



realm; conversely, the more G-d conceals Himself, the more the inhabitants appear, as a result, to be separate, independent entities—the opposite of *bittul*.)

Our physical universe is the lowest of all levels (because in it, G-d is **completely** concealed from our perception), and the ultimate purpose of the entire progression, because it is specifically in a context within which G-dliness is not apparent at all (and in fact, in which it **appears** that G-d does not rule (G-d forbid)) that the ultimate expression of G-d's sovereignty can be achieved—that is, by us (the inhabitants of that realm) voluntarily subjugating ourselves to Him anyway.

In order for this to be possible, there must necessarily be a concealment of G-dliness, allowing for a lack of bittul, somewhere along the line.

The life force is not transmitted to evil; rather, it is now accessible for evil to benefit from, similar to a stray dog getting warmth from a subway grating.

In order for this to be possible, there must necessarily be a concealment of G-dliness, allowing for a lack of *bittul*, somewhere along the line. The existence of evil—the possibility of non-conformity to G-d's Will—begins, in fact, after the point at which *Malchus* of *Atzilus* has transmitted the G-dly life-giving force beyond *Atzilus*, the realm of total *bittul* to G-d. The life force is not transmitted to evil; rather, it is now **accessible** for evil to benefit from, similar to the dog getting warmth from the subway grating.*

* *Kabbalistically, the life force of the forces of unholiness is said to come from the far side of the "hide"¹² of Malchus, a reference to the combination of the Hebrew letters (tzirufei osiyos) within which G-d has invested His creative life force.¹³ More specifically, that life force seeps through the holes (a metaphor for the "space" between each letter combination) in the hide, similar to hair and nails.*

12. See chap. 1, pp. 16–17, for an explanation of the metaphor of "hides."

13. This concept is explained in *Shaar HaYichud VeHa'emunah*, especially chap. 1. Briefly,



How evil challenged good; why the archangel of Esau targeted Jacob

Now that we have examined the way in which G-d's life force is accessed, although in a back-handed manner, so to speak, by evil, we are in a position to understand the underlying symbolism of the story of the angel of evil wrestling with Jacob.

We are now in a position to understand the symbolism of the story of the angel of evil wrestling with Jacob.

We said above that the distinction between good and evil is meaningful to G-d's creatures, but not to G-d Himself, Who created and defined them to begin with. Charity seems "good" because it was G-d's Will that the world be structured in such a way; had He willed otherwise, however, He could just as easily have set up a society in which charity is considered wicked, and murder, praiseworthy. G-d Himself is utterly transcendent of all worldly matters, including "good" and

in creating the world through the "ten utterances" ("Let there be light," etc.) G-d invested the Hebrew letters that make up each utterance with the creative life force to bring into being the subject of that utterance. Thus, for example, the Hebrew letters that form the phrase, "Let there be light" are the vessels, or conduits, for the G-dly life force that causes light to exist. Clearly, however, the universe contains countless things that were not mentioned in those ten utterances. There was, for example, no Divine proclamation, "Let there be rocks." From where, then, do all those other created entities derive their life force? The answer is that according to the grammar of the Hebrew language—the Holy Tongue—certain letters can be combined with and/or substituted for other letters and otherwise manipulated (e.g., by the numerological system of *gematria*) to yield different combinations than those of the original word(s). Furthermore, the process can be repeated on the derived word, yielding a third word removed yet another degree from the original, and so on. In *Shaar HaYichud VeHa'emunah*, the Alter Rebbe explains that the G-dly life force contained in the original ten utterances spoken personally, so to speak, by G-d, was so potent that only the broadest categories could be created from it; within each category, more specific things came into being only as the G-dly life force was "diluted," as it were, by letter manipulation. For any given object, the G-dly creative force that is its "soul" is contained within the Hebrew letters that—by whatever series of letter manipulations—form the Hebrew word for that specific object. In our discourse, the reference is to *tzirufei osiyos*, the rules by which Hebrew letters are combined. For more on this topic, see, e.g., *Tanya*, Bi-Lingual Edition Part II, trans. Rabbi Nissen Mangel (New York: Kehot, 1973), 287 n. 18 (letter combination); 307 n. 3 (letter substitution); 289 n. 21 (*gematria*).

