

PARSHAS TOLDOS

תשפ"ו

This week's parsha begins with the story of two powerful figures – Eisov and Yaakov. The posuk says they were already fighting before they were born. Rivka goes to Yeshivas Shem v'Ever and is told that she is carrying twins who are fighting for control over the world.

Rashi explains that this struggle is like a see-saw. When one is up, the other is down. They are never both up, and they are never both down. The entire world history revolves around this struggle between Yaakov and Eisov. The posuk says the older one will serve the younger one. (But, isn't this a stirah to the see-saw dynamic we mentioned – where they alternate their positions from up to down? This question is not answered at this point in the parsha.)

For some reason, Rivka never reveals to Yitzchok what she was told by Hashem – that Eisov will serve Yaakov, and that Yaakov deserves the brochos. There are many explanations given for this.

Eisov grew to be a hunter – trapping animals in the field. Yaakov sat and learned Torah all day. Rashi says that while they were young, you couldn't tell them apart. Meaning, you couldn't see one was a tzaddik and one was a rosho. But once they grew up and turned 13 years old, they went their own ways.

Eisov was very makpid on kibbud Av. He knew that Yitzchok would be deeply hurt if he knew that Eisov – his favorite son – was actually a rosho, worshipping idols. So Eisov put up a front which made Yitzchok think he was very frum. Yitzchok Ovinu was under the impression that both sons were tzaddikim, and one was learning while the other was engaged in the physical world. The Beis HaLevi explains that Yitzchok envisioned that Yaakov and Eisov would enter a partnership like Yissochor and Zevulun, where Eisov would support Yaakov's learning with his worldly pursuits. That is why he intended to give Eisov the brochos of material wealth.

Yitzchok was blind. How did this happen? Chazal say he was blinded by the tears of the malochim at the akeidah which fell into his eyes. What is the deeper meaning of this Chazal? Because Yitzchok was willing to be a korbon, he actually obtained kedushas korbon oloh to some degree. We learn halachos of korbonos from Yitzchok being offered on the mizbeach. He became kodesh kodoshim. He was not allowed to leave Eretz Yisroel. This was why Rivka had to come to Eretz Yisroel and leave her family behind for good.

As an oloh temimoh who was kodesh kodoshim, Yitzchok was blind to the reality of Eisov who was evil. But Rivka grew up with swindlers and fraudsters in her family who also tried to fool Eliezer. She wasn't fooled by Eisov's play acting.

When it came to the brochos, Yitzchok never dreamed of giving over the mesorah of Avrohom Ovinu to Eisov. We see this from the end of the parsha where Yitzchok instructs Yaakov to go find a wife, and he gives Yaakov another brocho – now knowing it is Yaakov. It is the 'birkas Avrohom' – to continue the legacy of Avrohom and receive Eretz Yisroel. Yitzchok only intended to give Eisov brochos of gashmiyus to support Yaakov's ruchniyus. Rivka knew this was a dangerous arrangement. Yaakov gets those brochos of gashmiyus instead and leaves, and Eisov walks in. At this point, Yitzchok realizes that Hashem changed all of his plans. He overhears Eisov admitting that Yaakov is really the bechor.

Eisov screams and begs his father for some kind of brocho! Yitzchok blesses Eisov and says he will receive a very fertile land – either Italy

or the oil-rich Arab lands where the nation of Edom originally started, but it will all be in the service of your brother who will rule over you. You will live by the sword – violence is how you operate. You will only be able to throw off the yoke of your brother when Yaakov violates the Torah. Then you will ascend and subjugate Yaakov. This echoes the see-saw dynamic that Rivka heard from Yeshivas Shem v'Ever all those years earlier.

There are two philosophies of life – two fundamentally different ways to approach the world. Yaakov's approach to life is that ruchniyus rules the world. Torah is the dominating force in humanity. Eisov's philosophy is physical power and brutal might is what dominates the world. Who wins between these two competing philosophies? When Yaakov keeps the Torah and lives a life of ruchniyus, he runs the world. When Yaakov tries to be Eisov, then Eisov rules the world.

This dynamic goes back and forth throughout history.

When Klal Yisroel came back to Eretz Yisroel to rebuild the Beis Hamikdosh, the Anshei Knesses Hagedolah wondered: if we still have a yetzer for avodo zoro, what's the point? We will have the churban all over again! So they davened for the yetzer horo of avodo zoro to be removed and they were granted their wish. The pesukim in Doniel allude to the fact that Hashem wanted to bring Moshiach at that time and He set up a whole system to destroy avodo zoro in the ancient world to prepare for Moshiach.

At the time of the destruction of the yetzer of avodo zoro, we also lost many ruchni things simultaneously – no Urim V'Tumim, no nevuah, no Aron Kodesh with the Luchos. So to compensate for this overall loss of levels of ruchniyus, there was an explosion of Torah Shebaal Peh. All the secrets of the Oral Torah became accessible to the average Jew through limud Torah. That happened during Bayis Sheni.

But simultaneously there was another dynamic that was set in motion many years before. The early Greek philosophers were very adept at copying and adapting the philosophies of other ancient people. We have a mesorah that they received their chochmah from the nevi'im. The midrash talks about a Greek philosopher who was a disciple of Yirmiyahu Hanovi. But they took this chochmah and they twisted it and distorted it.

