In this week’s parsha, parshas Balak, we read about the prophecies uttered by the wicked Bilam. HKB”H forces him to bless Yisrael against his will. In the following nevuhah, he prophesies about Yisrael’s future geulah (Bamidbar 24, 17):

"אראנו ולא עתה
אשורנו ולא קרוב, דרך כוכב מיעקב וקם שבט מישראל, ומחץ פאתי מואב וקרקר כל בני
שת"

—I will see, but not now; I view it, but it is not near. A star shot forth from Yaakov and a rod has risen from Yisrael, and he shall strike down the extremities of Moav and undermine all the children of Sheis.

Apropos this nevuhah, we find a fascinating passage in the Talmud Yerushalmi (Nedarim 12a):

"דרך כוכב מיעקב—
שנת צדיקים צדיקים שלום بشם אדונים
מדידים אדונים modelos משלים עם צדיקים בני צדיקים בליב
וותיקי צדיקים משלים, משל צדיקיםコーピיר 15-29
אלו התﺑננים כאן אך הפרשים שם
שכון המשה מראיה הז".

"A star shot forth from Yaakov’ From whom did the star shoot forth and is it destined to stand? From Yaakov. Rav Acha said in the name of Rav Chuna: In the future Eisav will wrap a tallit around himself and sit himself down amongst the tzaddikim in Gan Eden, and HKB”H will drag him out of there; why? Because the passuk states (Ovadiah 1, 4): ‘Even if you raise us like an eagle or if you place your nest among the stars, I will bring you down from there—the word of Hashem.’ Here the stars are an allusion to the righteous, the tzaddikim, as we see in the passuk (Daniel 12, 3): ‘And those who make the multitudes righteous, like the stars, forevermore.’”

Clearly, this passage deserves further elaboration. First of all, the Yerushalmi expounds on this passuk—“ דרך כוכב מיעקב”—employing a question and answer format. That in and of itself is interesting; furthermore, the question and answer are so straightforward that it is unclear what the Yerushalmi is trying to teach us. The passuk states explicitly that the star shot forth from Yaakov; how else could we interpret the passuk?

Secondly, the Yerushalmi associates this passuk with Rav Chuna’s statement regarding Eisav. He states that in the future, Eisav will have the audacity to wrap himself in his tallit and sit among the tzaddikim in Gan Eden, until HKB”H will come and drag him out of there. Where do we find even a semblance of an allusion in this nevuhah of Bilam’s to Eisav’s future attempted deception?

Thirdly, it is extremely surprising! After all, this nevuhah speaks of the future geulah—when Hashem’s light will be revealed in its full glory throughout creation, and the words of our prayer (Aleinu L’shabeiach) will finally be fulfilled: "והאלילים כרות יכרתון לתקן עולם
במלכות שדי, وكل בני בשר יקראו בשמך להפנות אליך כל רשעי ארץ"—and the false gods will be utterly exterminated to perfect the world as the kingdom of Shakkai; and all mankind will invoke Your name, to turn back to You, all the wicked of the earth. So, how is it even imaginable that Eisav—who rebelled against Hashem and His Torah in this world-- will have the audacity to wrap a tallit around himself and attempt to sit amongst the tzaddikim in Gan Eden? Surely he will realize the truth about himself—that he is thoroughly wicked and belongs in Gehinom rather than in Gan Eden. And can it be that no one will prevent him from entering Gan Eden and no one will bother evicting him from there until HKB”H, so to speak, will do so Himself: “והקב”ה גוררו ומוציאו משם”?

