

Parshas Toldos is a very frightening parsha. A pair of twins were born and raised in the same house and in the same environment, yet move in totally opposite directions later in life. They start out with very different tendencies. Every one of us is born with complexity. We all have built-in natural talents and traits, and as we grow, there are different influences which shape us and mold us.

Yaakov has a natural attraction to spirituality and Eisov is born with a violent bent with a desire to control.

There are two ways people can control the world. One way is through ideas and spiritual values, and the other way is through brute force. Yaakov and Eisov were born with different tendencies, but both were raised by great tzaddikim – Yitzchok Ovinu and Rivka Imeinu.

When Kayin's sacrifice was rejected, Kayin became very upset. Hashem tried to show Kayin that despite his failure, he can use his free-will to pick himself up again and fight his yetzer horo. He should not give up, even though he was born with negative tendencies. It is not an excuse. We live in a very diverse world. There are many different types of yetzer horo. But we can fight all of them because each person has free will. You can't just resign yourself to remain exactly how you were born.

Rivka was told that she was about to give birth to two people who represent two powerful forces which will always dominate the world. Chazal called these two forces 'Rome and Yerusholayim'. One force wants to conquer the world with the message of Hashem and spirituality. The other dominates through brute force and violence. The message of Hashem once came to dominate the world through the efforts of Avrohom Ovinu. Klal Yisroel accepted the Torah – and this influenced a major part of the world. The other way is Rome – physical power and military might. When one is dominant, the other recedes into obscurity. When the world is preoccupied with physical power, no-one wants to pay attention to spiritual ideals, and visa-versa. It is like a see-saw. They cannot both be great at the same time.

Who controls which way the see-saw goes? The plan of Hashem, as told to Shem and Aver, is that Yaakov is supposed to be in control. The older one will serve the younger one. When Yitzchok gave the brochos to Yaakov, who was disguised as Eisov, he blessed him that he would rule over his brother. When Eisov came in and realized what Yaakov did, Eisov screamed and begged to get a brocho as well. Yitzchok said you are a violent person and you will live by the sword. Your brother will dominate over you. But, כאשר תריד – which Onkelos explains to mean, that when Yaakov doesn't serve the Torah – you will rule over Yaakov.

So it is a constant struggle of who will control the world – the spiritual ideals of Yaakov or the physical power and brute force of Eisov. Who decides? Yaakov decides. When he does his job in an honest way, Yaakov will rule the world. If he doesn't, then he enables Eisov to rule the world with brute force. It is either one or the other.

We live in a world where the spiritual ideas of Yaakov Ovinu are steadily losing influence. The world used to be much more religious than it is now. Only pockets here and there remain. The world is now dominated by physicality.

Chazal tell us that when Klal Yisroel came back from golus and built the second Beis Hamikdosh, the yetzer horo of avodo zoro was taken away. The non-Jewish world kept worshipping them out of habit but

the world was ripe for drastic change. It was a time of tremendous opportunity. Suddenly, Greek philosophy began to spread. The early Greek thinkers took ideas of the Torah and corrupted them with kefiroh. Aristotle had a disciple called Alexander who swept through the world and brought the ideas of Greek philosophy wherever he went. It became the dominant philosophy.

Why did Hashem allow Alexander to succeed to such a great degree? Because Hashem wanted to use Greek philosophy to finish off the destruction of avodo zoro from the wider world. Only afterward, the beauty of the lofty ideals of the Torah would then be appreciated by the world and it would dominate. But it was up to Klal Yisroel to make themselves role-models of Torah living and be ready to replace the Greeks.

The problem was that the Jews themselves became entranced by Greek culture. They were presented with pure Torah of the Anshei Knesses Hagedolah and Shimon Hatzaddik on one side, and the corrupted ideas of the Torah with kefiroh by the Greeks on the other side. Why did the Jews choose the other side – the corrupted version of Torah – over the pure Torah? Because Greek culture accommodates your yetzer horo while still making you feel good about yourself with its sophisticated philosophy and literature. It is a very attractive approach.

150 years after Alexander died, Greek culture swept through Eretz Yisroel and there was a clash between the Misyavim and the Chashmona'im. This was the story of Chanukah. But by that time, the ideas of Torah had spread through the ancient world. At the time of the churban 20% of the Roman Empire were ready to drop avodo zoro and were attracted to Torah. But the Torah was too difficult – too many rules and restrictions like Shabbos and Bris Miloh. And at the time, Klal Yisroel were not standing as that example of an uplifted life. But the world was ripe for change and the ideas of Christianity and Islam took hold and spread the ideas of monotheism.

The Rambam writes at the end of Hilchos Melochim that Hashem realized that since Klal Yisroel weren't showing the way by their example, the world had to be prepared for the ideas of the Torah by other means, in order to eventually be accepted by the entire world. He made bridge religions to allow the ideas of Torah and Moshiach to take root in people's minds in advance.

Our job isn't to convert the world to Yiddishkeit. Our job is to make a Kiddush Hashem. Despite what many people think, a Kiddush Hashem isn't that a shomer Shabbos Jew makes it to a professional sports team or becomes influential in the White House. It means that people see a frum Jew living an uplifted life following Torah and mitzvos and realize that the Torah produces a superior human being. The sin of chillul Hashem is the opposite – when people look at frum Jews and think "this is what the Torah produces? Such a low-quality human being?"

