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This was manifested in the struggle with Jacob specifically.

“evil.” The archangel of Esau, representing the forces of evil, was not seeking to be cut off from its own life force by overthrowing the forces of good; rather, it was challenging the very system by which its life force had to be filtered through good in the first place. Its characteristic lack of *bittul*, or humility, left evil dissatisfied with its place in the scheme of things: it sought to rise up and, bypassing good entirely, draw its life force directly from that sublime level of G-d Himself which transcends the distinction between good and evil.*

This was manifested in the struggle with Jacob specifically, for it was Jacob whose spiritual accomplishments were rewarded by the investiture of G-d’s life force primarily into the forces of good.**

** Evil was not content with the “leftovers” of G-dliness remaining after the Light of the Infinite One (the Or Ein Sof) had enfolded Itself within the epitome of bittul, the Sefirah of Chochmah—and, by virtue of Chochmah’s own investiture within the other Sefiros, had also become inherent within the lower Sefiros of Atzilus, until some vestige thereof could leak through the “holes in the hide” of Malchus, the lowest. Rather, evil sought to derive its spiritual life force directly from the Source, the Or Ein Sof, transcending the idea of bittul, investiture within Chochmah, and the entire distinction between good and evil. Indeed, it wanted even good to have to receive its life force through evil.*

*** As the Torah relates, Jacob was compelled to live with his uncle and father-in-law, the wicked Laban, for many years. While there, he married Laban’s two daughters, Leah and Rachel. Additionally, Jacob amassed great wealth before leaving Laban’s household, because as payment for his services to Laban, the latter promised Jacob all the sheep which would be born from his flocks with band-like markings around their ankles (akudim in Hebrew), speckled with small spots (nekudim), or mottled*



guided contemplation of our own personalities, we may better understand G-d. Thus, we refer to the *Sefiros* by names to which our own attributes correspond, from *Chochmah* (“wisdom,” or the point at which new ideas come into the mind); through *Chessed* (“kindness”), *Gevurah* (“severity,” implying both “might” and “restraint”) and related “emotions”; all the way down to *Malchus* (the faculty which actually transmits influence to another). At the highest level—i.e., when G-d first manifests Himself through the ten *Sefiros*—they are all *batel*¹¹ to G-d Himself, and are really one with Him. This state of affairs is described as the spiritual realm of *Atzilus*. However, since G-d wants the world to exist in a form which allows for diversity and multiplicity (which would not be possible if everything were perceived to be united with G-d, Who is One and not diverse), He also allows (through the attribute of *Malchus*, which transmits outward) the spiritual life force to flow beyond *Atzilus*, through countless, progressively lower, spiritual levels (known in a broad, general sense as the three spiritual realms of *Beriab*, *Yetzirah*, and *Asiyah*) which are not necessarily completely *batel* to Him.

(In this sense, it is important to understand that the degree of *bittul* to G-d in these spiritual realms is not a measure of how much they “accept” G-d’s sovereignty (for this is not a matter subject to their choice), but a measure of how **revealed** G-d is in those realms. The more openly revealed G-d is, the more “transparent” and *batel* the inhabitants of that

When G-d first manifests Himself through the ten Sefiros, they are all batel to G-d Himself. This is the spiritual realm of Atzilus. However, since G-d wants the world to exist in a form which allows for diversity and multiplicity, He also allows the spiritual life force to flow beyond Atzilus.

11. The adjective form of the abstract noun “*bittul*.”



Symbolism of the struggle between Jacob and the angel

Let us bring this down to earth by relating the concepts, and the specifics of the struggle, to human experience. Evil has no hold over intellect (which, as explained above, is inherently *batal*); objective intellectual analysis is able to recognize good as good and evil as evil. It is only on the emotional level that a person's own desires and temptations can cause one to "forget" the difference between right and wrong.^{***}

Evil has no hold over intellect. It is only on the emotional level that a person's own desires and temptations can cause one to "forget" the difference between right and wrong.

archangel of evil attacked.