Furthermore, we may deduce from the language of the Yerushalmi: “והקב”ה גוררו ומוציאו משם”—“and HKB”H will drag him out of there”—that Eisav seems to feel that he has some justification for sitting amongst the righteous in Gan Eden; for, it requires an act of G-d, as it were, to remove him—in keeping with the passuk, "אלו התבננים כאן אך הפרשים שם
שכון המשה מראיה הז"—“Even if you raise us like an eagle or if you place your nest among the stars, I will bring you down from there.” We must try to understand what possible justification Eisav might have for thinking that he belongs among the tzaddikim in Gan Eden—which ultimately necessitates that he be dragged out of there.
Lastly, it is worthwhile scrutinizing the Yerushalmi’s statement: "ית護י עשתו הרשע עשה לשביעו נפשו ויעשה עשה לשביעו נפשו: "In the future, Eisav will wrap a tallit around himself and sit himself down amongst the tzaddikim in Gan Eden. In what kind of garment or tallit will the wicked Eisav choose to wrap himself? Surely not a tallit with tzitzit on its corners. For, the Yerushalmi would have not referred to such a garment as “his tallit”—from his enemies, the wicked; “—I learn to serve Hashem and fulfill mitzvot with the same fervor that they exhibit.

The source for this noble idea comes from the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov, zy”a, as described by the Tiferes Shlomo (Toldos): הערעי לאו ביהון עשה לשביעו עשתו בימיו ויתנה בלעב עשתו בימיו—“Evil One! You Were Already Preceded by Their Father Avraham—

In other words, we must turn our external desires and bad habits into good habits that will be utilized to serve Hashem—with that very same or even greater desire and intensity.

The Special Garments of Eisav Her Older Son

Let us examine the enlightening words of the Tiferet Shlomo regarding the amazing deed performed by Rivka Lemeinu, described in parshas Toldos (Bereishis 27, 15): "ותקח את בגדי עשו בנה великך החמודות—Then Rivka took her older son Eisav’s special garments, which were in her house, and clothed her younger son, Yaakov." He teaches us the following lesson:

Eisav’s coveted garments represent his evil desires and appetites. Rivka’s younger son, Yaakov, represents tzaddikim, who diminish their own importance. They harness that desire and appetite for worldly things, and apply them to serve the Creator, blessed is He, with greater enthusiasm.

In this same vein, he proceeds to elucidate the passuk (Bereishis 31, 20): "ואלך בורח הוא עשה לשביעו לשביעו—"And Yaakov deceived Lavan HaArami by not telling him that he was fleeing." When Lavan saw how much Yaakov yearned to learn from him his scheming and deceptive ways, he was certain that Yaakov was a cheat just like him. Yet, the Torah attests to the fact: ידוע עשה לשביעו לשביעו—celebrates Yaakov’s development: "—that Yaakov stole Lavan’s evil ways;—
and did not reveal to Lavan that he was fleeing from his domain in order to utilize what he had learned to better serve Hashem.

This allows us to better understand the wicked Lavan's allegation (ibid. 31, 30): "כְּנֶפֶשׁ נְפֶשׁוֹת נְפֶשׁוֹת לִבְּתֵא אָבִיךָ—"Now, you have gone, because you longed greatly for your father's house; but why did you steal my gods?" In other words, I cannot honestly complain that you wish to leave my house: "כְּנֶפֶשׁ נְפֶשׁוֹת לִבְּתֵא אָבִיךָ”—for you long to serve your Father in Heaven and resume a life of Torah; however, I do have a legitimate claim against you: "לִבְּתֵא אָבִיךָ—"why did you steal my gods, my negative traits, and then proceed to utilize what you learned from me to serve Hashem with even greater intensity?

A Complete Tzaddik Does Not Need to Learn from the Ways of the Wicked

In light of all that we have learned, let us reexamine the words of the Chasam Sofer cited above. He commented on HKB"H's remark to Bilam, after Bilam rose early in the morning to saddle his donkey: "הברך בר קדוש ארבעת אבותיך ש.ResumeLayout 앞 נפשך ברכתי"—In other words, HKB"H informed him that his zeal and alacrity to perform his transgression served no purpose, with regards to Yisrael. For, they already learned how to serve Hashem with zeal and alacrity from their forefather, Avraham.

