



Parshas Toldot

מתוך "ליקוטי שמואל"

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A Person Can Get Used to Anything – An Advantage and a Disadvantage

Parshas Toldos

The *pasuk* says “When Esav was forty years old, he took as a wife Yehudis daughter of Beerli the Hittite, and Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite; and they were a provocation of the spirit to Yitzchak and Rivka.” (Bereshis 26:34-35). The Medrash notes the fact that the Torah points out that the daughters-in-law behavior was painful **to** Yitzchak and **to** Rivka (*l'Yitzchak u'Rivka*) rather than merely stating that their behavior was painful to Yitzchak and Rivka (*l'Yitzchak v'Rivka*) – without the second “**to**”.

The Medrash states that the nature of the Yitzchak's pain differed from that of Rivka's pain. Rivka, having grown up in the house of idolaters, was better able to handle pagan daughters-in-law than was her husband, who grew up in the house of Avraham and Sora. Rivka was a *tzadekes* and of course *avodah zarah* bothered her, but having experienced it at home, she did not have the same visceral reaction to it as did Yitzchak. Dr. Abraham Twerski, zt"l, makes the point that a person who is exposed to negative phenomenon on a daily basis can lose their sensitivity to it. I once saw a statistic that the average child growing up in America has seen 300 murders (on television, movies, etc.). This was in the days BEFORE video games, in which killing people happens ALL THE TIME. Do you think that murder means the same thing that it meant 100 years ago? If you see something day in and day out, you can get used to it. You can get used to anything.

The truth of the matter is that this is the only way people were able to survive in the concentration camps. It was because “they got used to it.” You can get used to anything. That can be a

tremendous advantage but it can be a horrible disadvantage as well – if someone loses his sensitivity to evil.

Giving A Boost to the Efficacy of the *Tefilla* of a *Tzadik ben Rasha*

In the beginning of the parsha we read “Yitzchak entreated Hashem opposite his wife, because she was barren. Hashem allowed Himself to be entreated by him and his wife Rivka conceived.” (Bereshis 25:21). Rivka was barren. Both she and her husband, Yitzchak, davened that she should have children. The *pasuk* says that *Hashem* listened to Yitzchak and Rivka became pregnant.

Rashi points out that the *pasuk* emphasizes that *Hashem* listened to **him** – and not to her! It was Yitzchak’s prayers that were answered, not Rivka’s. Rashi explains that this was because “The (power of the) prayers of a *tzadik* (righteous person) who is the child of *arasha* (wicked person) is not comparable to the (power of the) prayers of a *tzadik* son of a *tzadik*.”

Yitzchak and Rivka were both righteous, but he was the son of Avraham and she was the daughter of Besuel. Therefore, his prayers were superior. The Brisker Rav (Rav Yitzchak Ze’ev Soloveitchik) infers from this statement of Rashi that had Rivka been a *tzadekes* the daughter of a *tzadik*, the power of her prayers would be equal to that of Yitzchak and the *Ribono shel Olam* could have listened to either of them or to both of them.

The Brisker Rav is bothered by this inference: Does that mean that aside from their ancestry, Rivka was on the same level of righteousness as Yitzchak? Yitzchak went through the *Akeidah*. He was *moser nefesh*. He was an *olah temima* (an unblemished sacrifice). Rivka was a very fine woman but how can we compare

her righteousness to his? He was also much older than Rivka, as he was sixty years old at this time and Rivka was much younger. The Brisker Rav says that we see from here that a righteous woman who is the daughter of a *rasha* and the sister of a *rasha*, who was able to overcome her environmental disadvantages and emerge as a righteous woman is on the same level as a Yitzchak. To remain steadfast in her beliefs as a young girl in a house full of *avodah zarah* and full of *reshaim* is a monumental spiritual accomplishment, comparable to that of Yitzchak, who went through the *Akeidah*.

