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בת משה מנחם הלוי ז"ל



עניני דשעה

AL E I D E S H E

Weekly Torah Insights and inspiration on the Parsha from the Rosh Yeshiva Shlit"za of Gur

Scent of a Traitor

יִהְיֶה כִּי זָקַן יִצְחָק וּגְוִי וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה נָא זָקַנְתִּי, לֹא יָדַעְתִּי יוֹם מוֹתִי

And it was, when Yitzchak had become old ... He said, "See, now, I have aged; I know not the day of my death." (Bereishis 27:1-2)

Even those Yidden who betrayed Hashem and His Torah will eventually do teshuvah, and Hashem will enjoy their fragrance.

יִהְיֶה כִּי זָקַן יִצְחָק is phrased in the past tense, *I have not known*; shouldn't Yitzchak have said לֹא אֲדַע, in the present tense?

The Gemara (Shabbos 153a) states, "R. Eliezer says, 'Do *teshuvah* one day before your death.' His *talmidim* questioned: 'Does a person know what day he will die?' He replied, 'Do *teshuvah* today, lest you die tomorrow. In this way, all your days will be in *teshuvah*.'"

When a person recognizes that this world is only temporary, he lives a life elevated above *gashmiyus*, so that all his life are days of *teshuvah*.

When Yitzchak said, הִנֵּה נָא זָקַנְתִּי, לֹא יָדַעְתִּי יוֹם מוֹתִי, he meant that his awareness of death was not merely a result of old age, but throughout all his past, *I did not know the day of my death*. He had lived all his life with a mindset of "Do *teshuvah* one day before your death."

Yitzchak addressed these words to Esav, who had been left unchanged in the wake of Avraham's *petirah*. He clearly did not live with an eye to the future. In an attempt to awaken him to *teshuvah*, Yitzchak imparted this lesson of יָדַעְתִּי לֹא יוֹם מוֹתִי.

We must know that as long as a person is alive, he can still do *teshuvah*. The pasuk says (27:27) וַיִּרַח אֶת רִיחַ בְּגָדָיו – *he smelled the fragrance of his clothing*. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 37a) explicates: "Do not read בְּגָדָיו, *his clothing*, but וַיִּרַח, *his traitors*." Even those Yidden who betrayed Hashem and His Torah will eventually do *teshuvah*, and Hashem will enjoy their fragrance.

The *Ba'al HuTurim* shows another occurrence of the word וַיִּרַח: ה' אֶת רִיחַ הַבְּשָׂמִים הַיְהוּדִים, וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל לְבוֹ לֹא אֶסְקֶה לְקַלְלֵךְ עוֹד אֶת הַיְהוּדִים. cont. on page 2

Blessing in Disguise

In this week's *parshah*, we read the story of the *brachos* which Yitzchak Avinu intended for Esav and which Yaakov took at Rivkah's command.

The Torah relates that when Yaakov brought Yitzchak the delicacies he had requested, Yitzchak asked him, מָה זֶה מְהֵרָה, לְמַצָּא בְּנִי – *How were you so quick to find, my son?* Yaakov replied, כִּי הִקְרָה ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ לְפָנַי – *Because Hashem, your G-d, arranged it for me* (Bereishis 27:20).

Hearing this, Yitzchak became alarmed: וַיֹּאמֶר יִצְחָק אֶל יַעֲקֹב, גֹּשְׁבָה נָא וְאִמְשָׁה בְּנִי, הֲאֵתָהּ לֹא יָדַעְתָּ בְּנִי עֵשָׂו אִם לֹא – *Yitzchak said to Yaakov, "Come close, if you please, so I can feel you, my son; are you, indeed, my son Esav or not?"* (27:21)

Rashi cites the Midrash:⁴ "Yitzchak thought, *It is not the way of Esav to frequently mention the Name of Heaven, and yet this son of mine said, "Because Hashem, your G-d, arranged it for me."*

The Imrei Emes asked: Yaakov Avinu took pains to disguise himself as Esav, wearing Esav's clothing and placing goat skins over himself. Why didn't he make the effort to speak like Esav, too? He surely knew that Esav didn't often mention Hashem's Name. Why raise Yitzchak's suspicions?

The Mishnah (Brachos 16a) relates that although a *chassan* is exempt from

cont. on page 3

1 This is in accordance with the opinion that Yitzchak was aware of Esav's wickedness (see *Ohr Hachaim hakadosh* and *Malbim*, 27:1).

4 Bereishis Rabbah 65:19.

Scent of a Traitor

cont. from page 1

הַאֲדָמָה בְּעֵבוֹר הָאָדָם, כִּי יֵצֵר לֵב הָאָדָם רַע מִנְעֻרָיו – Hashem smelled the pleasing aroma, and Hashem said to Himself: “I will not continue to curse again the ground because of man, since the inclination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.” (8:21) What is the connection between these two pesukim containing וַיִּרַח?