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Considerations focused on another, instead of the person him- or herself, are represented by the legs, which carry the person's own self (the head and torso) forward.

Once the transmitted concept has left the original person and been passed on, it is susceptible to lack of bittul and distortion.

G-d manifests Himself in the world, or transmits spirituality to it, in ten general ways known as the "ten Sefiros."

appropriate to that capacity. Or, before giving charity, the giver evaluates the need of the recipient. These considerations—focused on a recipient instead of the person him- or herself—are represented, allegorically speaking, by the legs of a person, which carry the person's own self (the head and torso) forward. Finally, after formulating the most appropriate plan for transmitting one's influence to another, the person actually transmits that influence. This concludes a process which may be understood as a gradual progression from receipt of a new idea from an external, "higher," source, through the filtering down of that idea to the point where it influences the person (for example, to love G-d, as mentioned above), and ending with the transmitting of the teaching to someone else. Every step of this process can be imbued with the quality of *bittul*; however, once the transmitted concept has left the original person and been passed on, it is susceptible to lack of *bittul* and distortion (for example, if the second person misunderstands the teaching or "takes it the wrong way").

Bittul in the spiritual realms; where bittul ends, evil can begin

As noted, the above should help us to understand the manner in which G-d transmits spiritual influence to the forces of holiness, from whence it is possible for the forces of evil to derive benefit as well. As explained elsewhere, G-d manifests Himself in the world, or transmits spirituality to it, in ten general ways known as the "ten *Sefiros*." Our own characters are fashioned after these *Sefiros*, so that, by Torah-



with larger patches (berudim). Thereafter, G-d miraculously caused all Laban's sheep to be so born. The above events mystically symbolize the fact that at first, the spiritual levels represented by Leah, Rachel and the variously patterned sheep were under the dominion of evil—Laban—but were taken over and brought under the dominion of good by Jacob.

Specifically, the banded, speckled, and mottled markings symbolize the progression of G-dly revelation from higher to lower.

The banded markings are called akudim, which literally means "bound" or tied together, because the bands encircle the ankles where the sheep would be bound with rope. The word akudim hints at the state of affairs in which the spiritual levels represented by the ten Sefiros are all "bound together" in one container and there is no discernable distinction between them. This is analogous to the state of the soul's various powers—sight, hearing, intellect, emotion, etc.—not as we perceive them through their investiture in the respective bodily organs that give them unique expression, but as they are all latent within the soul itself.

The first movement beyond that state of all-inclusiveness results in the level represented by nekudim, the speckles, or small spots. Here, the ten Sefiros make their first appearance as separate entities, each a distinct point unto itself. (This stage is associated with the mystical Olam HaTohu, the Realm of Chaos, in which the vessels—the Sefiros—were too small to contain the G-dly Light.)

Finally, the Sefiros as composites—each one containing elements of all ten—are alluded to as berudim, mottled with larger patches. (This is identified with the spiritual state of affairs as we know it: Olam HaTikkun, the Realm of Repair, in which the vessels are large enough to contain the Light.)

The point of all this is that to G-d Himself, it really makes no difference how the Sefiros manifest themselves. The Or Ein Sof transcends even the highest level, that of akudim. It was Jacob who, by his meritorious service, succeeded in removing the spiritual levels of akudim, nekudim, and berudim from Laban's reach and brought them squarely within his own dominion—that is, he accomplished that the Or Ein Sof should not simply shine indiscriminately on good and evil alike, but should in fact be revealed progressively by investing Itself only within that which is batel to G-dliness. For this reason, it was Jacob, specifically, whom the

(At first, the spiritual levels represented by Leah, Rachel and the variously patterned sheep were under the dominion of evil—Laban—but were taken over and brought under the dominion of good by Jacob.)



Bittul can permeate one's entire personality

Considering how *bittul* is reflected in our own personalities will help us to understand how this comes about spiritually as well.

The highest faculty of man is that which is least "substantial": the intellect.

