Parshas Toldot · 5781

BROTHERLY BATTLE AS A BLUEPRINT FOR REDEMPTION

BEGIN WITH A GRIN

In a local meat restaurant, a waiter approaches a customer with an expansive menu.

Waiter: I have chopped liver, jellied leg and broiled tongue.

Customer: Your medical problems don't interest me. Just bring me a shawarma in a pita.

CHOOSING THE MORE LOVABLE BROTHER

Parshas Toldos is one of the hardest parshiyos to understand when looked at superficially. “These are the progeny of Yitzchok the son of Avrohom – Yaakov and Esav who are mentioned in the parsha,” says Rashi. The story of Yaakov and Esav, the only children of Yitzchok and Rivka, is most astonishing.

The story of the selling of the birthright for a lentil stew, Yaakov's deception in order to receive the blessings, Yitzchok's uncompromising love for his less-than-stellar son Esav, are just some of the eyebrow-raising things going on in the parsha.

Let us focus on a number of questions that probably occur to every one of us:

1-Why does Yitzchok love Esav? (“And Yitzchok loved Esav because he [Yitzchok] would eat from his [Esav's] hunt.”) Doesn't he understand what is going on? And what does “eating from his hunt” mean? A tzaddik like Yitzchok would not be won over by a portion of broiled meat served with some herbs for added flavor. Apparently, Yitzchok saw something that we (at first glance, without Chassidus) don't see!

2-The story of the sale of the birthright is odd. After all, who is the oldest is a matter of fact and so what use is there in selling it?

3-And what about acquiring the blessings by deceit? How can the Torah, the model of integrity, write all that about this act of misrepresentation in which an old, blind man was taken advantage of?

4-And as always, how does all this relate to us, now, on the eve of the Geula?

As always, Chassidus has the answers to all questions. In an edifying sicha, the Rebbe tells us what was going on behind the scenes in this parsha and how to discover Moshiach in these surprising stories.

According to Chassidus, Yaakov is not just an ish tam v'yashar (sincere, straight man) just as Esav is not merely a wild hunter. It was not random that Esav was born first and not for naught that Yaakov seized him by the ankle. It is all sourced in the root of their souls. Yaakov's soul root was from the world of Tikun and Esav's soul root was from a higher realm, the world of Tohu. Esav came from a higher place and that is why he was born first. This is also the reason why Yitzchok, who saw the source of his son's soul, valued the soul potential he contained. This is the real reason why Yitzchok loved Esav.

Our Sages teach us that “the deeds of the Fathers are a portent for the children.” That means, in the lives of the Avos there are characteristic parallels to the material and spiritual happenings in the life of every Jew throughout the generations. This empowers their descendants, “the children,” to serve Hashem in different ways. In a Jew's service of Hashem there are two general sorts of avoda, that of a tzaddik, who never sinned and that of a baal teshuva who sinned and repented. The Avos provide the strength for the service of the tzaddik because this is what they were, tzaddikim. But from where will the baalei teshuva derive their strength? The Avos never had to conquer the yetzer; they were a “chariot for the supernal will all their days.” They did not have a yetzer hara!

The Rebbe innovates that Esav accepted this lofty task, the conquering of the yetzer. When Esav started out he was good. He was born with a yetzer hara for idol worship but that was only to provide him with the opportunity to conquer that yetzer hara and thus provide us with the opportunity and ability to control our yetzer. In potential, Esav was meant to be the “perfect baal teshuva,” but the sad outcome was that he slipped and his end is well known …

THE BROTHER WHO GETS THE JOB DONE

An ideological debate ensued between Yaakov and Esav. The years-long quarrel which began even before their birth, when they were in the womb, represents the psychological and spiritual battle over the eternal question: Which approach in the service of Hashem is right?

Esav, the baal teshuva, maintained that the main avoda is in this world; Olam Haba is only a means to bring clarity to this world and restore it to its proper state. Yaakov the tzaddik

maintained that the main thing is Olam Haba and in order to reach it you need avoda in this world. In other words, this world serves as a preparatory place for the ultimate which is in Olam Haba.

In accordance with his ideology, Esav was even willing to sell his portion in Olam Haba which he called (according to the Medrash) “bechora.” Yaakov and Esav made a deal in which Esav received this world and Yaakov received Olam Haba.

Yitzchok, aware of Esav's lofty source, wanted to confer the blessings on him because the moment Esav rectifies himself, the Geula will come!

Rivka, knowing full well that Esav was far from ready and it would yet be a long road, was interested, even at the price of integrity, as it were, in Yaakov gaining the blessings since it would be his children who would be rectifying the world throughout the coming generations.

Yaakov paved the way for us even while in utero. The world of Resurrection, Olam Haba, is the goal of our existence and as long as we are not redeemed, we cannot halt our forward march As long as we have not achieved the goal, what meaning is there to the entire road that we have traveled, as individuals and as a nation?

So, we have learned the reason for Yitzchok's love for Esav and explained the deeper significance of the sale of the birthright and explained the seemingly unjustifiable behavior of Yaakov and Rivka. As for us, we need to learn a practical lesson from “These are the progeny of Yitzchok the son of Avrohom – Yaakov and Esav who are mentioned in the parsha.” First and foremost, we need to learn from our forefather Yaakov, the ish tam, the importance of Torah study with sincerity, along with the desire and intent to attain life in Olam Haba.

At the same time, we need to learn from Esav the hunter to invest ourselves in matters of the physical world, to conquer the yetzer and refine this world. Thus, we will merit reaching the time when we will say to Yitzchok, “For you are our father” - the time of the Geula!

TO CONCLUDE WITH A STORY

We will end with a story about what it means to conquer the yetzer and the way to achieve this.

One night, a man went to the Maggid of Mezritch with downcast eyes. He felt terrible.

“Rebbe, my head is full of forbidden things. I am constantly thinking of nonsense and want to actually do these things. What should I do?” He nearly burst into tears.

The Maggid did not reply. He sent him to one of his students, R' Zev of Zhitomir.

The man traveled to the tzaddik and arrived late at night. He knocked at the door. Nobody answered. The house was lit up and nevertheless, the door was not opened. He banged harder and there was no response. The man waited for hours outside and it was only in the morning that the door was opened with a smile by the tzaddik, R' Zev.

When the man tried to get an answer to his question, the tzaddik said, “I already answered you at night.”

The man, perplexed, said, “Answer? At night? I was standing at the door and nobody opened it!”

The tzaddik said, “That is the answer! You saw that the balabus (boss, owner) is the one who decides who comes in and who goes out. He knows to lock the door and prevent one who should not enter from entering. You need to behave like a balabus and put a lock on what is forbidden to enter the head of a Jew!”

Good Shabbos!