

# TWO PEOPLE, TWO VIEWS, TWO WORLDS

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

## Friday Night:

*G-d said to her, "Two nations are in your womb--two nations shall be parted from your womb ..."*  
(Bereishis 25:23)

Two nations are in your womb ... The word "goyim" ("nations") is written [in the Torah as] "geyim," (which means "exalted," or "noble persons"), an allusion to Antoninus and Rebi, from whose table neither radish nor lettuce was missing, neither in summer nor in winter. (Rashi)

Though, Ya'akov and Eisav were born only in the year 2108/1653 BCE, Rebi (Yehudah HaNasi) and Antoninus (the philosopher Roman Emperor), alluded to in the above posuk, were not born for another some 1,820 years later. Unlike the relationship between Ya'akov and Eisav their ancestors, Rebi's and Antoninus's relationship was based upon mutual respect; indeed, Antoninus worshipped the ground that Rebi walked on. To wit:

He [Antoninus] used to serve Rebi in all his needs, and he once questioned if he would have a share in the World-to-Come, to which Rebi answered,  
"Yes."

"But," he said to Rebi, "does it not say, 'No one from the house of Eisav shall remain' (Ovadiah 1:18)?"  
"This means," Rebi answered, "he who acts like Eisav."

"But it also says, 'There are Edom, her kings and all her princes.' (Yechezkel 32:29)?"

Rebi again replied, "It says 'kings,' but not 'all her kings'; 'All her princes,' but not 'all her ministers.' We have learned the same thing from the following brisa: Her kings, but not all her kings. This excludes Antoninus son of Asuros and his associates ... (Avodah Zarah 10b)

It was a singular time in Jewish history, necessary for Rebi Yehudah HaNasi to redact the Mishnah just in time to preserve the Oral Law for future generations. Hundreds of years of horrible persecution by Eisav's descendants and defection from the ranks of Torah Jewry put terrible strain on the unbroken "chain" of Jewish tradition, which forced the writing down of what hitherto was meant to remain oral. The result was a codified Mishnah, an inseparable bond between a descendant of Ya'akov and one of Eisav, and, Antoninus' meriting of the eternal life!

This is why, perhaps, it is strange that an allusion to this anomaly should occur at a time when Eisav was acting normal: hating and trying to kill Ya'akov, as the Midrash warns,

It is a well-known halacha that Eisav hates Ya'akov. (Midrash HaGadol 28:1)

--strange, that is, until one considers the nature of Rivkah Imeinu's inquiry.

What did Rivkah really want to know, when she came and inquired of Shem and Eiver regarding the nature of her difficult pregnancy? Was she only concerned about what would happen to herself as a result? Was she not more like Avraham, whose only concern was for the welfare of his descendants--that they should be able to serve G-d with joy and without distraction that results from hardship?

Perhaps, then, that is why the posuk alludes to Rebi's time, when Eisav's descendant would finally give Ya'akov's descendants a chance to breathe spiritually, and enjoy a period of respite. This would serve not only to secure the authenticity of the Oral Law for all generations to come, but it would also give them a "taste" of the future time of redemption, when the kings of the world would finally come to appreciate the special role the Jewish people play in history.

Furthermore, the posuk alludes to how some non-Jews, even high up in the ranks of their nations, will understand and appreciate how the Jewish people were their "ticket" to Eternity. Kings like Antoninus, and that of the Kuzar Kingdom, and the Queen of Sheba in Shlomo's time.

Perhaps, these short moments of glory in world history would be minute compared to the long and bitter exiles Rivkah's children would have to endure. However, it would be enough, Rivkah understood, to make sure that we would endure, until we reached that time in history when Eisav would no longer bother us, and we could enjoy G-d's presence unencumbered, forever.