This also provides an answer to the question posed at the beginning: how could evil challenge good, being that evil's very existence depends upon good? The answer is that that very circumstance—the supremacy of good—was only brought about by Jacob. It should therefore come as no surprise that Jacob himself was targeted by evil, in an attempt to thwart this accomplishment.

(This progressive revelation of G-dliness, stage by stage, as it were, is symbolized by the Divine name Havayah, the Tetragrammaton, whose initial letter, yud, symbolizes one compressed point, followed by the letter hei, expanding into length and breadth, etc. Accordingly, all the above is hinted at by the verse,¹⁴ "Though you rise high as an eagle...from there I will bring you down, says Havayah." That is, although evil may seek to rise up and bypass the fixed order of creation, reaching for the very heights of direct revelation, nevertheless, thanks to Jacob, it is only through that fixed order—symbolized by Havayah—that the revelation will descend.

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(Kabbalistically, the struggle between good and evil plays itself out on two fronts.)

**** Kabbalistically, it is said that the forces of evil have no hold over any but the seven lower attributes (i.e., the so-called "emotional" Sefiros from Chessed through Malchus). With respect to these, the struggle between good and evil plays itself out on two fronts, as it were: the "masculine" aspect of kelipah (the forces of unholiness) strives to dominate its holy counterpart, the group of six Sefiros from Chessed through Yesod*

14. Obadiah 1:4.



Continuing the analogy to our own personalities, the emotional faculties are not as closely associated with the quality of *bittul*, but are still susceptible to its influence.¹⁰ For example, if the mind contemplates sufficiently the greatness of G-d, then the emotions of love of G-d, reverence for G-d, and so on will be aroused within the person, even to the point where the person puts G-d above his or her own interests. (For example, the person may want to read a novel, but out of love for G-d will read Torah literature instead. Furthermore, it is possible to develop one's love of G-d to the point where the person genuinely comes to prefer Torah to novels.) Thus, the emotions too, although initially less "transparent" than the intellect, can be made subservient to G-d; they can even be trained to focus exclusively on Him.

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The intellect, of course, is associated with the head, while the emotions are traditionally associated with the heart, which is located in the torso. Beneath these levels are the legs, which, like the head and the heart, also symbolize particular spiritual attributes. However, these are focused not on the person him- or herself, but rather on someone to whom the person wishes to transmit his or her own influence. For example, one who wishes to teach another must first evaluate the student's capacity to understand the concept, and then formulate the teaching in a way appro-

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10. Although it is true that emotions per se can not be empirically observed either, they are by definition the emotions of the particular person and manifest that person's sense of self, unlike new thoughts or ideas which seem to come to a person externally. With intellect, it's the idea that counts, not the person who thought of it; with emotion, the point is not that love (for example) is theoretically possible toward some object, but that a specific person loves.



have no hold even over the emotions. However, without adequate meditation intellectually, one's emotions could theoretically be drawn after worldly desires instead of spiritual ones.

Jewish mysticism identifies Jacob with those levels of G-dly manifestation referred to as the “emotional” attributes of the realm of *Atzilus*. Jacob symbolized a thorough dedication of one's emotions to G-dly matters. The angel of Esau symbolized the corruption or diversion of the emotions to worldly desires. Each tried to topple the other, swaying the emotional faculties of Man entirely over to his side. More specifically, the major emotional attributes of *Chessed* (kindness, love) and *Gevurah* (might, restraint) are symbolized by the right and left arms respectively; thus, each combatant encircling the other with his arms was an earthly manifestation of the spiritual struggle of the evil character traits, on the one hand, to envelop and dominate the personality, and that of the holy character traits, on the other hand, to dominate and convert the capacity for worldly desires entirely to good.

Evil's mistake

Evil's mistake, however, was in failing to recognize the true nature of Jacob.

Evil's mistake, however, was in failing to recognize the true nature of Jacob. The emotions can only be swayed to material desires when the influence of the intellect is lacking, for, as noted above, the objective intellect can discern right from wrong.*

* *This concept is hinted at in the saying of our Sages,¹⁶ “The needs of Your nation Israel are many, and their knowledge is short.”¹⁷ When*

16. *Berachos* 29b.