From his holy words, we learn a tremendous chiddush. Had it been necessary for Yisrael to learn this important attribute from Bilam—how to serve Hashem with alacrity—Bilam would have benefitted and accrued merit. Hence, HKB"H went to the trouble, so to speak, of informing Bilam: "רֶשׁעוֹ—evil person—you accrete no merit on account of this act; רֶשׁוֹ—for, Avraham preceded you and showed them how to serve Hashem in this manner.

To better appreciate the Chasam Sofer’s idea, we are compelled to present a divergent point of view. While the sources quoted thus far suggest that learning the tricks and strategies of the wicked is desirable, other sources point out a minor pitfall. By adopting the methodology of: "לִבְּתֵא אָבִיךָ—"my enemies, I will become wiser to keep your commandments"—we are empowering the wicked to some small degree. For, they now have a somewhat justified claim that they have assisted Yisrael to ascend to a higher level in their service of Hashem.

One of these divergent sources is the Knesses Yechezkel written by the great Rabbi Yechezkel of Dezh, ztz”l, (Balak). In short, he states that a true tzaddik, one who has reached the pinnacle of perfection, does not need to learn from the wicked how to ascend to a higher level in the service of Hashem. It is sufficient that he motivates himself to achieve greater heights as did Avraham Avinu (B.R. 61,1): "וְיִשְׁמַע וְלָכוּ מִצְרָיִם אֶל לָכוּ בְנוֹת שַׂעֲרֵי הַמַּעֲשֹׁת—"HKB"H provided him with two kidneys that functioned as two teachers, and they would flow and teach him Torah and wisdom."

He suggests that there is a way to distinguish which method the tzaddik is employing in his service of Hashem—learning from one’s enemies, "לִבְּתֵא אָבִיךָ—"my enemies, I will become wiser to keep your commandments," or self-motivation. If the tzaddik’s level of kedushah and good deeds merely parallel the wicked person’s level of malevolence and impurity, then it is a sign that he is utilizing the former method.

If, however, we discern that the tzaddik is rising to higher and higher levels of kedushah—far surpassing the wicked person’s corresponding degree of impurity—it becomes clear that the tzaddik is not relying on the wicked person to learn how to better serve Hashem. In this case, the wicked person no longer has any merit or claim to reward from the domain of kedushah—from the good deeds of the righteous.

An Incredible Story Involving the Holy Sar Shalom of Belz

Further on in his discussion of this topic, the Knesses Yechezkel validates his theory with the following, telling story:

It so happened one day that the holy master rose early, before he heard the sound of the sledge-hammer. He woke up regularly in the very early hours of the morning, after midnight, and began his daily work. When his righteous wife, (the Rebbetzin Malkah, a”h,) would hear the sound of the blacksmith’s sledge-hammer, she would wake her husband and say: "Shalom, Shalom rise up to serve the Creator; for the blacksmith is already pounding away with the sledge-hammer."

Our holy master, Sar Shalom of Belz, zy”a, tells a story from his youth. A gentle blacksmith lived in his neighborhood; he woke up regularly in the very early hours of the morning, after midnight, and began his daily work. When his righteous wife, (the Rebbetzin Malkah, a”h,) would hear the sound of the blacksmith’s sledge-hammer, she would wake her husband and say: "Shalom, Shalom rise up to serve the Creator; for the blacksmith is already pounding away with the sledge-hammer."
of waking him to serve the Creator, Blessed is He. As soon as he arose without the other’s assistance, the blacksmith’s thread of existence ceased at that moment.

Now, let us examine the viewpoint of the Kenesset Yechezkel. Like the Chasam Sofer, he addresses the passuk: בַּלְעָם עֵרוּם בּוֹרֵא אָרֻי נַעֲשָׂב, דְּהֵשִׁב חַיִּי אֵלֶּה לְשֵׁם אֱלֹהִים—בַּלְעָם עֵרוּם בּוֹרֵא אָרֻי נַעֲשָׂב (Bilam rose in the morning, he saddled his donkey and he went with3

not be reckoned among the nations”: There is no need for them to take note and consider the ways of the goyim in order to learn how to better serve Hashem, because they have an all-encompassing legacy from their forefathers. This is the crux of his amazing insight.

