**Parsha Potpourri**

**Parshas Toldos – Vol. 12, Issue 6**

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**ויתרצצו הבנים בקרבה ותאמר אם כן למה זה אנכי ותלך לדרש את ד' ויאמר ד' לה שני גיים בבטנך ושני לאמים ממעיך יפרדו ולאם מלאם יאמץ ורב יעבד צעיר (25:22-23)**

After being barren for 20 years, Yitzchok and Rivkah beseeched Hashem to bless them with a child, and Rivkah indeed became pregnant. However, her pregnancy was particularly painful and difficult. Rashi writes that when she passed by the yeshiva of Shem and Ever, the righteous Yaakov struggled to run out, and when she passed a temple of idolatry, the wicked Eisav attempted to come out.

Rivkah, troubled by the complications of her pregnancy, went to seek an explanation from Shem. Shem comforted her by explaining that she was pregnant with twins who would eventually develop into two separate nations that would always be jockeying against one another for supremacy. Although Shem certainly enlightened Rivkah about what was going on inside of her, the reason that she approached him was due to her frustration over her painful pregnancy. How did his explanation about the future help comfort her very real and immediate pain?

Rav Yosef Chaim Zonnenfeld suggests that Shem’s words weren’t merely a prophetic clarification of her perplexing situation, but they also allayed Rivkah’s difficult pregnancy in a very real and tangible way. He explains that Shem concluded his message to her by saying that the descendants of the older son would serve those of the younger son.

The Medrash HaGadol teaches that one of the reasons that Rivkah’s body had been enduring such constant turmoil during her pregnancy was that Yaakov and Eisav were fighting and jockeying for position in order to come out first and enjoy the benefits associated with being the first-born. However, now that they heard Shem’s prophecy that the older son would actually be subordinate to the younger, they ceased fighting with one another, and the pains of Rivkah’s pregnancy were alleviated as a result.

**ויגדלו הנערים ויהי עשו איש ידע ציד איש שדה ויעקב איש תם ישב אהלים (25:27)**

Although Yaakov and Eisav were twins, the Torah records that they were polar opposites. Yaakov spent his days dwelling in the study hall to learn Torah, while Eisav focused his energies on hunting animals in the field. Although Rashi writes that these differences weren’t apparent until they matured and reached the age of 13, Chazal tell us that their different values and priorities were already established even before they were born.

The Medrash relates (Yalkut Shimoni 111) that when they were still fetuses in their mother’s womb, Yaakov told Eisav that Hashem created two worlds: the physical world in which we live and the spiritual World to Come. The physical world is full of eating, drinking, doing business, getting married, and having children, none of which may be enjoyed in the World to Come. Yaakov offered to divide the two worlds, with Eisav taking the physical world and Yaakov receiving the spiritual world, an offer to which Eisav was only too happy to agree.

In “Mah Yedidus,” one of the songs traditionally sung on Friday night, we eloquently describe the wonderful delicacies and pleasures of this world, such as fattened chickens and sweet wines, which we enjoy at the Shabbos meal. Curiously, after relating the mouth-watering treats associated with Shabbos, we proudly declare that “Nachalas Yaakov yirash” – a person who properly honors Shabbos in this fashion will inherit the portion of Yaakov. This seems difficult to understand. The Medrash teaches that Yaakov’s share that of the spiritual World to Come. Although Shabbos indeed offers delectable enjoyments, isn’t it dishonest to associate these physical pleasures with Yaakov?

Rav Moshe Wolfson suggests that this song resolves this question just a few stanzas later, when we proclaim that “Me’ein Olam HaBa yom Shabbos menucha” – the restful day of Shabbos is itself so spiritual that it represents a microcosm of the World to Come. As we enjoy the Shabbos delicacies at our meals, we should appreciate and give thanks for this weekly opportunity to enjoy a small taste of the tremendous reward waiting for us – Yaakov’s descendants – in the World to Come.

**ויאמר עשו אל יעקב הלעיטני נא מן האדם האדם הזה (25:30)**

Parsha Toldos begins with the birth of Yitzchok’s twin sons, Yaakov and Eisav. Shortly thereafter, the Torah records that one day, Eisav came in from the field, tired and exhausted. He saw that Yaakov was cooking a lentil stew, and in his fatigued state, he begged Yaakov to feed him “the red food,” identifying it solely by its color and not even bothering to refer to it by its proper name.

Rav Mattisyahu Salomon relates that he was once in the house of Rav Elozar Menachem Shach and observed Rav Shach, who was well-known for giving candy to children, offering a lollipop to one of his grandchildren, adding, “You want a red one, right?” Rav Mattisyahu interjected, “Isn’t the Rosh Yeshiva encouraging him to be like Eisav, who insisted that Yaakov feed him ‘the red food?’”

Rav Shach, who was capable of imparting valuable lessons and perspectives through even mundane conversations and actions, responded that there was a critical difference between the two cases. He explained that for a child, living in a world of superficial dreams and imagination and preferring a shiny red lollipop is ordinary behavior and is to be expected. Children are only capable of appreciating the external appearance of an object, and there is no problem with recognizing this reality and interacting with them on their level.

The problem, Rav Shach continued, begins when an adult refuses to mature and elects to live his entire life in this shallow manner. As a person grows up, it is expected that his mind will mature as well, enabling him to see and appreciate an item’s internal value. When Eisav requested that Yaakov provide him with “the red food,” he was demonstrating his singular focus on externality and his inability to concern himself with the actual content of the dish.

