

PARSHAS TOLDOS

by Rabbi Dr. Meir Tamari

'And Yitzchak loved Eisav because there was hunting in his mouth' (Berishit, 25:28). In a previous verse we read, 'and Eisav was a person who knew to hunt', to which Rashi comments that he ensnared and defrauded Yitschak with his speech, asking how does one tithe straw and salt. His father thought him pious and punctilious in the performance of the mitzvot beyond their requirements. If we know why Eisav did not ask regarding other mitzvot like shechitah, which really contain refinements and hidurim, then we can understand the significance of choosing the false hiddur of tithing.

In the whole of creation, there is a distinction between that which is marginal and that which is paramount or important. The World to Come is paramount and this world is marginal; 'Prepare yourself in the corridor [Olam Hazeih], so that you can enter the palace' (Avot, chapter 4, mishnah). Shabbat is important and the six days of the week are marginal. Fruit is important and the purpose of the tree, while the skin or the shell only serves to protect it (Berachot, 36b). So too every person who does that which is their primary purpose, without being disturbed by that which is secondary and marginal, is able to achieve shleimut. In all the cases where the marginal is really held to be tafel, then that which is primary and ikar is able to transform and elevate it. If one prepares oneself in the Corridor then even Olam Hazeih becomes thereby elevated and holy. When the weekdays are really made to be subsidiary to Shabbat, then through it they too become perfected and spiritual; 'Everyday he ate for Shabbat' (Beitzah, 15a). The skin protects the fruit and therefore it too is important and can become tamei (Chulin, 118a). Indeed the whole purpose behind the creation of Eisav and Yaakov was that Eisav was to be subservient and marginal to Yaakov and thereby he, through his brother, would also achieve shleimut. This is why Yitschak wanted to bless Eisav even though he knew that Yaakov was more pious and deserving. Yitschak thought that through his subservience to Yaakov, Eisav would be elevated and sanctified so that they could jointly continue the Abrahamic tradition. However he did not realise the extent of the arrogance and gasut ruach of Eisav. When a gasut ruach fulfils a mitzvah or achieves a spiritual level, their arrogance only increases, making them truly evil. Eisav, being unable to differentiate between tafel and ikar, could never see himself as subservient to Yaakov. This is like the discussion in the midrash between the straw and the chaff as to who was superior, without recognising that they both were marginal to the wheat. So Eisav genuinely asked how one tithes straw and salt, both of which are marginal.

Not only are Eisav and Yaakov born to one mother and father, but they are twins. [According to chazal even identical twins, so that when Chushim slew Eisav at the funeral of Yaakov, he could only

strike his back, since both brothers had an identical face]. This is because they possess the same powerful spiritual urges, the same tshukah, albeit for different goals. It is this spiritual power that makes them eternal enemies locked in an ideological struggle, so that our sages taught, 'Rome [Edom] in ascendancy- believe; Yerushalyim in ascendancy- believe; Rome and Yerushalyim in equilibrium-this is unbelievable '. They both wished to link Heaven and Earth. Yaakov wished to raise everything earthly and material up to the heavenly, the holy and the spiritual and to merge body and the divinity that is the soul. Eisav, however, wished to degrade that which is heavenly, to subject it to that which is base and earthy in mankind. With the same parents and the joint powers that flow from their twin-ship, Yaakov and Eisav are like grapes harvested from the same vine. Yet in reality Eisav is the vinegar to the wine that is Yaakov.

It is this unity that explains Rifka's exclamation when she felt the turmoil in her womb,' And she said: 'If [it be] so, wherefore am I thus? And she went to inquire of HaShem' (Bereishit, 25: 22). She knew that the Etz Hada'at Tov ve Rah (good and evil intertwined) and the Etz Hachaim grew from the same root, and when the knowledge was subservient to the source of life then the separation between good and evil becomes clear. However, the struggle within her womb made her fear that the child that would be born would be a divided soul that singly would have to struggle even as Yitzchak struggled with Yishmael. So HaShem told that this would not be a struggle within one son but rather there would be two nations involved and that the older one would eventually be subservient to the younger.

Yet it is still not clear as to why the two should have been born through this powerful unity. We see that the whole of Yitschak's toldot flows from this power of unity. Yitschak is the personification of fear and awe- Pachad Yitschak- that is the opposite of toldot birth and generations; as we see when Rachav says that, 'there is no strength of spirit in anybody in Jericho because of the fear of Israel.' (Yehoshua, 2:11). For toldot the chesed of Avraham is essential. That is why the verse reads,

'These are the Toldot of Yitschak; Avraham gave birth to Yitschak'. 'Holid', so that the unity of the two midot, fear and chesed, can merge, the contradictory powers of left and right. There is a part of Yitschak in both sons; it is only the gasut ruach of Eisav that prevents the spiritual greatness of this unity.

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Dr. Tamari is a renowned economist, Jewish scholar, and founder of the Center For Business Ethics (www.besr.org) in Jerusalem.