Paradoxically, the highest faculty of man is that which is least "substantial": the intellect. Unlike other organs, whose action is physically observable (whether with the naked eye or on a microscopic level), the activity of the brain—thought—has never been susceptible of observation. To be sure, medical science has been able to observe electrical impulses in the brain, but actual thought, the mind itself, is mysteriously separate from any physical manifestation. Conceptually too, we are hard-pressed to identify the source and nature of the intellect: at its essential level, it is the capacity to conceive ideas and then to develop and understand them, but where do these new ideas come from? They seem to pop into one's mind from nowhere.

The above may be considered characteristic of the quality of *bittul*: The intellect is as nothing in and of itself. Its own substance or sense of "self," as it were, does not get in the way of its sensitivity to that which is outside itself. It is therefore inherently able to receive input from the source of new ideas (which source is mystically associated with a high spiritual level⁹), similar to the way in which light shines into a room in direct proportion to the transparency of the material covering the window.

9. *Kesser*. See below, pp. 187–189 (in italics).



Thus, if one has contemplated at length on such ideas as the greatness of G-d, one's emotions should be influenced to desire only G-d and the performance of His Will. The desire for worldly things should then

(known collectively as Za); and Malchus of kelipah (its "feminine" aspect) attempts to dominate Malchus of holiness. However, the spiritual levels above those seven (namely, the intellectual Sefiros of Chochmah, Binah, and Daas, as well as the transcendent level of Kesser) are beyond evil's reach.

It is possible for the invulnerability of the intellect to be extended to the emotions as well. This is accomplished through contemplation on the greatness of G-d, as elaborated in the main text. It is then as though the emotions are covered by a protective shield that keeps out the harmful influence of kelipah. This "shield," referred to in Hebrew as a makkif ("transcendent level"), is said to emanate from the Sefirah of Binah, which is the mystical source of all makkifim.

This is why the Biblical portion known as Kaddesh Li Kol Bechor¹⁵ refers to "a remembrance between your eyes." For the portion of Kaddesh corresponds to the Sefirah of Chochmah (the locus of memory) as it is manifest within Binah, the source of makkifim. These makkifim protect one from evil, as mentioned. Thus, regarding the war against the evil nation of Amalek—and the perpetual struggle against evil generally—we are commanded, "do not forget." To forget is to lose the influence of intellect, and if that happens, the emotions are left unprotected and vulnerable to corruption, G-d forbid.

The effect of intellect as an enveloping, protective, shield, or makkif, is illustrated by a phenomenon observable with respect to prayer. While one is concentrating exclusively on one's prayers, one's love for G-d can be openly felt. However, after one has finished praying and is going about one's daily affairs, one may very well lose touch with that active feeling of love, which has receded within one's personality. This is because, as long as one is engaged in contemplation, the enveloping influence of intellect acts as a protective shield that prevents worldly distractions from interfering with one's manifest love for G-d.

15. One of the four portions that, written on parchment, form the contents of *tefillin*. It is found beginning at Exodus 13:1.

If one has contemplated at length on such ideas as the greatness of G-d, one's emotions should be influenced to desire only G-d. The desire for worldly things should then have no hold even over the emotions.

(Intellectual attachment to G-d is like an enveloping, protective, shield, or makkif, against evil.)



Bittul—deference to G-d’s Will—is what distinguishes good from evil.

In order to comprehend this, it will be necessary to understand in more precise detail the manner in which evil is “nourished” through good.

The fact is that the statement above—that it is not fitting for G-d to give life to evil, only to good—is only meaningful from our mortal perspective. To **us**, it seems inappropriate for G-d to animate evil. However, our perspective is severely limited; the truth is that from the perspective of G-d Himself, Who created the world and everything in it, good and evil are equally insignificant. They are both functions of behavior in this physical world, a world which G-d Himself transcends utterly—as indeed, He transcends all worlds, even the spiritual realms. **We** must certainly observe the distinction between good and evil, because we dwell in and are subject to the boundaries of this world; to G-d, however, Who created good and evil to begin with, it’s all the same. Why then, does G-d choose to recognize good over evil, allowing His creative vitality to flow directly into good but withholding that vitality from evil? The reason is that G-d, in his love of the Jews, allowed us to influence the paths of G-dly sustenance to the world. G-d validates “our” perspective by directly channeling His spiritual life force only to those who are subjugated to Him. This is hinted at by the verse toward the end of this week’s Torah portion,⁶ “And these are the kings who

6. Genesis 36:31.

From the perspective of G-d Himself, good and evil are equally insignificant.