Rabbi Yisrael of Tshartkov’s View on This Subject

Now, let us examine this concept with a slight twist, as it appears in the Yismach Yisrael, authored by Rabbi Yisrael of Tshartkov, zt”a, (Vayishlach). In his opinion, it is fine and appropriate to study the ways of the wicked in order to better serve Hashem, as one is beginning one’s spiritual development. Once, however, one has children and students, this method possesses an inherent danger. Upon seeing him pay close attention to the ways of the wicked and even imitating them, his children and students might, chas v’shalom, mistakenly come to follow their improper behavior.

At that point in one’s spiritual development, the optimal method of growth entails focusing on one’s Torah study and davening. This avoids any contact and association with the wicked. In the words of Yisrael’s sweet psalmist (Tehillim 119, 37): העבר עיני מראות שוא בדרכיukuו, יעבר נא אדוני לפני עבדו, אמר לו יעבר נא אדוני לפני עבדו, אמר לו (Yismach Yisrael’s elucidation (ibid.):

In this manner, he explains our sages words concerning Yaakov’s conversation with Eisav after appeasing him (ibid. 33, 14):Now, let us examine the viewpoint of the Kenesset Yechezkel. Like the Chasam Sofer, he addresses the passuk: בַּלְעָם עֵרוּם בּוֹרֵא אָרֻי נַעֲשָׂב, דְּהֵשִׁיב חַיִּי אֵלֶּה לְשֵׁם אֱלֹהִים—בַּלְעָם עֵרוּם בּוֹרֵא אָרֻי נַעֲשָׂב (Bilam rose in the morning, he saddled his donkey and he went with3

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In this manner, he explains our sages words concerning Yaakov’s conversation with Eisav after appeasing him (ibid. 33, 14):

And aren’t you afraid of my officials?” In other words, aren’t you concerned about the yetzer hara, who places obstacles and roadblocks in one’s path? By observing my ways, you will know how to defeat him and circumvent the obstacles. Yaakov answers: בָּאָם לְאָבִי מִשְׁפְּטִים, יָכוֹלָה לְאָבִי מִשְׁפְּטִים, אֲלֵיהוּ יִהוּדָה יִזֹּכַר וּיְתַחֲדֵשׁ יָכוֹלָה לְאָבִי מִשְׁפְּטִים (Bereishis 32, 25): “—and Yaakov remained alone”—he remained alone, implying that he now served Hashem entirely by means of his own devices, without involving the wicked.

Two Distinct Approaches Represented by Yaakov and Yisrael

With the sacred words of the Yismach Yisrael in mind, we can begin to comprehend why HKB“H conferred upon Yaakov Avinu two distinct names—Yaakov and Yisrael. For, it is written (ibid. 35, 10): יָכוֹלָה לְאָבִי מִשְׁפְּטִים, יָכוֹלָה לְאָבִי מִשְׁפְּטִים, אֲלֵיהוּ יִהוּדָה יִזֹּכַר וּיְתַחֲדֵשׁ יָכוֹלָה L...Then G-d said to him, “Your name is Yaakov; your name shall no longer be called Yaakov, but rather Yisrael shall be your name.” And He called his name Yisrael. Regarding this matter, we have learned in the Gemara (Berachos 13a): אלע לא נקרא שמו שאר, אלא זה שמו של השם. Rather, guide me and sustain me in the ways of Torah and mitzvot—obviating any need on my part to pay attention to the wicked.

