



Parshas Toldos

For the week ending 5 Kislev 5757
15 & 16 November 1996

Overview

After twenty years of marriage without children, Yitzchak's prayers to Hashem are answered and Rivka conceives twins, Esav and Yaakov. The pregnancy is extremely painful. Hashem reveals to Rivka that the suffering is a microcosmic prelude to the world-wide conflict that will rage between the two great nations descended from these twins — Rome and Israel. Esav is born first, and then Yaakov, holding onto Esav's heel. As they grow up, the contrast between the twins becomes apparent: Esav is a hunter, a man of the field, of the physical world, whereas Yaakov sits in the tents of Torah developing his soul. On the day of the funeral of their grandfather Avraham, Yaakov is cooking lentil soup, the traditional mourner's meal. Esav rushes in, ravenous from a hard day's hunting, and sells his birthright (and its concomitant spiritual responsibilities) for a bowl of soup, clearly demonstrating his unworthiness for the position of the firstborn. Yitzchak tries to escape to Egypt when a famine strikes Canaan, but Hashem reminds him that because of the *Akeida* (where he was offered up as a sacrifice) he has become holy and must remain in the Holy Land. Instead he relocates to *Gerar* in the land of the *Plishtim*, where, to protect Rivka, he has to say that she is his sister. Yitzchak arouses jealousy when he becomes immensely wealthy, and Avimelech the king asks him to leave. Yitzchak re-digs three wells dug by his father, prophetically alluding to the three *Batei Mikdash* (Temples) which will be built in the future. Avimelech, seeing the blessings that Hashem has bestowed on Yitzchak, makes a treaty with him. When Yitzchak senses the end of his days approaching, he summons Esav to give Esav his blessings. Rivka, acting on a prophetic command that the blessings must go to Yaakov, arranges for Yaakov to impersonate his brother and receive the blessings. When Esav in a rage of frustration complains to his father that his brother has bought his birthright, Yitzchak realizes that the birthright has been bestowed correctly on Yaakov who has valued its responsibilities rather than its privileges, and confirms the blessings he has given. Esav vows to kill his brother, and so Rivka sends Yaakov to her brother Lavan where he may find a suitable wife.

Insights

VOICE CONTROL

“With the skins of the goat-skins she covered his arms and his smooth-skinned neck.” (27:16)

When Yaakov appeared before his blind father Yitzchak and Yitzchak felt his arms and hands he said *“The voice is the voice of Yaakov, but the hands are the hands of Eisav.”*

Why didn't Yaakov also alter the tone of his voice and make it sound like Eisav's?

In other words, if Yaakov took pains to conceal the physical differences between himself and Eisav, why didn't he also disguise his voice? Although everything is decreed in Heaven, Man is commanded to make efforts on his own behalf (*hishtadlus*). **However, this effort doesn't mean he has to change his entire personality.**

The voice is the essence of Yaakov. His hallmark is the voice of Torah, the voice of prayer. The voice defines *who Yaakov is*. Thus, he was not obliged to go to the extent of changing his essence in order to deceive Yitzchak.

(Heard from Rabbi Yehoshua Bertram)

A SIMPLE MAN

“And Yaakov was a simple man.” (25:27)

A man needs to be able to control and dominate his character traits — to exercise the appropriate characteristic in the appropriate situation.

For there will be times when he will need to apply a “bad” trait for the right reason, as our Sages teach us “Anyone who is merciful when the situation demands hardness, will end up being hard when he should be merciful.” (*Koheles Rabba* Ch. 7)

That is why Yaakov is called a *simple man*. *Man* — implying that **he was able to control his character, rather than his character controlling him.**

Yaakov could apply his simplicity when appropriate, but when dealing with trickery and deceit, he could be as wily and cunning as he was simple...

(HaRebbe HaKodosh M'Lublin in Mayana shel Torah)

I'M SO TIRED

“...and Eisav came in from the field and he was exhausted.” (25:30)

If there's one thing that can destabilize a normal person and make him irritable and irrational — it's being tired. We can all be saintly after a good night's sleep. But what are we like after the baby has woken us up five times in the night?

The essence of the Jewish People is that they serve Hashem even when they are exhausted. Even when they have black rings under their eyes, they don't give up and say — *“I'm too tired!”*

(Continued on next page)

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(Continued from previous page)

When Eisav is wearied, he immediately sells his birthright — the mantle of spiritual responsibility — without a second thought.

However, when the Jewish People are pursued by Amalek (the epitome of everything that stands against Hashem in

this world), in spite of being "tired and weary," they turn and fight.

Commitment is not a fair-weather affair. When the chips are down and the going gets tough — that's when the tough get going.

(Heard from Rabbi Moshe Carlebach)

Haftarah: Malachi 1,2

A QUIRK OF HISTORY?

When forced to examine the curious history of the Jewish People, historians have always found themselves at a loss, for there is no logical reason why a small tribe from a land at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea should have survived and prospered through two thousand years of oppression and assimilation.

No historical theory can explain why the Jewish People have outlived the Persian, the Babylonian, the Greek and the Roman empires. As Mark Twain once wrote "The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and he is today what he was then... Everyone is mortal in this world, except the Jew... What is the secret of his eternity?"

The Jewish People can answer this question with the words of this week's Haftarah "They may build, but I shall tear down... Your eyes shall see and you shall say 'Hashem is great beyond the boundary of Israel.'"

However invincible Edom/Rome, and the other spiritual heirs of Eisav may seem, they will not prosper eternally. Eventually Eisav will fall and Yaakov will take his rightful place — "I loved you, said Hashem... But I hated Eisav and I made his mountains a desolation, and his heritage for the desert serpents."

FAVORED-NATION STATUS

"I loved you' said Hashem, and you said, 'How have you loved us?' Was not Eisav a brother to Yaakov — the word of Hashem — yet I loved Yaakov. But I hated Eisav and I made his mountains a desolation...." (1:2-4)

When a servant faithfully performs the bidding of his master in every way, humbling himself before his master, one cannot discern the love that the master has for him. After all, why shouldn't he love him — he is the perfect servant.

However, when the servant disobeys the will of his master, and yet the master still loves him, then the master's love for his servant becomes apparent to all. Thus it is with the Jewish People and Hashem. For even if we are a "brother to Eisav" — i.e., our sins are comparable to his — Hashem still shows his love for us and forgives us. He treats us as a master treats a loved but errant servant, forgiving us, even though our behavior would warrant a harsh response if done by someone else.

(Adapted from the Chasam Sofer)



INSIGHTS INTO THE ZEMIRO
SUNG AT THE SHABBOS TABLE
THROUGHOUT THE GENERATIONS.

DROR YIKRA-treh rurs
"HE SHALL PROCLAIM FREEDOM..."

He shall proclaim freedom for man and woman

דרור יקרא לבן עם בת

Dror yikra l'vayn im bas

Inscribed on the famous Liberty Bell in Philadelphia's Independence Hall is the passage from the Torah (Vayikra 25:10): "You shall proclaim freedom ("dror") throughout the land and to all its inhabitants." The deeper meaning of the word "dror" in this command to free slaves in the Jubilee Year is explained by our Sages (Rosh Hashana 9b) as the freedom of choosing the locale he wishes to be in, a privilege denied to a slave who is restricted to the domicile of his master. The freedom which a Jew enjoys on Shabbos is not only his vacation from the weekday labor imposed upon him by his circumstances but also the privilege of remaining in his home rather than being in the field, the office or the market place.

So let your imagination allow you to hear the liberty bell chiming in to accompany your soul singing this song of freedom.

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