17. I.e., their knowledge is inadequate to understand and articulate all their needs in their prayers. See Rashi ad loc.



reigned in the land of Edom before there reigned a king over the Children of Israel.” The word “Edom” is associated with Esau, representing the forces of evil generally, and the reference to kings ruling in Edom is a mystical allusion to the ways in which G-dly vitality was in fact once found even there. However, this was “before there reigned a king over the Children of Israel.” The Jews, through their worship, limited the direct flow of G-dliness to that which has nullified itself before G-d.* Consequently, the forces of evil—characterized by a lack of deference to G-d's Will, and in fact by defiance of G-d's Will—no longer received their spiritual sustenance directly (as explained above). This latter state of affairs is the mystical meaning of the verse,⁸ “There was no king in Edom.”

It emerges, then, that deference to G-d's Will—*bitul* in Hebrew, which denotes more than mere deference but actual nullification, making oneself completely insignificant, as nothing, before G-d—is the factor that distinguishes good from evil. It is the path, the conduit, by which G-dly revelation flows into the world.

Deference to G-d's Will, bitul, is the conduit by which G-dly revelation flows into the world.

* *This is in accordance with the verse,⁷ “May [G-d] cause His face to shine upon us forever.” The stress here is on the expression, “G-d's face,” which is often found in mystical literature as a symbol of Divine favor. The implication of the verse is that G-d turns His face and focuses His attention directly upon “us”—the Jewish people—forever. By contrast, G-d “turns His back,” as it were, on the forces of unboliness.*

7. Psalms 67:2.

8. I Kings 22:48.

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sonality, extending even to the lowest level. For this reason, the evil angel was no match for him, and could only injure Jacob in the thigh (as recounted in the Biblical story): the thigh, as mentioned above, is a part of the body associated with relating to another, as opposed to being intrinsic to the person's own self; thus, the element of *bittul* is necessarily weaker on that level.

Jacob elevated evil into good

Not only that, but Jacob actually overwhelmed the evil forces, subjugating the desire for worldly pursuits to the desire for spiritual pursuits.

Not only that, but Jacob actually overwhelmed the evil forces, subjugating the inclination to do evil—the desire for worldly pursuits—to the inclination to do good—the desire for spiritual pursuits.²¹ In mystical terms, Jacob—the embodiment of the emotional attributes of *Atzilus*, the capacity for dedication of one's emotions to G-d—overwhelmed and elevated the emotional attributes of *kelipah* (the forces of non-holiness), the capacity for diversion of the emotions to worldly desires.

Another dimension to the struggle: the distinction between “dust” and “dirt”

Now, all the foregoing has focused on the struggle between Jacob and the angel as it was played out on the plane of the emotions. But, as noted above,²² the struggle between good and evil plays itself out on two

21. This is what is meant by the exhortation expounded from the *Shema* prayer that we should struggle to love G-d not only with our inclination to do good, but also with our desire for worldly pursuits: even our capacity to appreciate physical, mundane matters should be used in the furtherance of holy objectives.

22. See pp. 182–183, in italics.



In light of the above, the idea that evil should struggle with good, vying for supremacy, as it were, with its own life force, seems more than simply biting the hand that feeds it—it seems as though it should be “mechanically” impossible. How then are we to understand the teaching of our sages that the incident in this week's Torah portion represented an attempt by evil to overthrow good?*

The idea that evil should struggle with good, vying for supremacy with its own life force, seems “mechanically” impossible.