Let us begin by interpreting the pesukim that follow according to the Yismach Yisrael’s elucidation (ibid.):

Yaakov wished to be a partner in Yaakov’s life and world; he wanted Yaakov to observe his ways and to incorporate what he learned into his service of Hashem. In this manner, Eisav would share in Yaakov’s work and would be his partner. Yaakov replied: יָכוֹלָה לְאָבִי מִשְׁפְּטִים, יָכוֹלָה L...Then G-d said to him, “Your name is Yaakov; your name shall no longer be called Yaakov, but rather Yisrael shall be your name.” And He called his name Yisrael. Regarding this matter, we have learned in the Gemara (Berachos 13a): אלע לא נקרא שמו שאר, אלא זה שמו של השם. Rather, guide me and sustain me in the ways of Torah and mitzvot—obviating any need on my part to pay attention to the wicked.

Let us begin by interpreting the pesukim that follow according to the Yismach Yisrael’s elucidation (ibid.):
And Yaakov was left alone and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. When he perceived that he could not overcome him, he struck the ball of his thighbone; and the ball of Yaakov's thighbone became dislocated as he wrestled with him. Then he said, ‘Let me go, for dawn has broken.’ And he said, ‘I will not let you go unless you have blessed me.’ He said to him, ‘What is your name?’ He said, ‘Yaakov.’ He said, ‘No longer will it be said that your name is Yaakov, but Yisrael, for you have striven with the Divine and with men and you have overcome.’

First, let us reiterate a concept found in our holy sources numerous times. When the people of Yisrael are referred to as "יעקב", it indicates that they are spiritually on a lower level—resembling the "копך", the heel. When they are referred to as "ישראל", it indicates that they are on a higher level. The source for this distinction is found in the holy Zohar (Terumah 175b): ייעקב ולאו יישראל, ייעקב אל יהוה שמריו ימואל, יישראל אל יהוה שמריו ימי שראל. ייעקב אל יהוה שמריו ימואל, יישראל אל יהוה שמריו ימי שראל. ייעקב אל יהוה שמריו ימואל, יישראל אל יהוה שמריו ימי שראל.

Based on what we have learned thus far, we can suggest that the name "יעקב", alluding to a lower spiritual level, similar to the heel, represents the beginning of one's journey and development in one's service of Hashem. It represents the stage in Yaakov's development when he was still learning how to serve Hashem utilizing tactics learned from the wicked Eisav—learning never to despair or stop trying in his quest to achieve his goals. This is reflected by the name "יעקב", which he was given because he emerged while grasping his brother Eisav's heel. In other words, he was holding onto Eisav's heel in order to utilize Eisav's methods for the sake of kedushah.

This is the meaning of the verse: "וירא יעקבך בעקב איש עמו, ויאמר שלחני כי עלה השחר, ויאמר לא אשלחך כי אם ברכתני —"לך"—he no longer needed to serve Hashem by observing the methods of the wicked. So, when Eisav's ministering angel was wrestling with him: "וירא יעקבך בעקב איש עמו, ויאמר לא אשלחך כי אם ברכתני", he realized that he no longer shared a part in Yaakov's actions; "וירא יעקבך איש עמו —so, he resorted to striking a blow at Yaakov's descendants, who were not yet on that level of service and still needed to observe the ways of the wicked. As a consequence, he still had a minor connection with their holy accomplishments, which resulted in a minor and temporary injury to Yaakov's thighbone:

"ותקע כף ירך יעקב בהאבקו עמו".

This will illuminate for us the following pesukim: "ויצא primeiro אדמוניﾕן, כלום ייעקב —"לך"—he no longer needed to serve Hashem by observing the methods of the wicked. So, when Eisav's ministering angel was wrestling with him: "ויצא primero אדמוניﾕן, כלום ייעקב", he realized that he no longer shared a part in Yaakov's actions; "ויצא primero אדמוניゆן —so, he resorted to striking a blow at Yaakov's descendants, who were not yet on that level of service and still needed to observe the ways of the wicked. As a consequence, he still had a minor connection with their holy accomplishments, which resulted in a minor and temporary injury to Yaakov's thighbone: "ותקע כף ירך יעקב בהאבקו עמו".

