

אור פני משה

שיחות מוסר על התורה

מאת הרה"ג ר' משה אליעזר רבינוביץ זצ"ל

Shmuessen from
Harav Moshe Rabinowitz zt"l

פרשת תולדות

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לעילוי נשמת
ר' משה אליעזר בן ר' ישראל זצ"ל

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וַיֹּאמֶר עֲשׂו הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ לָמוֹת וְלָמָּה זֶה לִי בְכֹרָה
(בראשית כ"ה ל"ב)

Two Conflicts Between Yaakov and Esav

We have two instances in this week's *parshah* where Yaakov and Esav were competing, and Yaakov succeeded in overpowering Esav: the *bechorah* and the blessings from Yitzchok. We find that in the case of the *bechorah*, Esav is rather willing to forgo the grand prize. He doesn't seem to care much about his future descendants doing the *avodah* in the Beis Hamikdash; rather he's actually concerned about all the death penalties that hinge on not performing the various *avodos* correctly. Indeed, the *pasuk* concludes that Esav "spurned the birthright" – "ויבו עשו את הבכורה". However, later on in the *parshah*, when it came to the second showdown between Yaakov and Esav – we see a very different attitude from Esav. We find that he desperately desired those *brachos*, and he cried bitter tears when he realized that he had been duped. He also harbored a deep hatred for Yaakov after this event, and even plotted to kill him. Now, many of the *meforshim* teach that by giving the *brachos*, Yitzchok was essentially endowing his chosen son with the role of continuing Avraham's holy mission of bringing about *K'vod Shomayim* in the world. If so, it would seem that Esav's reactions to the two competitions were inconsistent; he mocked the idea of doing the *avodah* in the Beis Hamikdash, yet he greatly desired being the beneficiary of the 613 *mitzvos*. How can we understand this clear discrepancy?

What Frustrates a Person the Most?

On a simple level, we can try to suggest that in the case of the birthright, Esav didn't care much about Yaakov's triumph because that was his choice; he chose to abandon the *bechorah* of his own volition. However, when it came to the *brachos*, Esav had decided that he wanted them – and was therefore enraged when he was outsmarted.

I don't love this *pshat*, though, because I think it runs contrary to the way people usually react in these kinds of situations. Let's say, for instance, a businessman locks up his office and sets a door alarm before he heads home for the night. The next morning, he discovers that he had a break-in, and some valuables were stolen. He will surely be frustrated about the loss, but at the end of the day, there's a certain comfort in the fact that he did everything that he could have possibly done to prevent the theft. On the other hand, in a case where he forgot to lock the door and declined to install an alarm, he would surely have a much harder time getting over the incident. He will forever beat himself up over his negligence. "I could've prevented that loss! I should have been smarter!"

In Esav's case, I would assume that he would be more frustrated about easily giving up a highly coveted honor for almost nothing than having tried to get the *brachos* and ultimately failing. In the latter case, he did his best – and Yaakov beat him. But in the former, he acted like a complete fool, totally failing to pay any attention to the importance of the *bechorah*! That is surely a far more frustrating loss!

Nothing Should be Frustrating for a Yid

The truth is, when it comes to frum Yidden like us – neither should be frustrating. We should be able to realize that whether we were negligent or not, Hashem is the One that decides when it is time for us to sustain a loss.

A relative of mine was delivering some money to Rav Mordechai Gifter zt"l. When he arrived at the Rosh Yeshiva's home, he reached into his pocket and noticed that the money was gone. He promptly smacked himself on the forehead and said: "Oh, I put it in the pocket with the hole! I should have remembered to put it in the other pocket." He then apologized to Rav Gifter and told him that he will come back a different time with the money. "It was bashert that I lost the money," he mumbled as he turned to leave. But Rav Gifter didn't like this comment. "What do you mean, it's bashert? The money got lost because you made a mistake and put it in the pocket with the hole. Why are you blaming Hashem for your mistake?"

I told this story over to my Rebbe, Rav Elya Roth zt"l, and he expressed his disagreement with Rav Gifter on this issue. He explained that although a person must do his utmost to be responsible, at the end of the day, if he incurs a loss – that loss was predetermined by Hakadosh Baruch Hu. A Yid has to recognize that no matter what led up to the incident – the outcome was still Hashem's decision. So, it seems like we have two opinions here about this particular issue.

A Full Vessel Vs. an Empty One

Either way, getting back to Esav – why was he so much more frustrated about losing the *brachos* than losing the *bechorah*? After all, by the *brachos*, he did everything his father asked him to do; the fact that he lost the *brachos* was basically inevitable!

I would like to answer based on a *shmuess* I once heard from Rav Shlomo Wolbe zt"l, and I think this *nekuda* is the point of success in life.

The Gemara (Sukkah 46b) teaches us that a כלי מלא is able to be מחזיק; when a person is full of spirituality, then he can accept endless amounts of spirituality on top what he already has. However, if he's empty – there's nothing that can be done. In other words, the world of *ruchniyus* works very differently than the world of *gashmiyus*; for example, if you have a full bottle of milk, and you have an eighth of an ounce left over in another bottle – you won't be able to add that tiny bit into the full bottle, no matter how hard you will try. Only if the full bottle empties out a bit will it be capable of accepting more. But with *ruchniyus*, it's the opposite: an empty bottle can't accept anything, while a full bottle has endless room for more.