A person might think, *I have such a heavy pekel of aveiros; there is no way I can repent and start anew. There is no way I can give off the pleasant fragrance of teshuvah.* Such a person needs to look no further than the generation of the *Mabul*. There was no generation more wicked than they; and yet, after the *Mabul* the world began anew, and “Hashem smelled the pleasing aroma.”

Hashem promised to never again curse the earth because of man’s sins, *since the inclination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.* Hashem recognizes that we face a *yetzer hara*, and so he gives us always an opportunity for *teshuvah*. Instead of being bogged down in our past, we must look forward to the better person we can become.

On the pasuk, וַיִּרַח אֶת רִיחַ בְּגָדָיו, Rashi comments, citing the Midrash,² that goatskin gives off a very unpleasant odor. What pleasant fragrance did Yitzchak smell? It was the fragrance of *Gan Eden* that accompanied Yaakov as he entered to accept the *brachos*.

The Midrash gives an example of the source of the fragrance: A wicked Jew named Yosef Meshisa. When the Romans came to the *Har Habayis*, they devised to make a Jew enter first and begin the looting of the Beis Hamikdash. They announced that any Jew who entered could keep whatever he took out. Yosef

Meshisa volunteered to be that traitor. He entered the Beis Hamikdash and walked out with the golden Menorah. The Romans complained, “It is not the way of a simple person to use such a vessel. Return to the Beis Hamikdash, and whatever other thing you take out will be yours.”³ Yosef Meshisa was overcome with a spirit of *teshuvah*, and he refused. “Is it not enough,” he told the Romans, “that I angered my G-d once? Will I anger Him again?”

The Romans placed him on a carpenter’s board which was to be sawed and formed into implements, and sawed through him. As he was being tortured, he cried out, “Woe that I have angered my Creator!”

Why do Chazal describe what type of board he was laid upon to be tortured?

A carpenter’s board is something that is sawed for a positive purpose. By its severing, an object is created. In the same way, Yosef Meshisa was remade from a person on the lowest level imaginable to one on a very great *madreigah*. The suffering he endured served to rectify his sins — which became more painful to him than the torture. His greatest pain was expressed when he exclaimed, “Woe that I have angered my Creator!”

It was the fragrance of this traitor — this *ba’al teshuvah* — that Yitzchak Avinu smelled as Yaakov entered.

The pasuk says (25:34), וַיֹּאכַל וַיִּשְׂתֶּה וַיִּקָּם, וַיִּזְבַּח עֹשֵׂה אֶת הַבְּכֹרָה – He ate and drank, got up and left; thus, Esav disgraced the birthright. The Rebbe R. Bunim offered a deep insight in this pasuk, which he would share with joy. It was Esav who “ate and drank, and got up and left,” too. Why is Esav’s name mentioned only at the end, in connection with disgracing the *bechorah*?

The answer, said R. Bunim, is that eating and drinking are not the essence of Esav. Yidden sometimes fall prey to such distractions, too. Esav’s essence is וַיִּזְבַּח עֹשֵׂה אֶת הַבְּכֹרָה, demeaning all that is holy. That is what gave him the most pleasure, more than eating and drinking.

When one reads this *parshah* simply, it seems that Esav desperately wanted food and drink, and so he spurned the *bechorah* in order to obtain it. R. Bunim taught that it was not so; on the contrary, the greatest expression of Esav’s spirit was disgracing the *bechorah*.

Esav’s way stands in contrast to that of every Yid, even a sinner. No Jew would commit an act like disgracing the *bechorah*, even as a means of obtaining his *ta’avos*. Along these lines, the Rebbe R. Zusha once said that he never saw a *malach* created by a Jew’s *aveirah* that was whole. It always had some defect, since whenever a Yid sins, invariably, it is with a sigh. It doesn’t always lead him to *teshuvah*, but there is always some element of regret for his actions. A Yid never sins out of spite, as Esav did when he disgraced the *bechorah*.

We recite every day in davening the pasuk (Yeshayah 59:20), וַיָּבֵא לְצִיּוֹן גּוֹאֵל וְלְשִׁבְיָהּ – A redeemer will come to Tziyon, and to those of Yaakov who repent from willful sin. To whom will the *geulah* come? To the traitors of Yaakov who do *teshuvah* for their sins — those whose fragrance came over Yitzchak as Yaakov entered the room.

Wherever a Yid stands, his heart always yearns to come closer to Hashem. Indeed, a Yid is never too far to return.

(תולדות תשכ"ד – ס"ג מאמר ג)

² Bereishis Rabbah 65:22.

³ The Romans wanted a Jew not only to be the first to enter the Beis Hamikdash, but to be first to use its vessels, as well. Since they wouldn’t allow Yosef Meshisa to use the Menorah, they told him to go back and take something else.

cont. from page 1

reciting *krias Shema* on the night of his wedding, Rabban Gamliel still recited it on his wedding night. When his *talmidim* questioned him about this, he replied, “I will not listen to you to withhold *malchus Shamayim* from me even for one moment.”