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## Shabbos Day:

*Yitzchak was old, and his eyes were too weak to see, and he called Eisav his eldest son, and spoke to him, and he answered, "Here I am." (Bereishis 27:1)*

Why does the Torah mention that Yitzchak's eyes became too weak to see? Though it is not clear from the posuk itself, Rashi at least explains why his eyes became weak:

"... Through the smoke raised by these [women, mentioned in the previous section, whom Eisav married and who offered incense for idol worship purposes]. Another explanation: When Yitzchak was bound upon the altar, and his father was about to slaughter him, at that moment Heaven opened up and the angels saw [what was about to happen] and their tears flowed, and fell on his eyes, and that is why they [later] became weak. Another explanation: In order that Ya'akov should be able to take the blessings [without his father knowing it was him]." (Rashi)

Only Rashi's last explanation answers both questions--why Yitzchak's eyes became weak, and why the posuk tells us this now: G-d weakened them, in order that Ya'akov should receive the blessings

that Yitzchak had intended to give to Eisav, his firstborn.

According to Rashi's first answer, Yitzchak's blindness should have been a reason NOT to give Eisav the blessing. After all, Yitzchak could have told Eisav, "You know why I'm blind? Because YOUR wives offer incense to idols, and their smoke has blinded me! Do you expect me to give YOU the holy blessings?"

Rashi's second answer makes any connection between Yitzchak's blindness and its reference here very difficult. Because Yitzchak was prepared to sacrifice his life for G-d, he "merited" a physical disability that prevented him from seeing Eisav's unworthiness, and leaving him vulnerable to making the biggest mistake of history? Where's the justice in THAT ONE?

There are more questions that can be asked here, such as, why does Rashi need to bring three answers for one question? Does he always point out all or most of the interpretations of a single posuk? And, even should there be a good reason why Rashi felt compelled to quote all three sources, why does he mention them in this order? Should not the incident of the Akeidah, which, historically, came first, be mentioned first?

To begin to answer this complex question, we have to understand what the Akeidah really represented, at least historically. The Akeidah was not merely a test of one man's loyalty to G-d, to see whether or not he would willingly sacrifice his favorite son and heir to G-d. The Akeidah was a rare occurrence in history, when the forces of Chesed--Avraham--had completely subdued the forces of Gevuros (Strength) and Din (Judgment)--Yitzchak--Kabbalistic terms for the apparent absence of G-d's light. That is why:

Avraham named the place "G-d will see." Today, it is therefore said, "On G-d's Mountain, He will be seen." (Bereishis 22:14)

Hence, Chesed, at the time of the Akeidah, ruled the day, and where there is chesed, there is revelation of G-d's light. In other words, the Akeidah was the closest history ever came to being only moments away from an early arrival of Moshiach!

Alas, but it was not meant to be (Moshiach's arrival, that is), and the moment was imminent when "Gevurah" would be "released" and "let loose" on the world--hester panim, the "hiding of G-d's face," would be able to come back with a vengeance.

However, as the Talmud points out:

A judge has only what his eyes see. (Bava Basra 131a)

And, if those eyes happen to be weak, physically or even metaphorically, then his ability to judge is also weakened, being unable to clearly discern different aspects of reality.

There is a good side and bad side to this, for it is a two-way street. If you want to live in a reality that is less judgmental, then you have to appreciate that people you feel SHOULD be judged will also

"get away" with what they will do as well, even if it is to yours and the world's detriment.

The angels wanted to protect the Jewish people in the future, who were bound to sin and earn Divine wrath. At the moment of Gevuros's vulnerability, the Heavens were opened up and they were permitted to see this a once-in-history opportunity to "tinker" with and "temper" strict justice for the benefit of the future Jewish nation. Knowing the "script," that Yitzchak would walk away again, and worried about the effects that would have on the future Jewish nation, they seized the moment went after the "eyes" of strict justice, and weakened them.

However, as we learn in this week's parshah, every weakness has two sides to it, and in this case, the negative side was Eisav's ability to marry the wrong women, and history's willingness to let those evil people infiltrate the holy camp of the Jewish people, and further weaken Yitzchak's ability to see clearly. And, how many times have we witnessed "history's" willingness to let evil people arise and murder millions of innocent descendants of Ya'akov?