We find another concept in Chazal of *aveirah goreres aveirah*; when a person just tastes a small sin, he can suddenly begin to slip down into greater sins, and before long – he's doing things that he wouldn't have dreamed of six months prior. So too, when a person does *mitzvos*, we find that *mitzvah goreres mitzvah* – one good deed leads to another, which leads to another and another, guiding him up an endless ladder of growth.

And finally, we have the Chazal that teaches "הבא לטהר מסייעין אותו, והבא לטמא פותחין לו" – when a person attempts to become more pure, there is a special *hashgacha* from Above that assists him in the process, and when a person seeks to become less pure – the doors of *tumah* are opened for him.

Rav Wolbe used to put these three *maamarei Chazal* together, saying that they are essentially one and the same. A person has to recognize that there are two highways in life: there's one path that leads upwards, and it just keeps climbing heavenward – and one that leads down, all the way into the deep abyss. A Yid has to look inwardly and ask himself: "Do I want to be on the path that consists of non-stop growth – or do I want to be on the path that leads from one *aveirah* to the next, by making me such an empty vessel that I won't be capable of accepting holiness?"

What Path was Esav On?

I think that with this we can understand clearly the difference between the reaction that Esav had to Yaakov getting the *bechorah*, to the reaction that he had when Yaakov got the *brachos*. Let's think about Esav's state of being on the day that he spurned the *bechorah*. Chazal tell us (Bava Basra 16b) that he had done five *aveiros* on that day – *znus*, *kefirah* and *retzicha*, to name a few; he had a lot of sins on his hands when he walked into the tent where Yaakov was cooking a delicious soup. So, Esav was clearly in a state of *aveirah goreres aveirah* on that day; he was about as empty a vessel as there could possibly be. Of course, he couldn't even dream of a *mitzvah* at that point in time! The very idea of serving Hashem in the Beis Hamikdash was repulsive to his empty soul. He turned down the greatest honor imaginable without batting an eyelash!

However, let's think about the day that Esav wished to receive the *brachos*. His father had instructed him to go and catch an animal in order to prepare him a delectable meal. The Midrash tells us that Hakadosh Baruch Hu caused him to have some difficulty catching a deer, so that Yaakov would have more time to prepare his own dish and feed Yitzchok before Esav would return. Each time Esav caught a deer and it slipped away, he surely grew more and more frustrated – but he was persistent, because he wanted to do the Kibbud Av as well as he could! He spent his entire day attempting to catch a deer, then roasting and seasoning it to perfection, all because his father commanded him to. When Esav arrived back at Yitzchok's tent – he was a full vessel! He was more than ready to accept more *ruchniyus*; he was on the correct path. He walked in with a broad smile on his face, ready to accept the 613 *mitzvos* upon himself and his children – only to hear that he wasn't going to get any of it. Of course, upon hearing this tragic news, Esav was utterly distraught!

There is a very important lesson to be learnt from this. We see over here that the entire difference between "ויבז" and "וישטים" – making a mockery out of Torah, and desperately desiring Torah – all depends on one thing: what path you are on.

Two Paths. Two Very Different Days

Let's say a person is walking down the street on his way to Shul, and in his peripheral vision, he notices something that he shouldn't gaze at. If he chooses to look away – then he's already starting a positive path for himself. When he arrives in Shul, he is now entering with a mind that already experienced *ruchniyus* that day; it is more likely that he will *daven* with more *kavanah*, and he will pay more attention to the words that he usually says by rote. Once he's in that mode – he will probably *daven* for more *hatzlacha* in his *Torah v'avodah* that day. Now, when he approaches his morning *chavrusah* – he is coming in with a rather full vessel. When somebody makes an offensive remark to him that afternoon, he is already very well equipped to just ignore it and not allow his anger to overpower him. And the path goes on and on, leading him through a day with more success in every area of *avodas Hashem*. Now, imagine if he would have just given in to that first *yetzer hara* of the day; everything would have been far more likely to head in a downwards spiral.

Let's say a person is learning with his *chavrusah*, and he excuses himself for a minute. He has a clear game-plan in mind: go to the bathroom for a minute, go get a coffee – and come right back to the Beis Medrash. Now, sometimes he leaves his seat and he's back in five minutes, ready to conquer the world; other times, he only comes back a half an hour later, and he tells his *chavrusah* something like: "You won't believe how crazy the Democrats are. They're *mamash* pushing such a left-wing agenda!" And then he proceeds to relay the conversation from the coffee room, while his *chavrusah* begins to compete with even juicier stories of the day, and before you know it – the whole *seder* is killed. What can be the cause behind these two divergent outcomes?