Hashem planned to use the power of Greek philosophy and the spread of Greek culture throughout the world via the conquest of Alexander the Great, to undermine avodo zoro in the world. Had Klal Yisroel remained pure and loyal to the Torah and not been corrupted by Greek philosophy and culture, the vacuum left from the destruction of avodo zoro would have been filled by the truth of Torah. And then Moshiach could arrive and bring the final geuloh. But Klal Yisroel were seduced by Greek culture and became misyavanim along the way. This prevented the spread of Torah throughout the world and delayed the coming of Moshiach.

There have been many opportunities throughout history to spread the truth of Torah to the wider world, but somehow we manage to fall in love with the culture of the non-Jews and we abandon our own mission.

In Egypt, Klal Yisroel were enamored with the sophistication and advanced technology of Egyptian culture and wanted to imitate them.

Hashem brought Edom to the height of power and they conquered the entire world. Eventually they spread Christianity to the entire western

world. The Rambam writes that Hashem wants these false versions of monotheism to dominate the world in order to prepare for Moshiach. Greece and Rome stopped their conquest at the Far East – India and China – which is exactly where the ancient avodo zoros still thrive.

But Klal Yisroel never rose to the challenge to be on the right level to bring pure Torah to the rest of the world and to dominate the world as they should. They always got sidetracked by the enticement of the physicality of non-Jewish culture of the times. And then they become subject to the powerful nations of the world.

This is why there is a sharp disagreement in this country about drafting yeshiva bochurim into the army. The pesukim in Tehillim say if we would keep our part of the deal and be who we are supposed to be – which is Yaakov – we could easily subjugate our enemies without much effort. But we are too busy trying to be like Eisov – to build the most powerful army in the entire Middle East. We bomb Iran, Lebanon, Syria – we use our military might as the only way to influence the region. There is a deep problem with this whole approach.

People complained to me that there is a severe manpower shortage in the IDF which is putting the country at risk. We need to recruit the yeshiva bochurim! I responded that if 500,000 chilonim would start keeping Shabbos and keeping Torah, we will not need such a powerful army. We say it every week in our tefillos and Kabbolas Shabbos – היום אדם בקולו תשמנו – and I actually believe what I'm saying! When Yaakov is acting like Yaakov, we can subjugate Eisov without physical power and military might. Spirituality is what really matters and it is our real purpose in this world.

There is a gemoro in Avodo Zoro daf 2b which says in the future, Hashem will bring all the nations of the world together and they will demand reward. Hashem asks them what they did for Klal Yisroel to deserve reward? They each respond with their contributions to develop civilization to make it easier for Klal Yisroel to keep the Torah. Every nation claims we did it to help Klal Yisroel learn Torah. Hashem rejects their claims – they only did it to advance their own agenda for power and fortune and fame.

The Brisker Rav asked – we are talking about the end of times where there is only emes and Hashem is directly interrogating these nations. How could they make an outright lie right there to Hashem and claim they were acting for the sake of Klal Yisroel? Who do they think they are fooling?

He answered that what they were saying was true – all that they did was in fact done to promote limud Torah. But they wanted credit for it. As the Rambam says in his hakdomo to Peirush HaMishnayos, everything that happens in the world is directly orchestrated by Hashem for the sake of Klal Yisroel learning Torah. Nothing happens in any part of the world that doesn't somehow indirectly contribute to Hashem's ultimate purpose of the world – learning Torah. Wars between nations, world leaders making decisions, are all being manipulated by Hashem to achieve this goal of learning Torah.

The Rambam gives an example of a wealthy man who built an oasis in the desert with water pools, orchards and gardens. One day, a tzaddik was traveling by and needed to rest, and found the perfect place to refresh himself in this garden built by this wealthy man many years earlier. The wealthy man thinks he was able to amass his fortune and make this luxurious garden because of his own cunning business strategy. But the truth is that Hashem arranged it all just for that one day when this single tzaddik will need a place to rest in the desert.

We have to understand that Donald Trump is the President of the United States today only because somehow it will promote Klal Yisroel learning Torah. Going back many decades, we can see now in hindsight that the only reason so many Iranian Jews are sitting and learning in yeshivos today is because of the Iranian Revolution in 1979 which spurred a mass emigration of Jews out of Iran. The Ayatollah thinks he made this big accomplishment of overthrowing the Shah and turning the country to Islam. But in truth, he was merely a pawn to enable so many thousands of Iranian Jews to increase their limud Torah to a much higher level than what it was in Iran.

This is our approach to world events. We can either increase our limud Torah willingly without external pressure and upheaval, or Hashem sets up historical pressures which will bring this about by force. It is up to us to decide to be Yaakov and run the world through ruchniyus. But when we try to act like Eisov, Eisov runs the world and we will be subject to their rule. We can never be truly independent as a country until we make ruchniyus our number one priority.

This is the simple way of understanding the parsha, and it is a statement of our whole philosophy of life. The whole world surrounds the Torah being learned by Klal Yisroel. Then Yaakov runs the world and Eisov is subservient to Yaakov.