yeshayah 49, 3): “ישראל אשר בך אתפאר, את הוא שאיקונין שלך חקוקה למעלה”—“Yisrael, in whom I take glory,” you are the one whose image is engraved above. Now, we learned above: **The power of teshuvah is so great that it reaches up to the Kisei HaKavod.** So, when the malachim representing “din” begin to prosecute, they argue that the sinner deserves to die, because it does not recognize teshuvah as a means of tikun. As we have learned, it is only on account of the midah of “rachamim” that teshuvah is an effective means of atoning for a sin. Therefore, HKB”H etched the image of Yaakov Avinu on the Kisei HaKavod. His image serves as a constant reminder to the malachim that the halachah accords with him and his midah of “rachamim.” Thus, the teshuvah of a sinner is accepted.

We now have cause to rejoice. This illuminates for us the enigmatic words of our sages: **What is the meaning of that which is written** (Tehillim 20, 1): **“May Hashem answer you on a day of distress; may the name of the G-d of Yaakov strengthen you”?** **The G-d of Yaakov but not the G-d of Avraham and Yitzchak?! From here we see that** (when several are carrying a beam) **the owner of the beam must insert himself under the thick part of the beam.** The function of the beam placed on the roof of a building is to connect the two opposite walls of the structure. In similar fashion, Yaakov’s midah of “rachamim” functions to connect the right-sided midah of “chesed” with the left-sided midah of “din” (“gevurah”). In this merit, HKB”H accepts Yisrael’s teshuvah.

This then is the interpretation of the passuk: **“Havaya—the name that HKB”H prioritized over the name of Elokim at the beginning of creation—will answer you on a day of distress; may the name of the G-d of Yaakov strengthen you.” The G-d of Yaakov—whose midah is “rachamim”—but not the G-d of Avraham and Yitzchak** (whose midos are “chesed” and “din” respectively)! **From here we see that the owner of the**

beam—namely, Yaakov, who connects and settles the conflict between “chesed” and “din”—must insert himself under the thick part of the beam—to appeal to HKB”H to accept the teshuvah of Yisrael.

At last, we can appreciate why HKB”H assigned Yaakov Avinu to confiscate the month of Elul, the month of teshuvah, from Eisav. After all, the entire concept of teshuvah is due entirely to the midah of “rachamim” of Yaakov Avinu. His voice is the determining voice resolving the conflict and determining the halachah in favor of teshuvah. Hence, HKB”H’s pronouncement: **“He should perform teshuvah and it will atone for him.”** Therefore, the owner of the beam—Yaakov Avinu—bears the burden of the beam; it is his task to rescue the month of Elul and take it away from Eisav.

On Shabbas HKB”H Sits on His Kisei HaKavod and Accepts Yisrael’s Teshuvah

In this manner, we can proceed to explain the allusion presented by our master, the Maharid, zy”a, related to the words: **“ואלוקי אביכם אמש”**. He interprets the word **אמ”ש** as an acronym for **שבת מברכים אלול**. Thus, the passuk teaches us that on the Shabbas that we bless the month of Elul, HKB”H admonishes the yetzer hara: **“Beware of speaking with Yaakov either good or bad.”** To explain this, we will refer to the formula we recite in Shacharis on Shabbas morning: **“לא אל אשר שבת מכל—the G-d, Who rested from all activity, and on the seventh day ascended and sat on His Kisei HaKavod.**

In Sidduro shel Shabbas, the author explains that **שבת** is an abbreviation for **שבת ב”ו תשוב—on Shabbas, you should return—i.e., you should perform teshuvah.** Since a person does not have to deal with the everyday, mundane matters of Olam HaZeh on Shabbas, it is the ideal time to assess and take stock of one’s actions and behavior during the preceding weekdays. This coincides magnificently with the fact that Shabbas is the heritage of Yaakov, in whose merit HKB”H accepts Yisrael’s teshuvah. It is precisely for this reason that HKB”H sits on His Kisei HaKavod on Shabbas with the image of Yaakov etched on it. It is the opportune time to accept Yisrael’s teshuvah that ascends up to the Kisei HaKavod.

This explains beautifully the unique qualities of the Shabbas on which we bless the month of Elul. On this Shabbas, the kedushah of Shabbas—which is an ideal time for teshuvah (**שבת**)

ב"ז תשוב—combines with the teshuvah that characterizes the month of Elul—which Yaakov confiscated from Eisav. Therefore, it is specifically on this Shabbas that HKB”H admonishes sternly the yetzer hara, the guardian angel of Eisav: **“Beware of speaking with Yaakov either good or bad.”**

With this in mind, it is fitting to prepare adequately on Shabbas Kodesh. HKB”H refers to Shabbas as a special gift (Shabbas 10b): **“מתנה טובה יש לי בבית גנזי ושבת שמה”**—**I have a**

special gift in my treasure-house; its name is Shabbas. The month of Elul is also a special gift given to us by HKB”H; it is the month designated for teshuvah. Even though it originally belonged to Eisav, Yaakov Avinu successfully took it away from him, enabling us to perform teshuvah and rectify all of the wrongdoings of the past year. In this merit, we will deserve to be inscribed and sealed for good on Rosh HaShanah, and we will merit a year of geulah and salvation!



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