Why then, does G-d choose to recognize good over evil? The reason is that G-d, in his love of the Jews, allowed us to influence the paths of G-dly sustenance to the world. G-d validates “our” perspective by directly channeling His spiritual life force only to those who are subjugated to Him.



However, Jacob was not merely the embodiment of the dedication of one’s emotions to G-d; he embodied also **the influence of the intellect** which permeates the emotions and motivates this dedication. This is hinted at by Jacob’s name, *Yaakov* in Hebrew. *Yaakov* is spelled by the Hebrew letters *yud*, *ayin*, *kuf* and *vais*. A *yud* is written as a simple dot, representative of that mysterious “point” at which ideas enter the intellect.** The latter three letters of *Yaakov* spell the Hebrew word *eikev*, or “heel,” the very lowest part of the body. The name *Yaakov*, formed by combining these two elements, symbolizes the fact that in Jacob (*Yaakov*) and his descendants, the Jewish people, the influence of the *yud*—the intellect and its *bittul* to G-d—permeates and pervades the entire per-

Jacob was not merely the embodiment of the dedication of one’s emotions to G-d; he embodied also the influence of the intellect which permeates the emotions. This is hinted at by Jacob’s Hebrew name, Yaakov.

the intellect is “short,” i.e., when, like one who forgets, its influence has receded into the background of one’s consciousness as opposed to remaining an active awareness, then do the worldly concerns and needs of the Jews become “many.” When one maintains that constant awareness of G-d’s unity, however, then, likewise, all one really needs and wants is one thing as well—to be united with G-d. The same interpretation can be applied to the verse,¹⁸ “one who is separate [from G-d] pursues his desires.” “Separation” from G-d is the opposite of that unwavering consciousness of Him signified by the intellectual faculty of Daas.¹⁹ It is the person’s lack of that consciousness that accounts for his or her having other “desires” to begin with.

** More specifically, it represents the spiritual level known as Yesod Abba,²⁰ from which the entire realm of Atzilus proceeds.

18. Proverbs 18:1.

19. See the series of discourses entitled *Mayim Rabbim* of the year 5636, sec. 1, col. 2.

20. Literally, “foundation of Father.” This term refers to the *Yesod* component of the *Sefirah* of *Chochmah* within the realm of *Atzilus*. (*Chochmah* is called “Father” because, along with the *Sefirah* of *Binah* (“Mother”) it gives rise (or “birth”), upon proper contemplation, to love and fear of G-d.)

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Everything in the universe can only exist if G-d so wills it; It is only because G-d's great and inscrutable "master plan" calls for the existence of evil that evil exists at all.

Literally everything in the universe, whether a physical object or an intangible concept or event, can only exist if G-d so wills it; put another way, since G-d wills that something should exist, He bestows upon it the spiritual "life force" which brings that thing into existence and sustains it. This applies to "evil" as much as to anything else. It is only because G-d's great and inscrutable "master plan" calls for the existence of evil (in order that we may conquer it, and transform it into good, by observing the Torah) that evil exists at all—but there is no question that its existence is derived from none other than G-d. Certainly, there is no "independent power" responsible for evil, separate from the One G-d (as if such a thing were possible).

Moreover, since it would not be fitting for G-d to directly create things evil, the spiritual life force which gives evil its existence is "routed" through the forces of good. This will be explained in greater detail below; suffice it to say here that evil derives its sustenance from the "leftover" spirituality that could not be used by the forces of holiness, of good. For example, a stray dog may derive its sustenance by foraging among garbage in the street. Although it is nourished by leftover food that could not be used by the household, it certainly could not be said that the householders are **feeding** the dog. Or, the heat emanating from a subway grate may likewise warm stray dogs, but the subway officials, while aware of it, do not intend this result. Evil, however, depends on holiness even more than in these examples, because while the dog itself already exists, the very **existence** of evil is derived from the "leftovers" of the Divine life force which animates good.

