A TIME TO PRAY AND A TIME TO LAUGH

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Ya'akov approached Yitzchak his father. He felt him and said, "The voice is the voice of Ya'akov, but the hands are the hands of Eisav." (Bereishis 27:22)

These words have different meanings. On the simplest of levels, Yitzchak is pointing out his confusion: though it feels like Eisav, it sure sounds like Ya'akov. For, though skin is easy to hide, such as with animal skin to make Ya'akov feel hairy like his twin brother Eisav, voices are more difficult to disguise as well, at least without much practice at being a professional impersonator.

On a deeper level, Yitzchak was not referring to the actual tone of Ya'akov's voice, but to what he said. Voices can change over time, and even on a daily basis if one is not well, or out of breath, etc. But, a person who does not incorporate God into his life on a regular basis is unlikely to do so all of a sudden, at the spur of the moment, and at such a crucial juncture of history, like this:

> Then Yitzchak asked his son, "How is it that you found it so quickly my son?" And he answered, "Because God, your Lord, arranged it for me." (Bereishis 27:20)

True, but that was something only Ya'akov usually noted and appreciated, not Eisav. Eisav was a man who took what he wanted when he wanted it, and rarely gave God credit for anything he had. How could he, if what he took usually belonged to someone else, and he often took it by force? "Why, Eisav," Yitzchak was saying to whom he thought was his firstborn son, "Though it feels like you, it sure sounds just like your brother Ya'akov!"

The Talmud goes one step further and turns Yitzchak's statement into a prophecy about the future, and not a very positive one either:

> It is taught: Rebi Yehudah ben Rebi Elai Boruch said, "Rebi interpreted 'The voice is the voice of Ya'akov, but the hands are the hands of Eisav' to mean: The voice of Ya'akov screams out from what the hands of Eisav did in Beitar." (Yerushalmi, Ta'anis 24a)

Beitar was the place of Bar Kochba's last stand in his rebellion against the Romans, and the scene of one of the worst slaughters of Jews of that time:

> It has been taught: Rebi Elazar the Great said, "There are two streams in the valley of Yadaim, one running in one direction and one in another, and the Sages estimated that [at that time]

> they ran with two parts water to one of blood." In a Baraisa it has been taught: For seven years [after the massacre at Beitar] the gentiles fertilized their vineyards with the blood of the Jewish people without using manure. (Gittin 57a)
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> Rav Yehudah reported in the name of Shmuel, who said it in the name of Rabban Shimon ben Gamaliel: What is signified by the verse, "My eye affects my soul, because of all the daughters of my city?" (Eichah 3:51) There were 400 synagogues in the city of Beitar, and in every one were 400 teachers of children, and each one had under him 400 pupils, and when the enemy entered there they pierced them with their staves, and when the enemy prevailed and captured them, they wrapped them in their scrolls and burnt them with fire. (Gittin 58a)

After all, whatever Eisav felt about Ya'akov until that point was pushed over the edge when his younger brother pulled an Eisav and did to his older brother what Eisav had been doing to everyone else. No one likes to be beaten at his own game, especially Eisav, and even though Eisav did not deserve the blessings he was about to receive, payback time for stealing his blessings has been extremely, extremely painful, and continuous.

Indeed, it keeps coming back in our face in one form or another. For example, the Midrash explains, Leah justified her deceitful action of stepping in for Rachel against the will of Ya'akov Avinu by referring to his deceitful action when taking the blessings. An act of stealing, even for the right reasons, can still leave a negative impression on the world.

In fact, as Rashi explains, theft was destined to be a charge against the Jews since the beginning of Creation. Hence, Rashi says, the Torah begins with the creation of the world, partially to counteract the future claim that we will have stolen the Land of Israel. In other words, it comes to counteract the entire Arab world today, and all the Leftists, et. al., who back up their claim to our land.

Amazing, is it not, how the world is so prepared to believe a people that is historically famous for its deceit and stealing against a people that is famous for being accused of, but innocent of, the same thing? Amazing, is it not, how Eisav hated Ya'akov and wanted to murder him for giving him a taste of his own medicine? Ya'akov took what he had to by deceit, pretty much against his will, whereas Eisav took merely what he wanted, and enjoyed every bit of it. And they call us the murderers, and the terrorists, and the thieves?

It sure makes you yearn for Moshiach and world rectification.