** The question is a very real one, for not only did the angel grapple with Jacob, which might be viewed as a symbolic but impotent action; he actually harmed Jacob, inflicted actual damage upon good. Jacob sustained a wound to his thigh and was left limping. In his classic work, Pardes Rimoni,¹ the great Kabbalist Rabbi Moshe Cordovero² explains that this was the earthly expression of the spiritual damage done to the Sefirah of Netzach in the realm of Atzilus, which is the source of prophecy. As a result, there were no prophets among the Jews from the time of Moses until Samuel. (The soul of the prophet Samuel stemmed from this very Sefirah, Netzach of Atzilus; he was therefore able to rectify the damage, as alluded to by his statement,³ “And furthermore, the Eternal (Netzach) of Israel will not lie.”) Obviously, then, it was a true conflict that took place, in which good was vulnerable to harm by the hand of evil. In fact, this battle is ongoing, as it says,⁴ “G-d will wage war upon Amalek [i.e., the forces of evil] from generation to generation.” How, indeed, are we to understand this seemingly inconceivable notion?*

The impossibility of the matter is further underscored when we consider that not only does the very existence of evil depend upon good, as discussed in the main text, but even that “existence” is illusory; it has no reality to it. When Messiah arrives, whatever life force had been sustaining evil will be taken from it, as hinted, for example, in the verse,⁵ “He has swallowed riches, but will vomit them up again.” As a result, evil will be as though it had never existed at all. If so, how could it inflict damage—however things might appear to us, the reality is that there never was anything that could challenge good to begin with!

1. Portal 17.

2. Known as the Ramak, 1522–1570.

3. I Samuel 15:29.

4. Exodus 17:16.

5. Job 20:15.

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Ash, however, is equated with dust, and symbolizes kelipah.

(The very highest level is, paradoxically, expressed specifically within the very lowest. In our context, this is expressed by the verse, "I [G-d] am the first and I am the last.")

Ash, however, which, in our context, is equated with dust, symbolizes *kelipah*, because it represents

ly, expressed specifically within the very lowest. In our context, this is expressed by the verse,²⁵ "I [G-d] am the first and I am the last." This is because the Hebrew word for "I," ani, is spelled with the identical letters (although in different order) as the word meaning "nothing" or "where," ayin. The significance of this is that the spiritual level of Kesser ("Crown"), which transcends even Chochmah, the highest Sefirah, as a crown encompasses and sits atop the head, is mystically alluded to by the term ayin. (Indeed, this is the esoteric significance of the verse,²⁶ "From where (ayin) shall wisdom be found," which can also be interpreted to mean that the Sefirah of Chochmah ("Wisdom") is itself derived from the lofty spiritual level known as ayin.) Thus, the verse, "I (Ani) am the first and I (Ani) am the last" hints that the spiritual level of Kesser—alluded to by the letters of the word Ani—is manifest not just at the very highest level (the "first") but also the very lowest (the "last").

No created entity, even the loftiest spiritual entities such as the Sefiros of Atzilus, could withstand creation directly by G-d Himself; the transcendent level of Kesser functions as an intermediate level, bridging the gap between G-d and the Sefiros. Although spiritual, even the Sefiros are considered "something" in the sense of creatio ex nihilo, "creation [of something] out of nothing." Kesser, by contrast, is so completely identified with G-d that it is considered the "nothing" out of which the Sefiros came into being. The first glimmer of existence as something in its own right is manifest in the Sefirah of Chochmah, a phenomenon which is paralleled on a human plane by the springing of new ideas, seemingly out of nowhere, into the conceptual faculty of the intellect. This is akin to creatio ex nihilo, and is what is meant by "I (Ani) am the first": the manifestation of Kesser within the very highest created level, that of Chochmah.

"I (Ani) am the last," by contrast, alludes to the manifestation of Kesser, which can create something out of nothing, also in the lowest level of the Sefiros, i.e., in the Sefirah of Malchus. This is the reason why dirt, which is spiritually derived from, and is the physical symbol of, Malchus, has the unique capacity to bring forth an unlimited number and variety of plants. The Earth's generative faculty is like creatio ex nihilo.

25. Isaiah 44:6.

26. Job 28:12.



A strange incident is related in the Torah portion for this week: On the eve of Jacob's crossing the river Yabok on the way to meet his brother Esau, a mysterious stranger appears on the scene and wrestles with him. They struggle through the night and, as day breaks, the stranger reveals himself as an angel of G-d and begs Jacob to release him. Jacob does so in exchange for a blessing, and is told that from then on he shall be known as "Israel," a Hebrew name which signifies victory in the struggle.