This brings us to our next subject:

Why in fact does *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* accept the prayers of a *tzadik ben tzadik* more than those of a *tzadik ben rasha*? The *tzadik ben rasha* has a lot going for him. He has been able to raise himself above his corrupt environment. That is an extraordinary spiritual accomplishment! So why does *Hashem* favor the prayers of a second generation *tzadik* over that of a first generation *tzadik*? The opposite should be the case: "In a place where *abael teshuv* stands, completely righteous individuals cannot stand." (Brachos 34b).

I saw an approach to answer this question by a Rabbi Dovid Zucker, a Rosh Kollel in Chicago. He explains that the fact that prayer works is not something logical. It is something spiritual, something that sometimes defies regular logic. Better said, it has its own set of logic. There are laws of nature and there are metaphysical laws. In *Hilchos Tefilla* there are certain situations and conditions that make a person's prayer more accepted than other situations and conditions.

For example, there is a principle that "The Holy One Blessed be He does not reject the prayers of the masses" (Brachos 8a). In other words, a person has a better chance of having his prayers

answered if he davens with a *minyan*. This is one of the metaphysical-spiritual laws of *Tefilla*. Not only that, if someone cannot *daven* with a *minyan*, he should at least try to *daven* at the same time that the *tzibur* is praying. (ibid.) Why does that work? The answer is that there is such a thing as an "*eis ratzon*" (a time of favor). There are such things as favorable times and favorable places to daven!

Why do you think people go to *kivrei tzadikim* (the graves of the righteous) to pray? What is behind that? Part of what is behind that is that a *kever tzadik* is a *makom kodosh* (holy place). If a person davens in a holier place, it makes his prayer better and more effective. That is why even if someone misses *minyan*, there is an advantage to daven in a *Beis haKnesses* (synagogue) or a *Beis haMedrash* (study hall). Why? It gives the prayer a boost. It takes advantage of the fact that the prayer is recited in a *Beis haKnesses* or a *Beis haMedrash*.

What is the logic behind that? In the privacy of my own home, I can have the greatest focus and dedication, while in *shul* there are more distractions. The answer is that these are parts of the metaphysical laws of *Tefilla*. There are certain things that make prayer more accepted.

Prayers are accepted during the Ten Days of Repentance between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur better than they are during the whole year. Why? It is an *eis ratzon*.

Rabbeinu Bechaye writes that it is customary throughout the Jewish world that women recite a prayer that they should be blessed with good children at the time they light Shabbos candles. He explains that this is done because the time of *Hadlakas Neiros Shabbos* is an *eis ratzon*. By virtue of the fact that the woman is fulfilling the mitzvah of lighting Shabbos candles, it makes her *tefilla* then more effective. It becomes a favorable time.

Rabbi Zucker writes that one of these metaphysical laws of prayer is that the prayer of a *tzadik ben tzadik* is more effective than that of a *tzadik ben rasha*. The *tzadik ben rasha* has overcome great odds and has proven his closeness to *Hashem* by emerging righteous from a house of wickedness, but nevertheless, in the laws of prayer, which have a logic of their own, the prayer of a righteous person who is the son of a righteous person, trumps the prayer of a righteous person who is the son of a wicked person.

This brings us to an interesting question. We have all occasionally davened in a *beis avel* (a mourner's house). It is a big *mitzvah* to help the mourner make a *minyan* during his week of *shiva*. Yes, but let us ask – why are you forgoing the mitzvah of davening in a *shul*? The Gemara says that davening in a *shul* is much more acceptable than davening in a house – so how can someone give that up by going to a *beis avel*?

The answer is that while davening in a *beis avel*, you are also doing a *chessed* for someone. That makes your *tefilla* more acceptable. That makes it into an *eis ratzon* because while I am davening, I am doing a *chessed* for those who are alive and those who are dead. This is also what the Rabbeinu Bachaye meant – when a woman davens at the time of lighting Shabbos candles, it is more acceptable.

If that is the case, the prayer of a “*tzadik ben tzadik*” is also more effective. That is just the way it works. That is the “law.”

The Rosh was asked a ‘*shaylah*’ (halachic question). The congregation wanted to know who should be appointed as its *shliach tzibbur*. One candidate was a *tzadik* personally but he came from a disgraced family. The other candidate was a *tzadik* from a distinguished family.