Although most of us don’t spend our days pursuing red lollipops or red stew, Rav Shach’s message is still relevant to each of us. As children, we were drawn toward flash and superficiality, as could be expected of us at that time. However, as we age, it is imperative to transition to a more mature outlook and perspective, recognizing that people, possessions, and accomplishments should not be judged by their external appearance, but by their deeper – and true – value.

**Parsha Points to Ponder (and sources which discuss them):**

1. What is the significance of the fact that this week’s parsha is named Toldos, and why is it specifically read at this time of the year? (Emunas Itecha)
2. The Arizal teaches that Shimshon was a combination of the souls of Yefes and Eisav. In what way did Shimshon rectify their sins and errors?
3. If Rivkah knew the truth about Eisav’s wickedness, why didn’t she ever insist that he be sent away so as not to negatively influence Yaakov, just as Sarah forcefully sent Yishmael away to protect Yitzchak? (Rashi 25:27, HaEmek Davar 24:65, Nesivos Rabboseinu, Meged Yosef)
4. Rashi writes (27:9) that one of the two goats that Rivkah commanded Yaakov to bring served as Yitzchok’s Korban Pesach. What was Rivkah’s hidden intention in doing so? (Chochmas Chaim)
5. Rashi writes (25:9) that Yishmael repented his sins before the death of his father Avrohom. Why did he subsequently permit (28:9) the wicked Eisav to marry his daughter? (Emunas Yirmiyah)

**Answers to Points to Ponder:**

1) **Rav Moshe Wolfson** explains that this week’s parsha is called Toldos because it is the only parsha in the Torah in which all 3 of the Avos are living simultaneously, albeit for a mere three verses (25:26-28). Shlomo HaMelech teaches (Koheles 4:12) that a 3-ply rope is not easily severed. The Gemora in Bava Metzia (85a) teaches that if a man, his son, and his grandson are all Torah scholars, the Torah will never cease from their offspring. The simultaneous coexistence of our 3 forefathers formed such a strong foundation for the Jewish nation that they guaranteed a future for their Toldos – descendants. It is no coincidence that this parsha is read in the beginning of the month of Kislev, as it represents our guarantee of victory over the attempt of the Greeks to make us forget the Torah. In fact, the verse immediately following the 3 verses in which all of the Avos are alive begins (25:29) ויזד יעקב נזיד – Yaakov cooked a stew. The first letters of each word spell Yavan – Greece – to hint that although Avrohom had died, the indestructible 3-ply string had already been established to protect his descendants from the Greeks.

2) The **Arizal** explains that because Eisav didn’t bring wine to his father as Yaakov did, Shimshon was a nazir who was forbidden to drink wine. The reason that Shimshon killed a lion was to take revenge against the lion for scratching his “father” Noach when they were in the Ark. Because Eisav caused his father Yitzchok to become blind through the smoke of the idols worshipped by his wicked wives, the eyes of Shimshon were gouged out and he was made blind. Additionally, because Eisav was hairy from birth, the special strength of Shimshon was also dependent on his hair not being cut.

3) The **Netziv** notes that when Rivkah first encountered Yitzchok, he was praying. When he prayed, he was so removed from this world that he appeared angelic, and Rivkah slipped off her donkey and covered herself out of reverence for this holy man (24:64-65). This initial encounter gave her such a deeply-ingrained respect for Yitzchok that she was unable to directly confront him for the rest of their married life, such as to demand that he send Eisav away. **Rav Yosef Sorotzkin** points out that Sorah did not give birth to Yishmael as Rivkah did to Eisav, and no matter how badly a child may behave, a mother is still a mother and is unable to bear the pain of sending away her own child. Alternatively, **Rashi** writes (25:27) that when Yaakov and Eisav were young, they were similar in their actions and there was no reason to send Eisav away. Only after they turned 13 did Eisav's wicked nature manifest itself, and at that point Yaakov was old enough that Rivkah was no longer concerned that he would be negatively influenced. The **Brisker Rov** explains that during her pregnancy, Rivkah was prophetically informed that she would give birth to twins, who would be separated after they were born (25:23), meaning that the wicked one would have no sway over the righteous one, in which case there was no need to send Eisav away.

4) **Rav Yosef Chaim Zonnenfeld** explains that Rivkah worried that when Eisav would later come in with his food, Yitzchok would realize what had happened, and would then eat from Eisav’s food and give him the blessings that he had given Yaakov in error. To prevent this from happening, Rivkah made sure that Yitzchok would eat the Korban Pesach, because the law is אין מפטרין אחר הפסח אפיקומן – one may not eat or drink anything the entire night after eating the Passover sacrifice (or the afikomen in present times). In fact, Rav Zonnenfeld points out that Yitzchok told Eisav (27:35) בא אחיך במרמה – your brother came with cleverness. The word במרמה – trickery – has the same numerical value (287) as the word afikomen.

5) **Rav Eliezer Friedman** explains that although Yishmael was now righteous, he had originally been wicked. He reasoned that just as he had been able to repent his sins, so too was Eisav capable of doing so with the proper motivation. As such, he hoped that by marrying his daughter, Eisav would be inspired to repent just as he had been. In fact, Rashi writes (32:23) that because Yaakov placed Dina in a box and withheld her from being a positive influence on Eisav, he was punished, which seems to indicate that the right wife could have had the potential to influence him to do teshuvah. Yishmael’s error was that Eisav married his daughter while still retaining his previous wives, which was tantamount to immersing in a mikvah while holding an impure animal, in which case the purity of the mikvah is useless. Not only did Eisav not follow Yishmael’s daughter, but he brought her down by bringing her into his idolatrous home.

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