Evil derives its sustenance from the "leftover" spirituality that could not be used by the forces of holiness.



fronts: that of the emotions and that of *Malchus*. We will now see how the Biblical incident mirrors these spiritual themes in all its details, including the struggle on the level of *Malchus*.

The Sages teach that the Hebrew word used in our verse for "grapple" or "wrestle"—*vaye'avek*—is etymologically related to the word for dust (*ava'ek*), because when people engage in a fierce physical struggle they kick up clouds of dust. Based on this, the Sages say²³ that Jacob and the angel "raised up dust unto the Throne of Glory [G-d's throne]." The raising of this dust symbolizes the spiritual principles discussed above, and carries them one step further.

The difference between "dust" and "dirt" (i.e., "soil") is that dirt, despite its position at the relative bottom of the ecological ladder, nevertheless possesses the miraculous ability to grow plants, thus making it the very foundation upon which the vegetable, animal and human kingdoms depend. Dust and ash, by contrast, are not really endowed with this quality.

Spiritually, this is because dirt (which is the physical manifestation of the Divine attribute of *Malchus*), like intellect, is as nothing—to the point where it is trod upon by all—and is therefore a fitting receptacle for the revelation within itself of that same spirituality which shines within intellect.*

* This is in accordance with the Kabbalistic principle²⁴ that "the beginning is wedged in the end"—i.e., the very highest level is, paradoxical-

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Dirt is the physical manifestation of Malchus. Like intellect, it is as nothing—and is therefore a fitting receptacle for the revelation of spirituality.

23. *Chullin* 91a; *Zohar* I, 170a.

24. *Sefer Yetzirah*, chap. 1, *mishnah* 7.



Key topics to be covered in this discourse:

- ❖ Evil derives its sustenance from the “leftover” spirituality that could not be used by the forces of holiness.
- ❖ *Bittul*—deference to G-d’s Will—is what distinguishes good from evil.
- ❖ *Bittul* can permeate one’s entire personality.
- ❖ *Bittul* in the spiritual realms; where *bittul* ends, evil can begin.
- ❖ How evil challenged good; why the archangel of Esau targeted Jacob.
- ❖ Symbolism of the struggle between Jacob and the angel
- ❖ Evil’s mistake
- ❖ Jacob elevated evil into good.
- ❖ Another dimension to the struggle: the distinction between “dust” and “dirt”



what remains after all good and useful material has been extracted—for example, after all a material’s substance has been consumed by fire.**

lo, and is attributable to the influence of Kesser within Malchus.

Spiritually, too, we find that Malchus seems able to generate “something” from “nothing,” in the sense that Malchus, the lowest Sefirah, is the plane on which we operate in our own attempts to approach G-d, to initiate a closer relationship with Him (isarusa delesata)—yet, as explained elsewhere, our efforts along these lines have the ability to elicit a response from G-d (isarusa dele’eila), drawing forth the light of the ten Sefiros in a manner utterly disproportionate to what our unassisted human effort should have been capable of reaching.

**** This analogy is particularly apt in its application to the forces of unholiness, or kelipos. This is because the progression of G-dly life force down the spiritual hierarchy of creation is similar: the most potent and sublime revelations of G-dliness define the realm of Atzilus, i.e., they can be withstood and absorbed only by spiritual entities of the highest order, which make up the contents of that realm. What is left after the realm of Atzilus has “had its fill,” so to speak; what spirituality is left over and cannot be used on the plane of Atzilus, forms the contents of the next lower spiritual realm, that of Beriah. This process continues throughout the spiritual hierarchy, to the point where the holiness within the relatively lowest spiritual realm, Asiyah, is essentially that “left over” after the higher realms have all extracted as much holiness as they are individually able to absorb. What is left after even the realm of Asiyah has been “populated” with such holiness as is appropriate to it has virtually no G-dliness left to it at all. It is like the “ashes” of creation, from which all G-dly life force is absent; this is what is meant by kelipah.**

(What is left after the lowest realm of Asiyah has been “populated” with such holiness as is appropriate to it has virtually no G-dliness left to it at all. It is like the “ashes” of creation, from which all G-dly life force is absent; this is what is meant by kelipah.)