Someone might say “I don’t need a Rosh to answer that question. It is a Rashi in Parshas Toldos!” Rashi says explicitly in

our parsha that the prayer of a second generation *tzadik* is superior to that of a *tzadik* whose father was wicked. However, the Teshuvah HaRosh ruled otherwise. He *pasked* that it is preferable to take the *tzadik* from the disgraced family over the *tzadik* with a more impressive pedigree.

Why? The Rosh writes that by taking this candidate from the disgraced family, the congregation is “drawing close those who are far” (being *me'karev rechokim*). The act of *kiruv* and *chessed* of the congregation will bring them merit in the Heavenly Court and will help the prayers of their *shliach tzibur* to be accepted.

This is common. People who are *ba'alei teshuva* have a certain inferiority complex. “My friend here is a *me'yuchas* – he can trace his ancestry back to *Dovid HaMelech* and look where I come from! What am I?” The Rosh quotes the *pasuk* “...*Shalom, Shalom*, to the '*rechok*' and to the '*karov*' ...” (Yeshaya 57:19), in which the person who is distant (*rechok*) is given precedence over the person who is near (*karov*). That is the why the Rosh *paskens* to take the *tzadik* from a disgraced family. It gives their prayers the added boost called “*kiruv rechokim*” just like we can daven in a mourner's house rather than in a synagogue because of the added *mitzvah* of *Nichum Aveilim*. That *chessed*-boost equates the prayers of the *tzadik ben rasha* with that of a *tzadik ben tzadik*.

There is no contradiction between the *psak* of the Rosh and the Rashi in our *parsha* because in our *parsha*, no one is **appointing** Yitzchak to be the *shliach tzibur* and no one is **appointing** Rivka to *daven*. They each *daven* to *Hashem* independently on their own initiative. In that situation, with all other factors being equal, the *Ribono shel Olam* gives priority to the prayers of a *tzadik ben tzadik*. That is just the way it is. Those are the laws of tefilla.

The Rosh's case is not like that. There, the *shul* comes and asks "Who should we appoint?" There the Rosh says "Tell the *shul* to appoint the *tzadik ben rasha* because it will give them the merit of being *m'karev* this Jew with the inferiority complex." That equates with the *tefilla* of a *tzadik ben tzadik*.

The Challenge of Defying Natural Instincts

Parshas Toldos

One of the incidents in the Torah that I always have difficulty with is the incident of Yaakov "stealing" the brachos (blessings) from Eisav. The Patriarch Yaakov, who personifies the Attribute of Truth ("Give Truth to Yaakov" (Micha 7:20)), engages in a ruse—a canard—to take the brachos away from his older brother. As much as Rashi tries to parse for us the pasuk "I am Eisav your first born" (anochi Eisav bechorecha) (Bereishis 27:19) to read as if it were saying "(It is) I; Eisav is your first born", it is hard to believe that this is really how Yaakov was responding to Yitzchak's question, "Who are you, my son?" (Bereishis 27:18).

The Gemara in (Makkos 24a), which discusses the paradigm of the honest person, is even more troubling. The Gemara there says that the pasuk "Who has no slander on his tongue, who has done his fellow no evil..." (Tehillim 15:3) refers to our patriarch Yaakov, as it is written, "Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to him as a deceiver" (Bereishis 27:12). In addition, the Gemara in Sanhedrin (92a) says "whoever disguises his speech (so that he should not be recognized) it is considered as if he worships idols" (for the same word used by Yaakov in connection with his fear of being 'caught' is used elsewhere in reference to idol worship). Clearly, Yaakov Avinu was very reluctant to do this. Rashi says there in Makkos, "He originally did not want to lie for he said

'Perhaps my father will feel me', but his mother forced him into it—and it was based on the Divine Word." This Rashi contains somewhat of a novelty. We all know that Rivka forced him to do this, but Rashi is telling us that Rivka delivered a prophetic message to her son. She took him aside and said, "Yaakov, dear, I am telling you that the Ribono shel Olam said you need to do this!" Yaakov thus had no choice. He had to do it. Had it only been on his mother's say so, I do not know if he would have done it, but it was "Al pi haDibur" (based on the Word of G-d). So says Rashi.

