

# NATURALLY SUPERNATURAL

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

## FRIDAY NIGHT:

*Eisav said to Ya'akov, "Please, let me gulp down some of that red stuff; I'm feeling faint." Thus he was called "Edom". Ya'akov said, "[First] Sell me your first-born birthright." (Bereishit 25:3-31)*

Eisav's sale of the firstborn birthright to Ya'akov for some "red stuff" turned out to be the sale of a lifetime - actually, the sale of the centuries. No transaction has ever been so simple and basic, and yet so complex in terms of its historical ramifications. It took place 3,644 years ago, but it is still driving history, at least in terms of how the descendants of Eisav treat the descendants of Ya'akov.

However, that should not surprise us. As the Ramchal teaches in the mussar sefer, Derech Hashem, the period of the forefathers was really the period of roots. This meant that whatever nations did at that time, was destined to affect the future of those nations in one way or another throughout history. Just like the roots of a plant below the surface of the ground determine how and what will grow above the surface. Likewise, the actions of the "fathers" of that time, much of which is hidden from us, have determined the direction of in which entire nations will go, and especially the Jewish people.

At the center of this discussion is a basic fundamental about life: How to relate to this world. At one extreme there is the mishnah in Pirkei Avot which sees this world as a mere "corridor" to the next world, the eternal one (Pirkei Avot 4:16). At the other extreme, there is the Western viewpoint that has invested all of its marbles in this world, either marginalizing the concept of the World-to-Come, or dropping it altogether. And, there are countless versions in-between. Lifestyle follows priority.

Therefore, Ya'akov's life, which believed wholeheartedly in the point of view expressed by Pirkei Avot, was very different from that of Eisav's, who was really the father of Western society. Whereas Ya'akov pursued a spiritual existence based upon the belief that doing so was the key to maximize one's return in Olam HaBah, Eisav pursued a completely material existence predicated on the idea that what you see is all there is, so get as much of it as you can while you can. All this only goes to show the Hashgochah Pratit of the events that transpired. Wasn't Eisav the mighty hunter? Shouldn't it have been Ya'akov who came to Eisav for food, and not the other way around?

Perhaps the entire circumstance was supernatural, a set-up to force Eisav to choose between this world and the next world, and to provide Ya'akov with the opportunity to buy the birthright because Eisav didn't understand its importance. The rest is history. And though Eisav later tried to buy back

some of the World-to-Come from Ya'akov that he had once so readily given up, he did not succeed. Although refusing Eisav's offer may have cost us a portion in this world, Ya'akov never regretted it. Furthermore, whenever we, the descendants of Ya'akov Avinu, pursue materialism for the sake of fulfilling Torah and serving G-d, we seem to be able to acquire much of Eisav's world as well.

So then, what's the difference?

The difference comes down to earning a living. From Eisav's point of view, earning a living means going out into the world and making things happen for yourself. You want to eat, get a job. You want to get ahead materialistically, work harder. Invest more, invest harder. If you don't look out for yourself, no one else will, and this may mean, on occasion, taking advantage of the weaknesses of others. It's survival of the fittest.

This concept is not, says Ya'akov Avinu, for B'nei Ya'akov. For us, it is about serving G-d and performing His will; whatever needs to be done, whenever it needs to get done. We don't have to look out for ourselves, because by looking out for G-d, He looks out for us. Is this not what is promised at the beginning of Parashat Behar and Parashat Bechukotai? Take care of your portion in the World-to-Come, says the Rambam in his commentary on the Mishnah, and G-d will take care of your daily needs in this world.

What could be simpler?

### **SHABBAT DAY:**

*Then Yitzchak greatly shuddered and trembled, and said, "Who then is the one who hunted the game and brought it to me? I ate all of it before you came in and I blessed him. He will indeed be blessed."* (Bereishit 27:33)

This does not mean that every Jew is cut out for full-time Kollel, as the Talmud points out (Brochot 35b). But, it does mean that when a Jew "goes to work", no matter what that work may be, it has to be part of his service of G-d. He has to do it because somehow it facilitates that which the Torah requires of him. We have to make Shabbat, and making Shabbat costs money. From where shall we get it? From G-d, of course.

