

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Dedicated to Rivkah Malkah bas Ahavah Haddasah, amush, for waking me up to the importance of Ahavas Chinum. May Hashem bless her in all her ways. It is also dedicated to Yisroel Ya'akov ben Esther. May the merit generated by this parshah sheet help to bring him a refuah shlaimah immediately. And, if you can remember him in your prayers, I would greatly appreciate it.

FRIDAY NIGHT:

Ya'akov looked up and saw Eisav coming with 400 men. He divided the children among Leah and Rachel and among the two maidservants. He put the maidservants and their children first, Leah and her children after them, and Rachel and Yosef last. He passed ahead of them and he bowed to the ground seven times until he reached his brother. (Bereishis 33:1-3)

In this week's parshah, Ya'akov confronts Eisav after having avoided such a confrontation for 34 years. He fled from home after taking the blessings right out from under Eisav's nose when they were both 63 years old. He was now returning to face the music at the age of 97 years old, married to four wives and after having fathered 11 of the 12 tribes. Add to all of this the previous night's accomplishment of defeating the Angel of Eisav and receiving his new name, Yisroel, and you get a very different man than the tent-sitter with whom this chapter of history began.

Until now, we have defined this universe-stopping confrontation between these twin brothers in terms of spirituality versus materialism. Eisav came to Ya'akov with the view that the world is ours for the taking, to derive whatever enjoyment we can to suit our own personal drives for physical pleasure. Ya'akov countered with the perspective that the physical world only has meaning if it is used in the service of G-d, which brings the true and ultimate pleasure for which a human being truly yearns.

Neither one able to influence the other, they each went off in their own separate directions, physically and ideologically.

However, there is another aspect to this historical confrontation that I have never before addressed, at least not in this context, and it may be the most relevant of all ideas as we approach our final destination on this side of history.

To begin with, and this is also something we have mentioned before, there are two main forces within Creation, Chesed (Kindness) and Gevurah (Strength), that are complete opposites. Indeed,

Chesed is compared to water and is said to have the ability to join things together, just as water causes flour to become a homogeneous dough. Gevurah is compared to fire whose nature is to cause separation, like what happens to a piece of wood after it has been completely burned.

It does not take a lot of imagination to figure out which of the brothers represented which characteristic. Ya'akov clearly continued on with the ways of his grandfather, Avraham Avinu, who was world-renowned for his acts of loving kindness. The fact that Esav was out murdering and pillaging the very day his grandfather died shows how much he valued his ancestor's belief system.

This does not mean that each brother did not possess the potential to act the other way. On the contrary, they were, ARE twin brothers, and just as Ya'akov can become super-materialistic like Eisav, Eisav can also become quite spiritual like Ya'akov. So too can Ya'akov become very Gevurah-oriented and Eisav be capable of great acts of Chesed. Just look how divided the Jewish people have become, and how charitable the Western nations have been over the last century.

However, it is easier to be Gevurah-oriented. Even though the world was built upon Chesed (Tehillim 89:3), still the world follows a path of Gevurah. We live on the level of the sefirah called Malchus, which belongs to the side of Gevurah. We are constantly being judged for our actions, and we constantly judge others for theirs as well. As the Torah says:

G-d said, "I will never again curse the land because of mankind, since the impulse of man's heart is evil from his youth." (Bereishis 8:21)

We are born selfish, and it does not take much time for a child to learn how to hurt another to get what he or she wants, with little or no recrimination. The struggle to become a mentsch is an ongoing and uphill battle, with many people dropping out of the battle early in order to integrate Gevurah-type behavior, such as jealousy and hatred, into their everyday way of life. Newspapers reveal to what extent this is true, and Chesed stories are often relegated to the Family Section in the back of the paper (for those who make it that far).

That, of course, is my point. And to be more accurate and instructive, is the test. The world wasn't created with Din (Judgment) to make it easy for us to behave that way, anymore than Avraham's tests were given to him to destroy his sense of Chesed and make him more Gevurah-oriented. On the contrary, the ten tests of Avraham were designed to see to what extent his Chesed really went.