This leads to the following question: The Ribono shel Olam wanted Yaakov to receive the brachos. Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky asks, was the Ribono shel Olam unable to figure out another way for Yaakov to receive the brachos? Did it need to come about through deceit? The person who is the personification of Truth—for whom deception is as abhorrent as idol worship—needed to disguise himself and in effect lie to his father? Couldn't Hashem have arranged this to happen through a less spiritually offensive scenario? What is the meaning of this??

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky constructs a beautiful Torah thought to address this issue:

Each of the patriarchs symbolized a certain attribute. Avraham's attribute was Chessed (Kindness). He was the personification of Chessed. He preached Chessed. He looked at the world and saw the Creation as a reflection of the Chessed of the Almighty. He made his mission in life the emulation of the Chessed of the Ribono shel Olam. This is how he brought people under the wings of the Divine Presence.

If you look at the nisyonos (tests) of Avraham Avinu, so many of them involved lack of Chessed. One of his first tests was leaving his father's home. What kind of a Baal Chessed leaves his father? He is in effect commanded to NOT BE a Baal Chessed. It must have

hurt Avraham Avinu. It ran against his nature to abandon his father. What kind of nice person does that?

Another test involved sending away his wife Hagar. He objected when Sarah told him to do it, but Hashem insisted that he listen to Sarah. Here too we have a command that ran against his nature, his attribute of Chessed.

Of course, at top of the pyramid was Akeidas Yitzchak (the “Binding” of Yitzchak). Not only is slaughtering one’s own son an act of cruelty, but in the context of Avraham’s life—for years and years he preached about an Almighty of Kindness and an Almighty of Love—he is asked to do exactly what he has been urging others not to do for all these years. The answer is—this is why it is a test! A test is to overcome one’s natural inclinations and one’s own proclivities.

The Ribono shel Olam was saying to Avraham Avinu, “Avraham, if you REALLY love me and fear me, I want you to engage in these activities that are the hardest for you to do. They go against every grain and sinew in your body.” That is the nisayon—to demonstrate that there is something MORE important to Avraham than just being a Baal Chessed—listening to the Word of the Ribono shel Olam. That is what it is all about.

“Now I know that you fear Elokim and you did not refuse your son from Me” (Bereishis 22:12). That is why there were ten nisyonos by which Avraham was tested (Avot 5:3), to prove that Avraham Avinu would do the very thing that is the most difficult for him to do.

Yaakov Avinu’s attribute was Truth—“Give Truth to Yaakov...” (Micah 7:20) The Ribono shel Olam knows that Yaakov abhors falsehood. Psychologically, he feels that if he is forced to be deceitful “I will be like an idolater.” G-d tested him and said, “I want you to engage in deception because this is for the good of Klal Yisrael.” As painful and as difficult as it was, and as much as it went

against every grain in his body, he did it anyway. Of course, the Almighty could have figured out a “better way,” a different way, a less deceitful way. But that would not have been a nisayon! At the end of the day, the test is, what is more important—your natural inclination (to Truth) or listening to Me?

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky asks: We see the nisayon of Avraham Avinu and we see the nisayon of Yaakov (which Rav Kamenetsky aptly calls “Yaakov’s Akeidah”). Where is the nisayon of Yitzchak? Where was Yitzchak’s mettle tested? Don’t tell me it was the “Akeidah” because, on the contrary, that did not go against Yitzchak’s Attribute of Gevurah (Inner Strength), but rather they correlate with each other. Where do we find that Yitzchak was tested in the same way that his father and son were tested—being commanded by G-d to go against the essence of his natural inclination?