Making a kiddush Hashem or chillul Hashem doesn't just apply to the impression made on non-Jews. It applies to Jews as well. A yeshiva bocher represents to the Jewish public how the Torah should be lived in this world. People have to look at him and see that the Torah produces a superior individual and be inspired. Among Klal Yisroel, we certainly have an obligation to convince other Jews about the truth and beauty of the Torah. But sometimes, the best way to do this is to simply be a shining example of how a Torah-life uplifts and elevates a person.

The spiritual ideals of Yaakov and the brute, physical force of Eisov go

up and down throughout history. We now live in a world that brute force dominates and spiritual values are disappearing. But it is up to us to not go along with the tide and not take pride in our military might. True, we need an army to defend ourselves, but our source of pride must be that we produce superior human beings. And this in turn, demands of each of us to actually be that superior person that the Torah is supposed to make. Otherwise, why should people look up to the Torah? What type of person is the Torah actually producing today?

The parsha continues to describe the development of Yaakov and Eisov. They grow up and follow their in-born tendencies. Was Eisov forced to become wicked by his nature? No. He had incredible parents! Yitzchok and Rivka certainly taught Eisov what was right and what was wrong. Eisov had free-will to listen to them and not to his inner pressures and desires. But instead, he became an "ish tzayid" – he trapped people.

Yaakov was born with a spiritual bent, but he didn't remain with it as-is. He took it and developed it further and further. He used the upbringing of his parents to go beyond where his nature alone would have brought him. This was Yaakov's free-choice to do something with his in-born tendencies and make himself into who he was.

Yitzchok loved Eisov because Eisov was a very smooth talker. How was Eisov able to do this? Yitzchok Ovinu was an oloh temimoh – total purity. He didn't understand what evil really is and was able to be fooled by Eisov. Rivka was exposed to evil in her own house – growing up among thieves and murderers! She was able to clearly identify who Eisov was.

The posuk says Eisov came back tired from the field. But there are two types of tired. There is exhaustion from exerting yourself (נָאָץ), and just being tired (רָצַץ) from doing nothing for so long. Eisov was רָצַץ – just plain tired from boredom.

Yaakov saw an opportunity and wanted to purchase all of Eisov's rights as the firstborn. Eisov responded that since he is going to die anyway, why does he need the bechoroh? But this is puzzling – everyone dies eventually. What was Eisov saying?

Eisov knows that being the bechor means carrying on the mesorah of the Ovos. It is a great burden of responsibility because there are serious consequences for fulfilling this mesorah or failing. It requires a significant investment and even personal sacrifice to get things right. Eisov didn't want to invest effort. He didn't want consequences. He wanted to be free to do whatever he wanted! Yaakov could handle the bechoroh. Eisov said, if I have those responsibilities, I will certainly fail and die. Who needs it? So he agreed to Yaakov's bargain, stuffed the food in his mouth and walked off to do the next aveiroh. He clearly

wasn't interested in this spiritual mesorah of the Ovos and showed his utter contempt for it.

Later on, Yitzchok gave two versions of brochos to Eisov. Both are centered around olom hazeh – wealth and prosperity. Nothing to do with the mesorah of Avrohom and the promise of Eretz Yisroel. Why? This is because Yitzchok knew Yaakov would be the son who would carry on the mesorah of the Ovos. The first time he blessed Eisov (who was really Yaakov in disguise), he gave a brocho of wealth and prosperity – thinking Eisov would support Yaakov as part of a Yissochor-Zevulun partnership. At this point, Yitzchok still believed Eisov was worthy of being Yaakov's partner.

At the end of the parsha, Yitzchok dispatched Yaakov to Padan Arom to find a wife. Here he passed on the blessing of Avrohom and the heritage of Eretz Yisroel. He knew Eretz Yisroel does not belong to people like Eisov.

What does it mean to be a yeshiva bochur learning in a yeshiva in Eretz Yisroel?

Limud haTorah is supposed to connect one to Hashem and a whole world of spiritual ideas. The braisoh in Pirkei Ovos says, Torah is supposed to change you and uplift you when you learn lishmoh. You are not the same person – you are on a different level, pursuing different goals and ideals – even different than other frum Jews. But only if you want to change. Coming to yeshiva is not in order to take a break from real life and run around being a tourist. The yeshiva experience is to help you become a person where all your goals and aspirations in life are for ruchniyus and to become elevated. Just like Yaakov Ovinu.

Both Yitzchok and Yaakov realized that Eretz Yisroel is a special place to live a different sort of life. Eisov and his ideals don't belong here. It is a place where you can be uplifted by the intense limud haTorah that exists here. Hashem has arranged it so that in the generation before Moshiach, Eretz Yisroel has once again become a place where limud haTorah is flourishing in a way that it hasn't been seen for centuries. By coming here to yeshiva, you are supposed to connect yourself to that electricity. Being in a yeshiva is for the purpose of arriving at this end-goal of becoming a total superior individual. You have to integrate Torah into every fiber of your being and immerse yourself totally. Then it becomes who you are at your core, and you will become elevated.

If we can do this on a national level, and show how the Torah produces a superior human being, it will have a deep impact on the world and we will again dominate the world with spiritual ideals.