➤SHABBOS DAY:

He told him, "No longer will you be called 'Ya'akov,' but 'Yisroel,' because you have struggled with [an angel of] G-d, and with men, and have prevailed." (Bereishis 32:29)

Rabbi Hutner, zt"l, wrote that the difference in history before the giving of Torah and after was the type of Chesed Heaven performed for man. Prior to the giving of Torah, Rav Hutner explained, Chesed was not connected to performance, and thus evil people lived long, and often pleasant lives. This type of Chesed, Rav Hutner called "Chesed Vitor," which basically means "Free Chesed."

However, continued Rav Hutner, with the giving of Torah came a new kind of Chesed, Chesed Mishpat - Judgment Chesed. This meant that Chesed became connected to one's actions, and one had to be worthy of Chesed to receive it from Heaven. The time of freebies had come to an end, giving history more of a reward-and-punishment type of overtone, encouraging mankind to make an effort to be good, or at least better.

As a father, I can relate to this completely. I love to give to my children, and nothing more gives me satisfaction than seeing the happiness my children feel when I have enhanced their lives with something they want (providing, of course, that it fits into the realm of what the Torah permits). All I ask in return from my children, or anyone I give to for that matter, is appreciation of the good I have done for them, which can range from a simple thank you to behavior that shows they appreciate my gift.

In fact, the entire mitzvah of Kibud Av v'Eim (honoring one's father and mother), is based upon the concept of Hakores HaTov - recognizing the good that was done for us by our parents, starting with the opportunity of having been given life and including all the millions of other aspects in life that they give to us over our entire lifetime. It was a lack of Hakores HaTov that led Adam to blame HIS sin on G-d by complaining that it was HE who made Chava and put her into the world. That didn't go over so well with G-d.

And, as a parent, it makes sense to me that once my children stop showing me the proper appreciation for what I do for them, or act in a way that seems to indicate this, that I should stop giving to them the good they want. I'm not talking about starving our kids to death, but about reducing the niceties that make life more pleasant, such as extra money for non- essentials.

What about love? Can a child do something to cut off the most important gift a parent can give to him or her, love and emotional support?

Family therapists put in long hours working on that question. Their offices are filled with children who hurt from the void their parents left by withdrawing love and emotional support, and some of those children are already parents themselves. The parents, for the most part, claim no such thing occurred. "Once my child, always my child," they tell their disenfranchised child and the therapist. The love was and is always there, the parents counter, whether the child knew it or not.

It's not that children do not misbehave. HAH! They can push parents to their limits and wits end, and go to great extents to sabotage their relationship with their parents and other elders. They can act very Eisav- like with parents who try to instill Ya'akov's approach to life into their consciousness. Parents can do things that trigger and invoke the kind of judgment that seems to flow so naturally through Creation, judgment that oftentimes seems to be the Torah's approach to Chinuch Banim (the education of children).

But, in the words of the Talmud, it is much easier to be strict WITHIN A TORAH FRAMEWORK than to be lenient. Being judgmental and strict is swift and decisive, making one's point of view clear and

effective. Love and warmth requires both creativity and patience, and in some cases, demand an almost super-human balancing act, especially in teacher-student confrontations during class.

However, says the Vilna Gaon:

The path of the Sitra Achra is sadness, whereas the path of kedushah is joy. (Oros HaGRA, p. 240)

And that, my friends, pretty much says it all.

SEUDOS SHLISHIS:

Serve G-d with joy. (Tehillim 100:2)

A good friend of mine enlightened me with this teaching of the Vilna Gaon, and together we discussed what it meant. After all, the Jewish people are about kedushah (holiness), whereas the Sitra Achra is the angel who ministers over the affairs of Eisav in Heaven. It is also the name of the angel that Ya'akov struggled with and defeated the night before he met up with Eisav, which earned him the name, Yisroel.

Thus, the Vilna Gaon is really teaching about what it means to become a Yisroel, which as we have discussed on many occasions, is the challenge of every knowing Jew throughout history. We want kedushah, we NEED kedushah, because it is intrinsic to the very nature of every Jew, and the Gaon from Vilna is telling us that simchah is the hurdle one must get over to achieve it.

Thus, Dovid HaMelech wrote:

Serve G-d with joy. (Tehillim 100:2)

Because, if you think about it, there is really no other way to serve G-d. For, sadness is the force within Creation that emanates from the side of Gevurah, and it divides and conquers the person's consciousness, distracting him away from giving his entire being over to the will of his Creator. Distraction is THE number one tool of the yetzer hara, the other name of the Sitra Achra, who uses it to minimize one's connection to G-d and our service of Him as well.

