

Parshas Toldos

For the week ending 2 Kislev 5756
24 & 25 November 1995

Summary

After twenty years of marriage without children, Yitzchak's prayers to Hashem are answered and Rivka conceives twins, Esav and Yaakov. The pregnancy is extremely painful. Hashem reveals to Rivka that the suffering is a microcosmic prelude to the world-wide conflict that will rage between the two great nations descended from these twins — Rome and Israel. Esav is born first, and then Yaakov, holding onto Esav's heel. As they grow up, the contrast between the twins becomes apparent: Esav is a hunter, a man of the field, of the physical world, whereas Yaakov sits in the tents of Torah developing his soul. On the day of the funeral of their grandfather Avraham, Yaakov is cooking lentil soup, the traditional mourner's meal. Esav rushes in, ravenous from a hard day's hunting, and sells his birthright (and its concomitant spiritual responsibilities) for a bowl of soup, clearly demonstrating his unworthiness for the position of the firstborn. Yitzchak tries to escape to Egypt when a famine strikes Canaan, but Hashem reminds him that because of the *Akeida* (where he was offered up as a sacrifice) he has become holy and must remain in the Holy Land. Instead he relocates to *Gerar* in the land of the *Plishtim*, where, to protect Rivka, he has to say that she is his sister. Yitzchak arouses jealousy when he becomes immensely wealthy, and Avimelech the king asks him to leave. Yitzchak re-digs three wells dug by his father, prophetically alluding to the three *Batei Mikdash* (Temples) which will be built in the future. Avimelech, seeing the blessings that Hashem has bestowed on Yitzchak, makes a treaty with him. When Yitzchak senses the end of his days approaching, he summons Esav to give Esav his blessings. Rivka, acting on a prophetic command that the blessings must go to Yaakov, arranges for Yaakov to impersonate his brother and receive the blessings. When Esav in a rage of frustration complains to his father that his brother has bought his birthright, Yitzchak realizes that the birthright has been bestowed correctly on Yaakov who has valued its responsibilities rather than its privileges, and confirms the blessings he has given. Esav vows to kill his brother, and so Rivka sends Yaakov to her brother Lavan where he may find a suitable wife.

The clothing of HIDE
can no longer HIDE
the VOICE.

Commentaries

THE VOICE

“The voice is the voice of Yaakov, and the hands are the hands of Esav” (26:22).

The Voice is given to Yaakov. And the Hands, to Esav. The internal power which emanates from the heart — that's the Voice. The external power of action — the Hands. But these Hands are not satisfied just to dominate the physical world. They strive constantly to subjugate the Voice. The Hands of Esav thrust themselves into the insides of Yaakov; coarse Hands delving into the depths of the *neshama*; setting up an idol in the inner sanctuary of the Jewish soul. Superficiality swelling up and suffusing the innermost chambers of the heart. The Hands strangling the Voice; The Voice of prayer without the feeling of the heart; A mitzvah done mechanically — the Hands are working. And the Voice grows quieter and quieter... But in spite of this, the Voice is *the voice of Yaakov*, destined to rise up, to

dominate and elevate the Hands, to purify them and make them holy. When Yitzchak said that the voice was “*the voice of Yaakov and the hands were the hands of Esav*,” he thought that it was Esav who was in front of him, and that Esav had acquired the voice of Yaakov — that the Voice had sanctified and elevated Esav. The truth of the matter was that Esav had remained unchanged in his evil, while it was Yaakov who stood before him, garbed in the goatskin hides of Esav. For the Voice — the voice of Yaakov — permeates to the outermost layer of its skin, even to the very end of the material world.

(Adapted from Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin -
L'Torah U'L'Moadim)

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Parshas Toldos — 2 Kislev 5756, 24 & 25 November 1995

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“And these are the generations of Yitzchak, son of Avraham. Avraham fathered Yitzchak” (25:19).

It may be true that example is a powerful educator. But, in the education of one's children, it should not be relied on exclusively. The assumption that children will naturally want to imitate the positive attributes of their parents can never replace constant attention and clear direction. The Torah tells us that Avraham fathered Yitzchak, to emphasize that Yitzchak was not just the product of exposure to his father's success in bringing the world to recognize Hashem, but Avraham actively labored to implant love and recognition of Hashem in Yitzchak's heart.

(Adapted from Drash Moshe)

TWO'S A CROWD

“The children agitated inside her” (25:22).

During her pregnancy, whenever Rivka passed by the yeshiva of Shem and Ever, Yaakov struggled to be born, and when she passed a place of idolatry, it was Esav who tried to leave. One can understand why it was that Esav was anxious to leave his mother's womb, for he could find no idolatry there; but why did Yaakov want to leave? After all, as the Talmud teaches us (Nidah 30), during pregnancy, an angel teaches the fetus the entire Torah. Why would Yaakov want to leave his angelic teacher? The answer is simple: You can have the best *rebbe* in the world, but if you've got a bad room-mate — you've got to get out!

(Rashi, Mayana Shel Torah)

Haftorah: Malachi 1:1-2:7

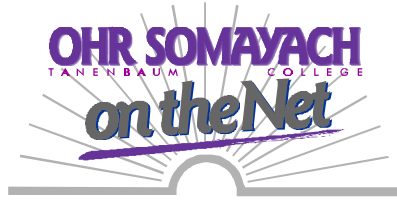
PASS THE SALMON

“You say ‘Behold! It is so burdensome!’ And you sadden Him...and you bring stolen, lame and sick animals... for an offering...” (1:13).

Things don't change. How much care and attention we put into our physical existence — our clothes, cars, furniture and food! But to spend an extra ten or twenty dollars on a first-class mezuzah...well the other one *is* kosher isn't it? The Rambam writes that beyond the requirement to offer only blemish-free animals on the *mizbeach* (holy altar), we are obliged to give our very best to Hashem. When *Bnei Yisrael* were righteous, they imported choice rams from Moav for offerings, special lambs from Chevron, as well as the best doves. Now, when we import, it's Smoked Salmon from Scotland, and that's to go on the *mizbeach* of our own appetites!

(Based on The Midrash Says)

It changes all the time...



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Insights into the Zemiros sung at the Shabbos table throughout the generations.

Yom Shabbos Kodesh
אשׁוּׁעָ אִי
‘Holy Sabbath Day...’

הבשר יין ודגים ואיל יחסר בתענוגים... יוסף רוצה דג ומצא מרגליות בשרו
“Meat, wine and fish — no delights shall be missing... Yosef cut open a fish and found a jewel in its flesh”

“Yosef Mokir Shabbos” earned his title, say our Sages (Masechta Shabbos 119) because of the extraordinary fashion in which he honored the Sabbath. Stargazers informed his wealthy gentile neighbor that all of his riches were fated to go over to Yosef. To insure himself against such a fate he sold all of his possessions and bought a precious jewel which he wore in his turban. While crossing a bridge a strong wind blew off the turban and when the jewel fell into the water below it was swallowed by a fish. The fish was caught and brought to market just before Shabbos when there were no customers around. The fisherman was directed to Yosef who was renowned for buying whatever would add honor to the Sabbath. When Yosef cut open the fish he discovered the jewel and became a wealthy man in fulfillment of the maxim: “Shabbos repays the one who lends it money.”