

YAAKOV AND EISAV GO SEPARATE WAYS

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

*Eisav said to his father, "Is there only one blessing that you have, my father? Bless me too."
(Bereishis 27:38)*

What is the origin of the following joke:

God is sitting in Heaven when a scientist says to Him, "Lord, we don't need you anymore. Science has finally figured out a way to create life out of nothing. In other words, we can now do what you did in the 'beginning'."

"Oh, is that so? Tell me..." replies God.

"Well", says the scientist, "we can take dirt and form it into the likeness of you and breathe life into it, thus creating man."

"Well, that's interesting. Show Me."

So the scientist bends down to the earth and starts to mold the soil.

"Oh no, no, no...." interrupts God, "Get your own dirt."

It's this week's parshah! What, you don't believe me? You're right, and wrong. The joke is not over 3,500 years old. But, it is based on something in this week's parshah, for, in this week's parshah Ya'akov and Eisav go separate ways, Eisav in one that will eventually produce scientists who will deny the reality of God, and Ya'akov in one that is supposed to prevent Eisav from doing that.

It says:

I am God; 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)

This means teaching the world the truth about life in this world. It means making it clear to everyone, and not just to ourselves, that God is not only here, but that He runs the world, every last detail of it, and that if He stops doing so for a moment, everything goes poof!

Now, I'm not into self-flagellation, but whenever the world becomes Godless, any part of it, it is the Jewish people's responsibility. We were the ones who were miraculously redeemed from Egypt, we were the ones for whom God split the sea, and we were the ones who received the Torah, to live by

and to teach from it. If we don't do it, no one else will.

And, it's not just that the world remains spiritually uneducated, as history proves. Man is inherently smart, street smart, and innately ambitious, not to mention very talented. Furthermore, the world in which he lives is so packed full of potential, a virtual R & D Department in which man can experiment with just about everything under the sun, and just about has.

Judging by who's on top these days, and how they are using Creation in pretty much self-fulfilling ways, it would be safe to say that the blessing of Yitzchak in this week's parshah has been fulfilled, in the negative:

Eisav said to his father, "Is there only one blessing that you have, my father? Bless me too."

Eisav raised his voice and cried.

Yitzchak his father answered and said to him, "Your settlements will be in fat places of the earth, and [you will also have] from the dew of heaven above. You shall live by your sword, and serve your brother. But when the time comes that you feel justified to complain, you will break his yolk from off your neck." (Bereishis 27:38-40)

Yolk? Which yolk?

The rabbis point out that a yolk is a positive thing, as in, the yoke of Heaven. The point of a yolk is not to imprison, but to channel energy in a positive and meaningful way. For example, when it comes to an ox, a yolk is for harnessing its power and energy in order to plow a field for planting so that everyone can eat, live, and prosper. Remove the yolk, and the ox does very little else but graze and sleep.

Likewise, the yolk that Ya'akov was supposed to implement with respect to his brother Eisav, and all of his descendants, was to provide them with "binding" information that would "obligate" them, by their own logic and reason, to use their lives and the world in a meaningful way. It was, is, to give them a means to participate in the fulfillment of God's master plan for Creation. Otherwise, they just use the world in whatever way it suits them.

Some people are different. They may not Jewish, but they act like it. They have observed the Jewish people and their Torah, and as a result, they have made conscious decisions to leave behind their backgrounds, and at the very least, become Bnei Noach. They are a phenomenon, especially since they have done so even as the world becomes increasingly hostile to the Jewish people. They support Israel, and are not pulled into the insanity of the rest of the world to which they still, technically, belong.

There were people like this in Shlomo HaMelech's time as well, in fact, many more of them. In Shlomo's time, the fame of the Jewish people and their Torah was known far and wide, and people traveled many miles just to see what they were about. According to the Talmud, they did not leave

disappointed.