On the other hand, when one feels true joy, he feels unified and focused. He feels good and feels like doing good. It is not even an intellectual struggle, but a natural reaction to the good one has received. It's simple: good begets good, and in this way one becomes like G-d, the secret of being WITH G-d, as the Ramchal reveals in his monumental work, Derech Hashem.

Thus, what Dovid HaMelech was really saying is to serve G-d with your entire being, something that can only happen when you are in a state of joy. That is why prophets used to have musicians play for them before going into a state of prophecy, in order to unify their entire being which was a prerequisite for receiving the word of G-d so directly. Music has the power to unify the body and soul when it is holy in nature and content, and therefore speaks to the soul, and not just the body.

Having said this, we can now understand what the Talmud means when it tells us that the Second

Temple was destroyed as a result of *sinas chinum* (baseless hatred) (Yoma 9b). Thus, it burned to the ground even though it was made of stone.

The Talmud goes even further: such hatred was and is as bad in the eyes of G-d as murder, illicit relationships, and idol worship, sins that a Jew is supposed to die for rather than to commit. Incomprehensible, isn't it? On the other hand, it is hard to find a single Jew who will use the Torah as the basis for having murdered an innocent person, for having had an immoral relationship, or for having worshipped an idol. However, you will find many who will tell you that the hate he or she feels for another Jew is Torah-based. Indeed, I am constantly amazed at how one of my children will cite one of MY principles to justify the hate-like reaction he has shown to one of his siblings or to a friend of his - until, that is, I see myself doing the same thing regarding my fellow Jews.

In fact, if I were G-d, I would have destroyed the world a long time ago. From my point of view, the Torah demands it. Judgment requires it. *Gevurah* encourages it. And all of a sudden, I feel more like *Eisav*, my twin brother, rather than *Ya'akov*, my namesake. No wonder the rabbis teach that the third and final temple will only be built as a result of *ahavas-chinum* (unconditional love), the kind that G-d seems to be showing us as we live our lives right now.

MELAVE MALKAH:

For you are our Father; though Avraham may not know us and Yisroel may not recognize us, You, G-d are our Father; "our Eternal Redeemer" is Your Name. (Yeshayahu 63:16)

Allow me to share with you a very unusual account from the Talmud. Avraham Avinu was the paradigm of *Chesed*, and Ya'akov was considered to be the continuation and refinement of that *Chesed*. On the other hand, Yitzchak, the middle Forefather was the paradigm of *Gevurah*, and yet the Talmud records:

Rav Shmuel b. Nahmani also said in Rebi Yochanan's name: What is meant by, "For you are our Father; though Avraham may not know us and Yisroel may not recognize us, You, G-d are our Father; 'our Eternal Redeemer' is Your Name" (Yeshayahu 63:16)? In the future to come The Holy One, Blessed is He, will say to Avraham, "Your children have sinned against Me."

He will answer Him, "Master of the Universe! Let them be wiped out for the sanctification of Your Name."

Then He will say, "I will say this to Ya'akov who experienced the pain of bringing up children; maybe he will ask for mercy for them." So He will say to him, "Your children have sinned."

He [too] will answer Him, "Master of the Universe! Let them be wiped out for the sanctification of Your Name."

He will then respond, "There is no reason in old men, and no counsel in children!"

Then He say to Yitzchak, "Your children have sinned against me." But he will answer Him,

"Master of the Universe! Are they my children and not Your children? When they gave precedence to "we will do" over "we will listen" before You, You called them, 'Yisroel my son, my firstborn' (Shemos 4:22). Now they are MY sons, and not YOUR sons! Moreover, how much have they sinned? How many are the years of man? Seventy. Subtract twenty, for which You do not punish them, [and] there fifty remain. Subtract twenty-five which comprise the nights, [and] there remain twenty-five. Subtract twelve and a half of prayer, eating, and Nature's calls, [and] there remain twelve and a half. If You will bear all of these, then it is fine; if not, half will be upon me and half upon You. And should You say that they must all be upon me, then I offered myself up before You [as a sacrifice]!"