How will He give it to us? Will it fall from the sky like the manna in the desert? No, because if people saw that, they would automatically believe in G-d and Torah without having come to that decision intellectually. This goes against the purpose of Creation, for it says:

According to the effort is the reward" (Pirkei Avot 5:22), and since "everything is in the hands of Heaven except fear of G-d" (Brochot 33a). This means that all of our efforts are purely for the sake of developing fear of G-d. Thus, as Rav Dessler explains, we go to work not to earn a living, but to "give" G-d a way to funnel necessary funds to us without arousing the suspicion of non-believers.

Nevertheless, when it comes to the Jewish people the entire system is supernatural. On the surface

of things, it may appear as if the Jewish people earn a living just like the rest of the world does, but this is not true. And more than likely, if we were to investigate each and every case, we'd find something unusual about the situation that might imply luck to a non-believer, or Divine Providence to a believer. And it has to be this way, by virtue of the fact that we are B'nei Olam HaBah, as the Mishnah teaches, "Every Jew has a portion in the World-to-Come" (Sanhedrin 10a). To be eternal you have to ALWAYS be eternal, even when it seems that you are not. You can't live a finite existence and then, all of a sudden, become eternal. In fact, the greatest smoke screen in history has to be the body, which covers up the true nature of a person.

And, because our bodies look just like those of Eisav and the rest of the world, many of our people have come to believe that just like them, we are not supernatural. It's like talking to people who have seen water and ice, but have never seen the former become the latter, and trying to convince them that it is possible. Likewise, people who do not see the miracles of Jewish survival have a tough time learning to live differently than Eisav's descendants. It's an emunah. It's something that we have to believe because we have been told that it is true. In the time of the Avot, it was so obvious that even Potiphar, who lived on the 49th level of spiritual impurity, could recognize it in Yosef:

G-d was with Yosef and he became a successful man. He lived in the house of his Egyptian master. His master saw that G-d was with him, and that G-d made him successful in all that he did. Yosef thus became favored while he served his master (Bereishit 39:2-4). But in our time, it is not so obvious at all... until you believe it and start living that way. Then, all of a sudden, it becomes one of the most obvious things in the world. It then becomes the reality of bitachon — trust in G-d, and as the Midrash says:

*"One who trusts in G-d will be surrounded by kindness"* (Tehillim 32:10). Even an evil person who trusts in G-d will be surrounded by kindness. (Midrash Tehillim 32:10)

We can assume that the Midrash is simply making a point about the power of bitachon to elevate a Jew above the constraints of the seemingly natural world. Evil people are not known for their trust in G-d, but if one did trust in G-d, miracles would happen for him as well. However, explains the Ramban, if he didn't do teshuvah shortly after, then punishment would more than likely follow on the heels of the miracle.

### **SEUDAT SHLISHIT:**

*I am G-d; I called you for righteousness and I will strengthen your hand; and I formed you, and I made you for a people's covenant, for a light to nations.* (Yeshayahu 42:6)

Actually, it is much deeper than this, as the Leshem explains:

The main idea is the Ohr HaMakif HaYashar (a very higher level light in the Sefirot) is for the sake of the Ohr HaNissi (the miraculous light) only. It is like the Rav (the Arizal) said, that the Ohr HaMakif HaYashar was not constricted at all, never having entered a vessel at all. Therefore, it remains at full

strength just as it was when it first emanated from above... (Drushei Olam HaTohu, p. 97)

Everything in the physical and spiritual world is a function of spiritual light. The general rule is, the lower down a light is able to penetrate into the system, the more filtered it becomes, and therefore the weaker — and less miraculous it seems. This is especially important if the light is going to enter into a vessel, such as a human body, and not destroy it while doing so.

Likewise, if a light is to be used to accomplish the supernatural, it must remain unconstricted, which means it must be able to remain free of any kind of containment. One such light is called the Ohr HaMakif HaYashar, which literally means the "encompassing light of the straight". It sounds meaningless in English, but Kabbalistically it is a very important and central concept, but the important point now is that it is the source of the miracles we experience in this world.

Its purpose is for when the Ohr HaPenimi becomes weak below... Literally, this means inner light" because it is a light that goes into a vessel and is constricted by it, such as the light of our souls that provide us with life in this world.