Rav Yaakov gives an amazing answer. He cites a Gemara we have quoted in the past, but now we will have a new understanding of this Gemara (Shabbos 89b):

Rav Shmuel bar Nachmani said in the name of Rav Yonasan: What is the meaning of that which is written ‘For you are our father, because Avraham does not know us and Israel does not recognize us, you Hashem, are our Father—Our Eternal Redeemer is your name.’ (Yeshaya 63:16)?

At a future time, the Holy One, Blessed is He, will say to Avraham: Your children have sinned against Me. Avraham will reply before Him: Master of the Universe, let them be obliterated for the sanctity of Your Name! (Unsatisfied with this reply) Hashem will say (to Himself) I will speak rather to Yaakov since he experienced pain in raising his children. Perhaps he will ask Me to have mercy upon them. So Hashem will say to Yaakov, ‘Your children have sinned against Me.’ Yaakov will reply before

Him: Master of the Universe, let them be obliterated for the sanctity of Your Name! Hashem will say: There is neither reason among the elders nor counsel among the youth! So Hashem will say to Yitzchak, 'Your children have sinned against Me.' Yitzchak will say before Him: Master of the Universe, my children and not Your children?! When they preceded the statement 'we will do' to the statement 'we will hear' before You, You called them 'My son, My firstborn'. Now, you tell me that they are my children and not Your children? Furthermore, how much after all, could they have sinned? How many are a man's years? Seventy years. Take away the first twenty, since You do not punish a person for them. There are fifty years left. Take away twenty-five, which are nights. There are twenty-five left. Take away twelve and a half, which are spent praying, eating or in the bathroom. There are only twelve and a half years of potential sin left. If You will shoulder them all, fine. And if not, then half should be on me and half on You...

This Gemara always bothered us. This is Yitzchak? Yitzchak whose attribute was Justice! Yitzchak, who is known as the Pachad Yitzchak (the "fearful Yitzchak" who was always afraid of sin and its punishment)? This is Yitzchak who lived by the motto of the immutability of law—"Let the law pierce the mountain!"? He, of all the patriarchs, is defending Klal Yisrael and saying, "What's the problem that they sinned a bit?"

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky says an amazing insight: This is Yitzchak's "Akeidah"! It is here that he is being challenged to go against his base instincts and his natural inclination. This is where he needs to say "I am NOT going to invoke Din (Judgement). I am not going to 'go by the book'. I am not going to say they are accountable." Here Yitzchak pleads: "Have mercy on them," because that was the Almighty's challenge to him!

The ability to defend Klal Yisrael despite the fact that they are guilty was the nisayon the Almighty placed before Yitzchak. When Klal Yisrael will need this defense, in the End of Days—that is when Yitzchak will have his “Akeida”—the test of his ability to meet the challenge of going counter to his natural instincts.

The bottom line from the above analysis is that everyone has his own “Akeida”. How do we know which is our personal “Akeida”? The Vilna Gaon writes in Sefer Yonah that most of us (if not virtually all of us) are ‘Gilgulim’ (transmigrated souls). Our neshamos (souls) have been here before. The reason we are back here again is because our souls were sent to this world to accomplish a certain task, to behave a certain way, and we failed the first time around. Therefore, neshamos need to come back a second and sometimes a third time in order to correct that which they failed to correct the first time(s).

How does one know what to correct? Both the Vilna Gaon and Rav Tzadok say that that which you have difficulty with—that is what you need to correct! If a person has a tendency towards anger, he is a quick-tempered person—that is his nisayon! That, then, is what he is challenged to work on. Another person may find it difficult to part with money. It is hard for him to write a check. That is what he needs to work on. A third person may find it difficult to sit and spend time learning. That is what he has to work on.