[Thereupon] they shall say, "For you [i.e., Yitzchak] are our father." Then Yitzchak will say to them, "Instead of praising me, praise The Holy One, Blessed is He," and Yitzchak will show them The Holy One, Blessed is He, with their own eyes. Immediately they will lift up their eyes on High and exclaim, You, G-d are our Father; 'our Eternal Redeemer' is Your Name." (Shabbos 89a)

Among the many questions this nice little story invokes, is WHAT IS GOING ON HERE?

The Jewish people have sinned, and that means punishment from G-d. But, apparently G-d didn't want to punish them for some reason, and so He went in search of someone who would beg for mercy on their behalf. Yet, after finding Avraham who symbolized mercy in his lifetime, G-d received a Gevurah-type response for His effort. And He did not fare any better when He went to Ya'akov to find a reason to mitigate the punishment of the Jewish people that, according to strict judgment, was coming to them.

Then, surprise of surprises, it was Yitzchak, Mr. Din himself who pressed all the right buttons and brought down just enough Divine mercy to spare us from elimination. Talk about unlikely saviors!

On the other hand, should we really be surprised at Yitzchak Avinu's capacity to suppress his nature of din and show unconditional love? Yitzchak was a great prophet and no one's fool, and yet he showed love for Eisav, probably until the day he died. He believed in him enough to be willing to give the blessing of the firstborn to him if Divine Providence had not stepped in.

Yes, Eisav did evil things. Yes, Ya'akov was a much better person. But, perhaps, just maybe with the proper act and the help of the blessings, Eisav just might have turned around and become, over time, what Dovid HaMelech became, red, ruddy and the king of Israel. Thus, he sent him in search of food just prior to blessing him, to prepare food "just the way I love it," an act of kibud av.

And, according to the Midrash, he might have been right about that had Heaven not had other plans for Eisav, preventing him from catching kosher game. Nevertheless, it was probably Yitzchak's unconditional love of Eisav that kept Eisav coming back home, leaving open his potential to do teshuvah, something Rashi implies was possible in the elsewhere (Bereishis 32:22).

In fact, this explanation may help us understand something Rashi claimed to have no explanation for. The posuk says:

And Yitzchak sent away Ya'akov, and he went to Padam Aram to Lavan, son of Besuel the Arami, the brother of Rivkah, the mother of Ya'akov and Eisav. (Bereishis 28:5)

THE MOTHER OF YA'AKOV AND EISAV: I do not know what this was intended to tell us. (Rashi)

With due respect to Rashi, perhaps it is a message for our generation: In spite of the fact that Rivkah loved Ya'akov more (which is why his name is mentioned first), and for good reason, even so, she remained his mother. That is, she found it within her heart to love Eisav too, though he gave her good reason to regret the day he was born. In fact, there was enough love to not want to lose both of her sons on the same day (Bereishis 27:45). And that was Eisav, about whom Rivkah was told would pursue idol worship and father tribes that would eventually threaten the very existence of her beloved Ya'akov. How much more must we, the Jewish people, be able to have that kind of unconditional love for our own children and our fellow Jews.

Without it, there can never be the achdus (unity) of Chesed, but only the peirud (separation) of Gevurah, be that on a personal level within one's own consciousness, with one's own spouse and children, or nationally, within the nation as a whole. And, we know that once the Jewish people achieve something, it becomes attainable for the entire world.

Therefore, the struggle to become a true Yisroel is not just a matter of foresaking materialism for its own sake, but also of overcoming our nature to be din-like, our innate tendency to be judgmental and self-focused like Eisav was. As the Rambam points out, when rectifying a negative trait, it is advisable to first go to the other extreme, which is precisely what Yitzchak did, and that resulted in unconditional love. For Avraham and Ya'akov who came from the side of Chesed, their opposite extreme was Din, and that resulted in his forcing himself to invoke judgment, rather than mercy.

But for all of us, the mean is between both extremes, a balance that is best expressed by the name Yisroel - Chesed Mishpat. It represents our ability to judge actions and do whatever we can to align ourselves and others with Torah, but without ever having to break the flow of love that so many, especially in this generation, depend upon to remain connected to G-d and the rest of the Jewish nation. Let the healing begin.

Have a great Shabbos,
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Text

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