When the lower lights become weakened to the point that they can't maintain the body and the vessel of the world because of the sins of the generation and the amount of evil in the world, G-d forbid ...Like today, when the world seems so distant from G-d and the truth of Torah, to the point that people can have the chutzpah to act out against G-d without any fear or sense of remorse. Left unchecked, this spiritual degeneration can result in the destruction of the world, as it did in Noach's generation. However: Since G-d doesn't want the world to be destroyed, He allows the Ohr HaMakif HaYashar to emanate... into the body and the vessel, and this restores them and they are allowed to survive supernaturally... Which might explain while the world is still here today, in spite of all the meshugat taking place in just about every nook and cranny in the world. Given that the Jewish people are so far from their ideal state, this explains why we are still here, especially in Eretz Yisroel, in spite of our many flaws. And, it explains why the Jewish people survived the Holocaust in spite of the impossible conditions.

At such a point, the Ohr HaPenimi, which is the light of the soul, lacks the strength to sustain [the body], so therefore it [the Ohr Makif HaYashar] gives off light from the distance... (Drushei Olam HaTohu, p. 97) As descendants of B'nei Ya'akov, or more accurately, B'nei Yisroel, this is something that we can access. We don't have to wait for the world to balance on the brink of destruction. We can strive to be great, and the light will shine and strengthen an already strong soul.

## **MELAVE MALKAH:**

Nefesh HaChaim, Ch. 10

There was a disagreement among the leaders of the Rishonim, as to whether or not a Jew was greater than an angel, or the other way around. Each opinion brings verses to support its point of view. However, according to what we have said until now, we can prove that each side is speaking

the "truth of the living G-d." Certainly an angel is greater than a man. They are holier in essence and far more wondrous. There is no comparison between the two, as it says in the Zohar Chadash:

The grasp of the angels is very great, which is not the case of those below them on the second level; the grasp of the third level is the lowest of all, that of those made from the dust, the level of man (Bereishit, Midrash Ne'elam, Parashat Vayikrah, Elokim LaOhr Yom)

It also says there:

The closest angels receive the emanation of the Upper Reflection first, and from there it descends to heaven and all its hosts, and from there, to man. (15b). See the source itself.

The Zohar says:

The Upper Angels are holier than we are. (Terumah 129b) However, in one thing man is greater than angels: it is he who elevates and unifies the worlds, forces, and the lights. This is not true of the angels, because an angel has but one ability, and does not incorporate all the worlds (in Aitz Chaim, Sha'ar Penimiut v'Chitzoniut, at the beginning of Drush 1, it also mentions that an angel represents only one level within its world, whereas the soul of man, with its three levels of Nefesh, Ruach, and Neshamah, incorporates all the worlds; see there). Therefore, an angel does not possess the ability to elevate and unify each world with the one above it, since that world (i.e., the world above it) includes nothing from that angel. Even an angel's own elevation to the level suitable for it, to become joined with the world above it, is not dependent upon the angel itself. This is why angels are considered to be "standing," as the verses say, "Serafim Omdim — Standing Serafim" (Yeshayahu 6:2), and "And I give you access among these Omdim..." (Zechariah 3:7).

Only man can elevate and unify the worlds and the lights through his actions, because he includes an aspect from all of them. Angels are only elevated and increase their holiness through the actions of man, since man includes something from them as well. (See the Aitz Chaim, Sha'ar Ha-Iburim, at the beginning of Chapter Four.)

The same is true of the three levels of man's soul [before entering the body], Nefesh, Ruach, and Neshamah; they could not elevate and unify the worlds or themselves until they came down into the world of action, into the body of man, as the verse states, "And He breathed into his nostrils a living soul..." (Bereishit 2:7). That is, He breathed into the body of the man, and then "he (man) became a living spirit" to all the worlds, as we have already mentioned in Chapter Four.

This is the underlying theme in the story of Ya'akov's ladder:

"And He breathed into his nostrils a living soul" and it says, "He dreamed, and behold, a ladder" (Bereishit 28:2). The ladder was the "living soul"... and the angels were ascending and descending it. (Rayah Mehemna, Naso 123b)

That is, by way of the "living soul" that is placed on earth, the lowest point being enclothed in the

body of man. [In other words, the ladder in Ya'akov's dream represented his soul that spans from earth inside his body up into Heaven. Nefesh can be considered the ground-point, and Neshamah the Heaven-point, with Ruach joining the two of them together. As Ruach (wind) implies, there is motion between the two points, and that was represented by the angels ascending and descending, dependent upon the actions of man. Thus, on one hand, physical man is certainly not as great as an angel in terms of holiness, but in terms of impact on Creation and the fulfillment of G-d's mandate, man is far greater than an angel.]

*Have a great Shabbat,  
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