But that was in Shlomo HaMelech's time. Since then, thousands of years have passed, and the Jewish people are now dangling at the end of the political chain. In spite of many miraculous accomplishments and countless contributions to the benefit of all of mankind, the Jewish nation is being treated like a pariah, and being asked to meet unreasonable demands, or else. The Goldstone Report, and the U.N.'s reaction to it is just one more indication of how unimportant the Jewish people have become in the eyes of Eisav.

One might call it ironic that the very people whom the secular leaders of the modern State of Israel tried to imitate and join are now the ones joining forces against them today. However, that is only if one has not read this week's parshah, during which Yitzchak warned Ya'akov that should he try and make it in life without God, he himself will unleash Eisav on the world, and once that happens, it will not be easy to reverse the situation.

Practically-speaking, that means a Godless world. Yitzchak also alluded to this in his blessing, for when he blessed Eisav, God is not mentioned. Rather, Eisav's success, Yitzchak indicated, though it will come from God, it will not be recognizable to him as such. He'll use the dirt that God created, so-to-speak, but only pay attention to what he is able to do with it, and pat himself on the back for doing so.

But then again, when his own brother, who is supposed to be Godfearing and the teacher of mankind acts in very much the same way, what more can be expected from Eisav himself? And, we're not only talking about secular Jews, but religious Jews as well, who, through their attitudes and actions, have also nudged God out of the picture somewhat as well.

The balance between hishtadlus, the effort we actually make to succeed in the life, and bitachon, the trust in God were supposed to have when it comes to survival, has never been an easy one to strike, and certainly an even harder one to maintain. This is certainly so if a person makes a point of growing spiritually on a daily basis.

As a person matures physically, he should mature spiritually as well, and not necessarily at the same rate. Rather, a person should grow spiritually as quickly as he can, in a healthy way. When it comes to physical maturity, there is little we can do to speed up the body clock, not that we necessarily want to.

However, spiritual growth is less limited. You can find children with the spiritual maturity of an adult, and vice-versa. There are limits to how much one can push themselves physically, based upon the rules of nature. This is not necessarily the case when it comes to spiritual growth.

For example, a person can have little faith in God one day, learn about the need to fully trust God the next day, and then within a short time live on such a level. True, old habits are hard to break, and there are usually lapses. Nevertheless, with consistent follow-up, a person can come to integrate

sophisticated spiritual concepts into their consciousness within a short while.

I didn't say that it is easy to do so. I just said that it can happen relatively quickly. Besides, what is the alternative? Intellectual blindness. Spiritual shortcomings. A lifestyle that bears an uncanny resemblance to that of Eisav, one that seems to say that a Jew can and should earn a living just like the rest of the world, and therefore, become as embroiled in the physical world as Eisav has become.

I'm not saying a Jew doesn't have to work hard to survive. I'm just saying that the work is, first and foremost, spiritual. For, if a person wants to strengthen himself physically, all he needs to do is change his eating habits, and spend considerable time in the gym working out. But, if we want to enhance himself spiritually, then he has come to terms with many important spiritual concepts, many of which are counter-intuitive, and that is where the work begins, at least for a Jew.

And, when enough of us have done the work, so that when the nations of the world look at us they say, "Wow. There must be a God. Torah must be true. Why else would so many intelligent people live in such a way, and succeed at doing so? How can we get a piece of this spiritual action?" It will be the ultimate Kiddush Hashem, the ultimate sanctification of God's Name.

When that happens, not only will the scientists not try and usurp God's role within Creation, but they will even thank him for the very "dirt" with which they work. Then the joke will no longer be on us, but it will be one that we will all share, God included, as the Talmud says:

Then each of the proselytes will throw aside his religious token and get away, as it says, "Let us break their bands asunder," and the Holy One, Blessed is He, will sit and laugh, as it says, "He that sits in Heaven laughs." [It was on this that] Rebi Yitzchak remarked that there is no laughter for the Holy One, Blessed is He, except on that day. (Avodah Zarah 3b)

Which day? On the day that the truth about God, Torah, and life in this world becomes clear to everyone.

Text

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