Did the angels make a mistake? What good can possibly come from all this?

Hence, Rashi's third, and perhaps, most important answer, the one that puts the previous two in perspective: all of it, even the parts of history we barely survived and never understood, are just for the Jewish people to reap eternal rewards. In the end, after it is all said-and-done, it will have been only so that Ya'akov can receive the "blessing"--at points throughout history, and finally, G-d willing, at the "End-of-Days."

Because, as we have seen in the past, and will see at the end, the Eisavs of history will not get away with anything--and we will finally understand how all of it was part of the fulfillment of G-d's covenant with Avraham, and the purpose of creation.

Thank you, Rashi, for your ALL your answers.

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## **SEUDAH SHLISHI:**

*He [Yitzchak] said [to Eisav], "I am old and do not know the day of my death." (Bereishis 27:2)*

The Midrash points out that there are seven things concealed from a person, one of which is the day of his death. The other six are (and in brackets are the reasons given for each):

1. The date of the Final Redemption (the "early" date of Moshiach is not fixed, and those far from any "fixed" date would not be able to live knowing that redemption could not come in their lifetimes).
2. The full severity of G-d's judgment (we would not be able to comprehend or bear this knowledge in our present physical state).
3. The business in which he will succeed (a person would only focus on those businesses that would enrich him, and deny himself and the world of other necessary experiences).

4. Another person's thoughts (this would be very detrimental to peace on earth, to say the least).
5. The gender of a child before its birth (abortions would be rampant if the "undesired" gender was about to be born; this happens already today).
6. The precise moment of Eisav's descendant's downfall, which will follow the arrival of Moshiach (earlier generations would despair, just as in the case of #1). (Bereishis Rabbah 65:7)

As for the day of one's death, that can also change based upon one's merits and teshuvah. However, the Talmud adds another insight to this idea:

Rebi Eliezer said, "One should do teshuvah before his death." "Does one then know the day of his death?" his students asked him. "How much more so should you do teshuvah today," he answered them, "in case you die tomorrow. This way, all of your days will be spent in teshuvah!" (Shabbos 153a)

--which, of course, would not be the case if a person knew the precise day of his or her death. He would sin ALL of his life, and wait for one day before the appointed time to do teshuvah--and that's not what life in This World is about!

In other words, This World is a corridor to the World-to-Come, and the rite of passage is one's positive, moral use of free-will. Teshuvah out of fear of disaster is hardly teshuvah at all, certainly when compared to teshuvah that is performed because one sees and humbles himself to truth--THE Truth. The time to do teshuvah is when things are going well, while the "skies" are blue and peaceful, not once G-d steps into history and makes it clear to us that He has had enough of our wayward behavior, and the storm clouds of Divine intervention begin to form on the horizon.

However, though the day of one's death may not be known to him well in advance, we learn from the Torah, and from later stories, that the precise day of one's death may be made known to certain righteous people the actual day they are meant to die. Since they have spent their lives serving G-d, and have lived each day meaningfully as if it was their last, as a bonus, G-d gives them a little advance notice so that they can get their affairs in order just before they go, and leave This World knowing all is in order--Above and Below.

However, for the masses out there who refuse to take life seriously, and whom live as if "there will always be another tomorrow," death usually comes suddenly, measure-for-measure. They leave this world, in the vast majority of cases, with very little in order down here on earth, and even less in order Above.

It is not a good position to be in, but one that we have been given free-will to rectify, should be so choose.