This is how the Vilna Gaon interprets the Gemara: “It would have been easier for man to have never been created than to have been created; now that he was created let him examine his actions” (Eiruvim 13b). This means that now that you are back here for a second time, examine your ways (and see where your challenges are). Rav Tzadok says the same thing. “So too Chazal expound the pasuk, ‘Repent Israel to Hashem your G-d for you have failed in

your sins' (Hoshea 14:2). From the failures that a person sees in his ways, from the places he has stumbled, he can detect those areas where he has not yet purified himself in the depths of his heart." This is the takeaway message. All of us in this world need to look for our Akeida. What thing is the most difficult for us to do properly? The area that we find the most difficult is the area where we need to overcome our tendency to do the opposite—just like Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov all did (or will do). That will, G-d willing, allow us to achieve a "tikun" (correction) for our souls so that we will be able (following death) to remain in the World of the Souls eternally.

Live and kickin'... but no freechoice?

Written by D Fine

Rivkah is extremely puzzled at the start of Toldos. She has twins inside her stomach, and (as Rashi quotes on 25;22) one kicks to get out whenever they pass a house of idol worship, whilst the other kicks to get out when she passes the yeshiva of shem v'ever..and Rivkah doesn't necessarily know she is having twins! So she seeks prophetic advice, and is told that she's having twins who will head two opposite nations. The question is this: It is a basic axiom that to be able to be punished or rewarded, one must have free will. But if Esav was already kicking out to avodah zarah when still unborn, where was his free will? What hope did he have for later on in life?

The answer is (as the Ramchal points out in derech hashem 1;3;8) that free will does not mean that one has no urges. It could still be that one has a 90% pull to do an aveirah, yet the fact that there is 10% fighting that urge (or even less) means that it is no longer inevitable that you must sin. And that's where your free will kicks in – you must decide whether you will go with the 90 or the 10. So too here, Esav had a strong urge to do avodah zarah even in the womb, but when he grew older he had the tools to fight that urge.

The lesson for us is that it is perfectly natural to have urges to do things which are not 100% correct; are we going to give in or fight them? [or better

still to use those same urges for good.eg gemarra shabbes 156a says that if someone has an urge for shedding blood he should channel that urge by being a mohel].

Toldos

Written by Daniel King

“these are the descendants (toldos) of Yitzchak” Rashi tells us that these are Yaakov and Esav mentioned in the Parsha. Why are both sons mentioned in the Parsha?

According to Chasidic teachings Yaakov represents the soul and Esav the body. The parsha is therefore named after both sons because the soul and the body each have their own qualities.

The soul is described as a “child” of Hashem because the love shared between the soul and Hashem is a natural love like the parent-child relationship.

The body however, has no inherent love for Hashem, in fact it hides Hashem. All bodies look similar to one another. But the body is necessary in this world in order to bring the spiritual into the physical (hence why Mitzvos done with the body).

Judaism is not a religion that believes in abstaining from the physical (eating on Shabbos is a mitzva, post-marital relations are a mitzva). However, we do not over-indulge in the physical. Rather Judaism teaches us to engage in physical actions but to bring spirituality into them.

This is why Yaakov, the soul, and Esav, the body, are both mentioned in the Parsha, as both are important.

Adapted from the Gutnik Chumash

Toldos 2

MISGUIDED LOVE

In 25:28 we are told that Yitzchak loved Eisav, seemingly over Yaakov.

Could Yitzchak really have got it that wrong in loving the wicked son over the righteous one? The Netziv notes that there are two types of love. The first is a real love for the person himself. The second type, however, is just a love in that one realizes that this person can give you things/make you happy. It is this second type of love which Yitzchak had for Eisav; Yitzchak's love for Eisav was merely the happiness at the fact that Eisav would constantly bring presents and food for him. Indeed, the Netziv shows how this is hinted to in the words of the pasuk too. Whereas normally when the Torah describes love it phrases it in terms of 'loving to someone' (e.g. love to thy neighbor as oneself; *ve'ahavta le'reacha kamocho*) – denoting a real two-way relationship, the pasuk in our sedra merely says 'Yitzchak loved Eisav,' without the to – which denotes this lower form of love.

Humor

-You know what twins and calculators have in common? They both love to multiply!

– I asked the twin electricians about their similarities. One said, "We're wired differently but always grounded!"

– Twin carpenters working together can really nail it when it comes to building a rapport.

– There's nothing quite like twin lifeguards—double the splash, double the rescue!