In the Future Eisav Will Don His Garment Representing: "בגד יעש ה∕יהודדות"

We can now rejoice and celebrate our enlightenment. For, we have finally gained a deeper understanding of our sages' enigmatic statement in the Talmud Yerushalmi: "A star shot forth from Yaakov.' From whom did the star shoot forth and is it destined to stand? From Yaakov. Rav Acha said in the name of Rav Chuna: In the future Eisav will wrap a tallit around himself and sit himself down amongst the tzaddikim in Gan Eden, and HKB"H will drag him out of there; why? Because the passuk states (Ovadiah 1, 4): ‘Even if you raise us like an eagle or if you place your nest among the stars, I will bring you down from there—the word of Hashem.’ Here the stars are an allusion to the righteous, the tzaddikim, as we see in the passuk (Daniel 12, 3): ‘And those who make the multitudes righteous, like the stars, forevermore.’

Let us explain. The passuk quoted at the end of this passage (Daniel 12, 3): מראת אל יסראל מראת אלויס —teaches us that the tzaddikim, who guide the public to be righteous and meritorious, are likened to stars. Therefore, in the future--when Eisav sees that Yaakov's descendants, who are merely on the spiritual level of "יעקב", who
follow in their forefather’s earlier ways and serve Hashem with the methods Yaakov learned from him, as reflected by the words: “וְיָדוּ אִישׁ אָחוֹתָךְ עֹשֶׂה לְךָ שָׂרָה—"he will claim that he, too is a star; because he has guided the public to be meritorious and, thus, deserves to sit amongst the tzaddikim in Gan Eden.

Accordingly, we can suggest a very nice interpretation of Rav Chuna’s statement: "ותקח רבקה את בגדי עשו בנא הגדוא החמודות אשר אתה בבית ותלבש את יעקב בנא הקטן." Eisav’s special, prized garments that he had entrusted to his mother, Rivka, who used them to clothe Yaakov. As we have learned from the Tiferet Shlomo, "בגדי עשו החמודות" is an allusion to Eisav’s trickery and conniving ways, which he utilized to satisfy his worldly appetites. Yaakov was clothed in these garments, implying that he adopted these methods to serve Hashem. Thus, it is this “tallit”—representative of "בגדי עשו החמודות"—that Eisav will don when he sits among the tzaddikim in Gan Eden.

Nevertheless, HKB”H will drag him out and expel him from their midst. For, in truth, the tzaddikim sitting around him in Gan Eden will primarily be those on the level of "ישראל", who did not need to learn how to serve Hashem from Eisav. And even regarding those members of Yisrael still on the level of "חרם", who did learn how to serve Hashem from Eisav to some degree, he surely doesn’t deserve any reward for helping them. After all, he lacked any good intentions in the matter; and, in reality, caused Yisrael tremendous grief and hardships in his attempts to prevent them from serving Hashem.

At this point, we can marvel at the words of the Yerushalmi. The passage begins by expounding on Eisav’s unbelievable "chutzpah." He will wrap himself in a “tallit” and sit down among the tzaddikim in Gan Eden, forcing HKB”H to drag him out of there. This exposition is founded on a passuk in our parsha from one of Bilam’s prophecies: "דרך כוכב מיעקב וקם שבט מישראל, ומחץ פאתי מואב וקרקר כל בני שת—A star shot forth from Yaakov and a rod has risen from Yisrael, and he shall strike down the extremities of Moav and undermine all the children of Sheit.

In other words, albeit Eisav’s star emerged from those who were yet on the level of "Yaakov"; nevertheless: "A rod has risen from Yisrael—tzaddikim on the level of “Yisrael” will rise, those who did not need to learn from Eisav how to better serve Hashem. In their merit, HKB”H will drag Eisav out of Gan Eden: "And he shall strike down the extremities of Moav and undermine all the children of Sheit.” For, the goyim lack any merit for teaching Yisrael how to serve Hashem. The words of the passuk are not applicable: “מאויבי תחכמי מצוותיך—due to the merit of the tzaddikim representative of “Yisrael.”