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### **MELAVE MALKAH:**

*Rav Avina said: All who say, "A psalm of praise of Dovid" (Tehillim 145) three times [daily] is guaranteed*

*to go to the World-to-Come. Why? Because it follows the "Aleph-Bais." If so, then, instead I say, "Praiseworthy are those whose way is perfect ..." (Tehillim 119), during which the "Aleph-Bais" is followed eight times. Rather, it is because it mentions, "You open Your hand ..." (Brochos 4b)*

And that is what we do: we say Tehillim 145 three times daily, twice in the morning service and once at the beginning of Mincha, preceded by the two verses, "Happy are those who dwell ..." ("Ashrei yoshvei veisechah ..."). And, as the Talmud says, the stanzas follow the "Aleph-Bais" in order, with the exception of the letter "nun" (which was left out) for which the Talmud provides the reason.

However, as important a reason as saying the "Aleph-Bais" is, more important is the verse that says, "You [G-d] open Your hand, and satisfy the desire of every living thing." For, in this verse lies the essential difference between Ya'akov and his twin brother Eisav--between going to the World-to-Come, and being able to enjoy This World ONLY.

From where do we learn this? We learn it from many places, but a key place is this week's parshah, when Yitzchak blessed Ya'akov with the words:

"And G-d (Elokim) will give you of the dew of Heaven ..." (Bereishis 27:28)

However, when Yitzchak later blessed Eisav (27:37), there was no mention of G-d, seemingly disconnecting Eisav's blessing from its Source, G-d Himself.

Not so for Ya'akov: not only is G-d mentioned, but the specific name of G-d that implies justice ("Elokim") is employed, implying that only when Ya'akov DESERVES the blessing will it, in fact, be fulfilled. Eisav's blessing comes regardless of his spiritual behavior (to a limit), but Ya'akov's blessing is proportional to the level of Torah to which he strives to uphold.

One might yell "Foul!" Why should we, the Jewish people, have to work so hard for our blessing, when Eisav and his descendants get the rain in the proper season no matter they're spiritually up to? The answer to this question is: relationship.

The point of This World is not materialistic success; that is a means to an end, that end being ETERNAL CLOSENESS TO G-D in the World-to-Come. That can only be a reality if a person in This World has earned that relationship, by constantly pursuing G-d and appreciating the gift of life and all aspects of it, which, as we all know only too well, is not the easiest thing to do.

Yitzchak understood this. Therefore, he sought to fortify Ya'akov against the trappings of This World, to help him and his children to maintain the proper spiritual perspective at all times. How did he do this? He "pulled" G-d into the picture, so-to-speak, and made Ya'akov's physical blessing dependent upon his spiritual status.

Yes, it made Ya'akov's life in This World physically more difficult. But, on the same token, it made his spiritual life in This World far easier, and therefore, his place in the World-to-Come more secure. It was just the opposite for Eisav, who, in inheriting This World sacrificed the World-to-Come.

All of this is implied in the words, "You open Your hand ..." from 145, for, it reminds us each day--three times a day--of the Source of our bounty, and, the relationship upon which it is based. Is it any wonder then, in the end, why this tehillah is so important for guaranteeing one's portion in the World-to-Come?

Being "Shabbos Mevarchin"--the Shabbos when we announce the new Jewish month coming up the following week, we'll even tie this theme to Chodesh Kislev.

It is in the month of Kislev that the Jewish holiday of Chanukah falls. It is called the "Holiday of Lights," not just because of the candles we light for eight nights in the midst of winter darkness, but, because it is a holiday that enlightens us so that we can reconnect to G-d.

As we have said on many occasions, and the Midrash says in Parashas Noach, the dove which Noach sent out represented the Jewish people going into the Greek exile in the future. The dove brought back an olive branch (though there were higher trees to choose from), says Rashi, to tell Noach that, "Better that the food be bitter (as unpickled olives are) but from the hand of G-d, than food sweet as honey from the hand of man."

It was the reversal of this principle that led to the great Flood and eradication of the previous generations, the dove implied. And, it is the reversal of this idea that leads to prolonged Jewish exile, as we have learned. Kislev is a month to turn death into life, darkness to light, by rising to the level of this profound intellectual understanding, which, for the dove, seemed to be a simple fact of life.

Have a great Shabbos,  
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