A mysterious stranger wrestles with Jacob.

How can evil challenge good?

To appreciate the significance of this, we must consider that everything in life, all that occurs, reflects an underlying spiritual nature. This is especially true of incidents related in the Bible, in which the protagonists were the most pious and saintly figures imaginable. The lives of our Divinely inspired forefathers were earthly reflections of heavenly principles.

Everything in life, all that occurs, reflects an underlying spiritual nature. This is especially true of incidents related in the Bible.

It is in this context that we may understand the narrative of the angel wrestling with Jacob. Our sages have taught that that angel was the guardian angel of Jacob's wicked brother, Esau, and that the struggle was the very embodiment (in the sense discussed above) of the struggle between good and evil.

Our sages have taught that the struggle was the very embodiment of the struggle between good and evil.

Yet this itself requires explanation. It is one of the most fundamental principles of Judaism that G-d is One, and that there is nothing else beside Him.



The symbolism of Jacob and the guardian angel of Esau “raising dust unto the very Throne of Glory” is

era, as it is written,²⁸ “I will remove the spirit of uncleanness from the land.”

(Perhaps we may see here a further answer to the fundamental question of this maamar.)

*Perhaps we may see here a further answer to the fundamental question of this maamar. We previously stated²⁹ that the struggle of evil against good represented by the angel’s struggle with Jacob poses no philosophical problem, since it was not until after Jacob had succeeded in having G-dliness channeled exclusively through good that such a struggle would seem impossible. However, this answer appears inadequate, since, as noted at the beginning of this discourse, the struggle between good and evil was not a one-time event, but is ongoing, as stated in the verse,³⁰ “G-d will wage war upon Amalek **from generation to generation.**” Thus, we are still left to wonder how this could be, at least from the time of Jacob forward.*

However, the answer may lie in the fact that—as repeatedly stressed in the maamar—ash differs from soil in that ash can only support any weak growth at all if someone has planted within it.

In chapter one, it was stated³¹ in connection with G-d’s “original” plan had Adam not sinned that, of course, G-d knew all along what was going to happen. Although we can speak, from our earthly perspective, of the situation now vs. what would have happened had there been no sin, we must recognize that G-d has a higher perspective encompassing both scenarios. On that level, it was G-d’s will that some even greater good come about specifically through the “failure” of Plan A and the success, instead, of Plan B. This was G-d’s ultimate plan, His “meta-plan,” as it were, all along.

We may suggest the same thing here. Ash, on its own, cannot support life. Correspondingly, kelipah—the forces of evil—do not even exist in their own right; any life force they have comes through the leftovers of good. However, it is G-d’s will that evil exist, so that we may overcome it by our own efforts. By definition, this entails the possibility of evil prevailing (G-d forbid) in any given situation. That cannot happen, however, without that “meta-” permission from G-d. That is the symbolism of ash’s sup-

28. Zachariah 13:2.

29. On p. 182, in italics.

30. Exodus 17:16.

31. See p. 19 n. 36.



and the major sections of the human body underlies the symbolism of the bodily struggle between Jacob and the angel, in which each embraced the other and sought to topple him.

Evil has no hold over intellect. It is only on the emotional level that a person’s own desires and temptations can cause one to “forget” the difference between right and wrong. Jacob symbolized the influence of intellectual deference to G-d manifest within emotion, bringing about a thorough dedication of even one’s emotional attributes to G-d. Jacob’s encircling the angel with his arms represented the resulting dominance of spiritual desires over worldly ones.

Even the very lowest level of unholiness was elevated by Jacob, as symbolized by the dust raised in the struggle.





(The righteous cannot match the intensity of the penitent's struggle. And the concept of extracting the sparks of holiness from this world and returning them to their heavenly source is related to repentance.)

prey to temptation must fight all the stronger, all the more desperately and valiantly, against the impulse to sin again. In that respect, the righteous cannot match the intensity of the penitent's struggle, which is all the more forceful by reason of the sin itself. And the concept of extracting the sparks of holiness from this world and returning them to their heavenly source³⁴ (as Jacob did in elevating the spiritual powers of the angel) is related to repentance, the Hebrew word for which means "return."