The above is why physical ash, unlike dirt, has almost no ability to sprout growing things. Only if someone cultivates it and plants within it, can it support some weak growth²⁷—in sharp distinction from earth, which sprouts even if no one cultivates it, and if one does, it sprouts all the more vigorously. As for ash, though, even what miniscule generative ability it does have is transient and will be taken from it during the Messianic

27. For this reason, Jewish law permits ash to be used for purposes of the ritual covering of blood (see *Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah, 28:23*).

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Summary of the discourse:

The struggle recounted in this week's Torah portion between Jacob and a mysterious angel is symbolic of the struggle between good and evil.

Since evil itself has no independent life and only exists by living off the scraps, as it were, of the G-dly life force channeled to good, it is necessary to understand how evil could struggle for supremacy with good at all: should this not be impossible?

The answer, however, lies in the fact that G-d transcends any distinction between good and evil. G-d could just as easily have created a world in which what we know as evil is superior to what we know as good. Evil sought not merely to challenge good, but to challenge the very Divine plan by which good is superior to evil in the first place.

The mystical correspondence between G-d's attributes



thus as follows: good (Jacob) and evil (Esau) battled for supremacy, each bodily embracing the other and trying to overwhelm it.*** Evil was no match for good, and was itself overwhelmed, resulting in Jacob himself being strengthened and renamed “Israel” in recognition of this victory. The victory was so complete that not only were the emotional attributes of *kelipah*, of the forces of unholiness, subjugated and elevated to the emotional attributes of *Atzilus*, but even the “useless dust” of evil, mystically derived from *Malchus* of *kelipah*, was “raised”—elevated—unto *Malchus* of *Atzilus*, associated with G-d's Throne of Glory.

Jacob's victory was so complete that even the “useless dust” of evil, mystically derived from Malchus of kelipah, was “raised”—elevated—unto G-d's Throne of Glory.

porting growth only “if something is planted within it”: because, ultimately, it is G-d's will that such a possibility exist, kelipah can sometimes prevail (G-d forbid).

However, when Messiah arrives, there will no longer be any need for this. Then, even such miniscule life force as evil had previously had—as had been “planted within it” by virtue of G-d's ultimate plan—will be taken from it. It will, in fact, be as though it had never existed to begin with: we will be able to perceive G-d's ultimate purpose and the greater good He had in mind all along, and we will realize that there never actually was any “evil.”

*** That **each** tried to overwhelm the other is alluded to by the teaching “**They** [plural] raised up dust....” The way of combatants is that each tries to overwhelm the other—and the very exertion on the part of one calls forth additional strength in opposition from the other. That is why our sages advise,³² “One should always incite the impulse to good against the impulse to evil.” This principle also lies at the heart of the concept of repentance. Our sages teach,³³ “In the place penitents stand, even the completely righteous cannot stand.” This is because one who has (G-d forbid) once fallen

32. *Berachos* 5a; *Zohar* I, 202a; *Zohar* III, 113b. See also *Sefer HaSichos* 5701, p. 59.

33. *Berachos* 34b.

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Practical lessons to be derived from this discourse:

1. Ultimately, everything in the universe derives its sustenance from none other than G-d.
2. Deference to G-d's Will, *bittul*, is the conduit by which G-dly revelation flows into the world.
3. 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.
4. 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. 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.
5. Here is an awesome thought: If evil is defined as the opposition to G-d's Will, what defines opposition to G-d's Will? The answer is that G-d has revealed his Will to us in the Torah: study of Torah and living by its directives (the *mitzvos*) are expressions of G-d's Will, while neglect or violation (G-d forbid) of the *mitzvos* are the very definition of opposition to G-d's Will. Thus, whether or not evil is able to exist—by drawing from the spiritual life force flowing through good—is entirely up to us: if we (G-d forbid) transgress the laws of the Torah, evil exists; if we obey the Torah, it does not.

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