Another explanation of the above verse is this:

> The voice is the voice of Ya'akov: no prayer is effective unless the seed of Ya'akov has a part in it. The hands are the hands of Eisav: no war is successful unless the seed of Eisav has a share in it. (Gittin 57a)

Isn't it amazing how these and other prophecies have come true over time? For example, the Torah says:

> You will call him Yishmael, because God has heard your affliction. He will be a wild man. His hand will be against everyone, and the hand of everyone [will be] against him. Yet, he will dwell over all of his brothers. (Bereishis 16:11-12)

Has that ever come true! So many nations have come to exist over the course of almost four millennia since these words were spoken, but how many, other than the descendants of Yishmael, have come to fulfill them so accurately? Likewise, how many major wars have been fought—and won—by descendants of Edom, even by those who considered themselves to be men of God?

And, likewise again, who understands prayer better than the Jewish people, and have witnessed as many miracles done for them than the descendants of Ya'akov? For, there is something intrinsic to the Jewish soul that allows for a high level of connection to Heaven, making it possible for the will of man to play a destiny in the path of history.

Therefore, in a sense, the words, "The voice is the voice of Ya'akov, but the hands are the hands of Eisav" is kind of a spiritual indicator. These words can be interpreted in different ways, as the Talmud makes clear, sometimes to the advantage of the Jewish people, sometimes to our disadvantage, depending upon the role we play in history and how we interact with Eisav.

This is what Yitzchak later indicated with his blessing to Eisav:

> Yitzchak his father answered, and said to him, "Your settlements will be in fat places of the earth, and 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 27:39-40)

We seem to have a see-saw relationship with Eisav, as the Talmud points out:

> Caesaria and Yerushalayim: If someone tells you that both are destroyed, or both are settled, do not believe him; that Caesaria is destroyed and Yerushalayim is settled, or Yerushalayim is destroyed and Caesaria is settled, believe him. (Megillah 6a)

From this statement, it seems that the two cities, Caesaria belonging to the Romans, and Yerushalayim belonging to the Jewish people, are polar extremes, radically different. Apparently, the world as it was created does not support the coexistence of two such contrary realities, and this is reminiscent of another pair of extreme opposites.

The Midrash explains that Yitzchak told Eisav that, if Ya'akov's descendants cast off the yoke of Torah, then his descendants could inflict severe damage upon them and even gain control over of

them. In other words, as long as Ya'akov remained "settled," that is, devoted to Torah, then Eisav would remain "destroyed." However, if Ya'akov became "destroyed," that is, he abandons Torah, then Eisav will become the "settled" one, controlling the world and subjugating his younger brother to all kinds of misery over the millennia, causing his voice to go from one of sweet prayer to one of tragic scream.

Shlomo HaMelech wrote that "a wise man's eyes are in his head" (Tamid 32a), meaning that he can see what is happening before it will actually occur, as the Talmud states:

> Who is a wise man? One who sees what is being born. (Tamid 32a)

What is being born is tremendous support for people who deserve none, at least not with respect to Eretz Yisroel, and Eisav has just renewed himself and re-entered the ring with Yishmael to fight against the Jewish people. We should start praying now while our voice is one of praying before Eisav gets a chance to turn it, God forbid, into one of grief!

So then it is a time to pray and not to laugh, right? Yes, it is a time to pray; it rarely isn't. But, it is also a time to laugh as well. For, just like in the time of Rebi Akiva, we are seeing bad prophecies come true in our time. And, just as in the case with Rebi Akiva, they are prophecies that must be followed by good ones, as it says:

> After Moshiach comes a major war will be instigated against Israel ... This is the "War of Gog and Magog" spoken about in Yechezkel (38, 39), and Zechariah (14), as well as in Midrash Tehillim (Mizmor 118:9): Three times in the future Gog and Magog will war with Israel and go up against Jerusalem; they will assemble and anger the nations to go up to Jerusalem with him, as it explains there ... After, The Holy One, Blessed is He, will take His revenge against them, as spoken about in Yechezkel, and the Jewish people will dwell in their land in security and with much good. Godly understanding will greatly increase, as will wisdom and purity. (Sha'arei Leshem, p. 491)

So, when taking a break from prayer, make a point of laughing about the situation today. The first part of the prophecy is already coming true, so the second part can't be too far behind. Perhaps if we pray hard enough, we'll mitigate the impact of Gog and Magog, and laugh all the way to Yemos HaMoshiach:

> A song of Ascents. When God will return the captivity of Tzion, we will be like dreamers. Then our mouths will be filled with laughter ... (Tehillim 126:1-2)

Text

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