8

Vayishlach



VaYe'avek Ish Imo



(Torah Or, 26a–26d)

34. For more on this subject, see below, chap. 9.

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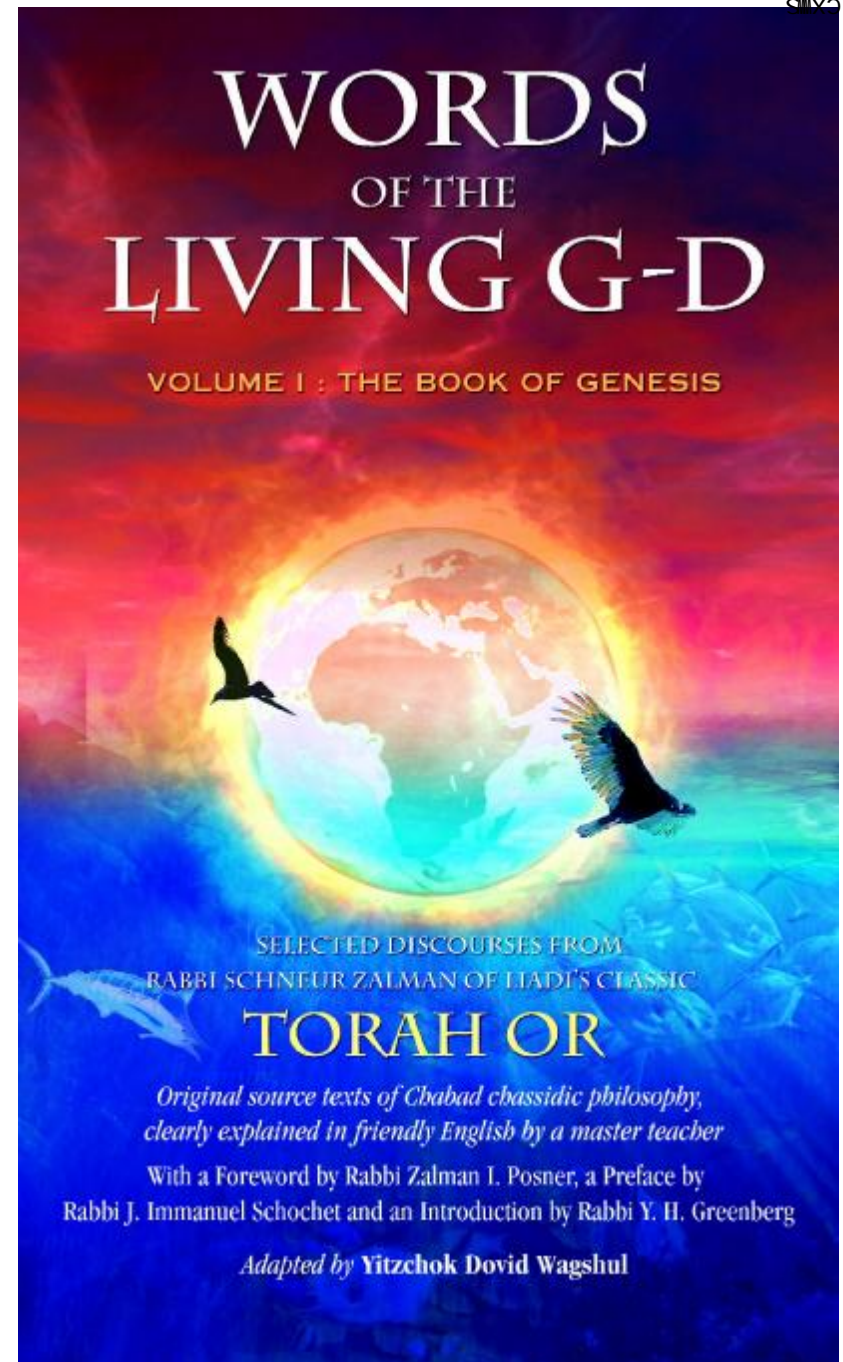
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