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This may sound a bit far-fetched – but perhaps it all begins with how he makes his *Asher Yatzar*. On the days that he chooses to make the *bracha* with *kavanah*, honestly filling himself with feelings of gratitude to the Ribono shel Olam for his healthy body – he is starting his short break on the right path. When he goes to get his coffee, he's on a mission to get back to the Gemara as soon as humanly possible. When someone approaches him with some of the most recent hock, or some old joke, he dismisses him with a polite smile, letting him know that he's rushing back to his *chavrusah*, and the rest is smooth sailing. But if he starts off with the rattled-off-barely-awake *Asher Yatzar*, he's more likely to fail the rest of his coffee break.

Rav Wolbe would advise his *talmidim* to remind themselves regularly over the course of their day to look inwardly and ask: "What path am I on right now?" This tactic is helpful whether a person is on the right path or the wrong one. If he asks himself the question at some point during the day and determines that he's indeed on the *aveiros* track, then he can simply pull himself off and get back on the right track. Without this midday reckoning, he would probably just continue the chain for the rest of the afternoon. Conversely, if he finds that he's on the right track, then he'll feel invigorated to continue upwards. The bottom line is, if a person trains himself to frequently recalibrate with the path of *mitzvah goreres mitzvah*, then he is far more likely to have a day filled with proper *avodas Hashem*.

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' לָהּ שְׁנֵי גוֹיִם בְּבִטְנָהּ (בראשית כ"ה כ"ג)
רש"י: גיים כתיב, אלו אנטונינוס ורבי.

Why Are There So Few Arab Geirim?

Throughout history, Klal Yisroel has accepted many *geirim* from the nations of the world. Thousands of converts to Judaism over the centuries have come from the French, the British, the Americans – but we never hear of any *geirim* coming from the Bnei Yishma'el. It seems like the Arabs stay very far away from the Jews. I asked around, and people have been telling me that this is true from a historical standpoint; Arabs rarely convert to Judaism. What's *pshat* in this phenomenon?

My dear friend R' Yossi Brachfeld worked tirelessly on reprinting the *sefer* Chein Tov from one of the *kadmonim* [Rav Tuvya Halevi, one of the Chachomim of Tzefas in the generation after the Bais Yosef]. The Chein Tov writes that the reason why Yishma'el stays away from the Yidden is because his mother was not Sarah; his mother was Hagar, a *shifcha* who was not part of the chain of the *Avos* and *Imahos*. Esav, on the other hand, had Rivka for a mother. Rivka was one of the *heiligeh Imahos*, and Esav therefore has within himself sparks of *kedusha* as well, and this causes that there were always many *geirim* from Esav.

He further notes that Yaakov, who was the father of all of Klal Yisroel – the root of good in the world, was born as a twin with Esav, who was the father of Edom – one of the greatest sources of רע throughout the generations. He explains that this is because the two are actually eternal partners; the רע of Esav is really just there to give us an opportunity to choose the good. Without the רע, we wouldn't have a *nisayon* in doing the right thing. Therefore, during the times of Moshiach, Esav's descendants will give up their connection to רע, and they will embrace the *emes* of the Torah. Now, why couldn't the same happen with Yishma'el and Yitzchok? Couldn't they also be eternal partners,

born as twins? The Chein Tov answers that Sarah, aside from being a tremendous *tzadekes*, also had a father and brother who turned out to be relatively good people – Haran and Lot; she therefore couldn't possibly carry and give birth to such a *rasha*. Rivka, however, came from the home of Besu'el and Lavan who were total *reshaim*; she was therefore able of give birth to a *rasha*.

The Chein Tov concludes that because Rivka was able to give birth to and raise Esav – his descendants are far more easily drawn towards the *emes* of Yiddishkeit. Whereas the *einiklach* of Yishma'el, on the other hand, are naturally uninterested in the *am hanivchar*. He explains that this was Rivka's intention when she said “אם כן למה זה אנכי” – why should I give birth to a *rasha*, let a *shifcha* do that, just like Yishmael was born from Hagar and not from Sarah. To that Hashem answered “שְׁנֵי גוֹיִם בְּבֶטְנָהּ” – Rivka herself has to give birth to Esav so that *geirim* like Antoninus can come from him.

Receiving the Portion of the Wicked People

Chazal tell us in various places that in addition to what they acquired on their own, *tzaddikim* end up getting the portions of Olam Habah that were originally set aside for the *resha'im* before they sinned. The Nesivos explains that this is because the *tzaddikim* only managed to reach their high *madreigos* thanks to the *resh'iam*; it was the fact that they were constantly trying to seduce him with temptations that caused him to have to fight harder and harder, ultimately causing him to accrue a lot more *s'char*.

My Rebbe, Rav Yitzchok Feigelstock, used to similarly say that the רע is actually very good for us because it causes the טוב to *shteig*. This concept can be used as a form of tremendous *chizuk*. If a person finds that certain people are often hurting him and trying to affect him spiritually, financially or physically – then he should realize that although they are causing him pain or distress, they are also benefiting him. After 120, he's going to receive large swaths of that person's portion in Olam Habah, thanks to the fact that this fellow made his *avodah* so much more difficult.

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