The Rebbe R. Bunim points out that in the following Mishnah (16b), Rabban Gamliel himself says that not

**עשה דברים לשם פעלים:
remember for Whom
you are doing this
mitzvah. As you do
it, be sure that all
your actions remain
pleasant in His eyes.**

every person has the right to recite *krias Shema* on their wedding night. R. Bunim explains that that Mishnah is talking to people who wish to be stringent and recite *krias Shema* even though they are exempt. Rabban Gamliel was in a different class. He was simply incapable of going without *kabbalas ol malchus Shamayim*. He had every right, then, to recite *krias Shema*.

The Imrei Emes explained that the same was true of Yaakov Avinu. Even as he did his utmost, at his mother's instruction, to masquerade as Esav, he was simply unable to remove his mind even for a moment from *malchus Shamayim*, and so he was compelled to say, **כי הקרה ה' אלקיך לקני**.

This beautiful *vort* encapsulates the true path of life, **דרך חיים תוכחות מוסר**; with this lesson, one is equipped with the necessary provisions for his journey through this world.

Let's think about this. The question of the *talmidim* of Rabban Gamliel was perfectly justified. The halachah is that **העוסק במצוה פטור מן המצוה**, *One engaged in a mitzvah is exempt from another mitzvah*, because beginning another mitzvah will disrupt his performance of the first mitzvah. Thus, a *chassan* is exempt from reciting *krias Shema*, because doing so would negatively impact the mitzvah he is now engaged in. What gave Rabban Gamliel the right to recite *krias Shema* at the expense of his present mitzvah?

Rabban Gamliel was teaching his *talmidim* a valuable lesson. *No matter what I am doing, whether this mitzvah or another, my mind is always on the kingship of Hashem. There is no logic in exempting me from krias Shema, because regardless, my thoughts are on malchus Shamayim; reciting krias Shema won't distract me any more from my present mitzvah.*

In the same way, even as Yaakov Avinu heeded his mother's command to take the *brachos* — the *heilige brachos* that would protect his descendants for all time — he did not divert his mind from *malchus Shamayim* even for an instant.

We must learn from here the way we are to perform mitzvos. The Gemara (Nedarim 62a) admonishes: **עשה דברים לשם פעלים** – *Fulfill the mitzvos for the sake of Hashem Who initiated and commanded them.*⁵ This seems obvious; if Hashem hadn't commanded the mitzvos, surely nobody would do them.

On further reflection, however, this isn't simple at all. It does happen sometimes that a person becomes so involved in fulfilling a mitzvah that he forgets about Hashem Who commanded the mitzvah. This concept is behind the painful phenomenon of people who adopt a certain mitzvah or positive idea, and in their zeal for that mitzvah, they trample other mitzvos of *bein adam laMakom* or *bein adam l'chaveiro*.

Addressing this, the *Chachamim* warn, **עשה דברים לשם פעלים**: remember for Whom you are doing this mitzvah. As you do it, be sure that all your actions remain pleasant in His eyes.

It is related that the Kotzker Rebbe once sent somebody to purchase an expensive pair of *tefillin* for him. As the *shaliach* was on his way back, he couldn't control himself and donned the *tefillin*. When the Kotzker obtained the *tefillin*, he understood what had occurred, and refused to accept them. He explained, “*Tefillin* that caused a Yid to slip and transgress *lo sachmod* are not suitable for me.”

This *chassidische ma'aseh* captures well the lesson we are studying. The entire meaning of upholding the Torah and mitzvos is only to fulfill the will of Hashem. If an object of mitzvah was used to transgress Hashem's will, then it is undesirable to the *tzaddik*.

We have this trait as our heritage from Yaakov Avinu: to fulfill the mitzvos **לשם פעלים**, for Hashem's sake. Even as we perform a mitzvah, we must always stop and consider if this action is desirable before Hashem.

(בנאות דשא – תולדות תשפ"ד)

5 Ran.

וַיֵּצֵא הָרֵאשִׁון וְגו' וַיִּקְרָאוּ שְׁמוֹ עֵשָׂו, וְאַחֲרָי כֵן יֵצֵא
אֲחָיו וְגו' וַיִּקְרָאוּ שְׁמוֹ יַעֲקֹב

The first one emerged ... and they named him Esav ... after that his brother emerged ... and he called his name Yaakov. (Bereishis 25:26-27)

Rashi notes that regarding Esav, the pasuk says, וַיִּקְרָאוּ שְׁמוֹ עֵשָׂו, *they named him Esav*, in the plural; while regarding Yaakov it says, וַיִּקְרָאוּ שְׁמוֹ יַעֲקֹב, *he called his name Yaakov*, in the singular.

Perhaps Esav's naming is in the plural because it was not a one-time event, but continues through the ages. In each generation, Esav manifests in a different form — whether in printed newspapers, digital technologies, or something else — and it is the job of Yidden to call it what it is: Esav.

Yaakov, on the other hand, is unchanging. Throughout all generations, Yidden have continued to follow in the *derech Yisrael sabba*, the old, beaten path of Yaakov Avinu. Thus, the original naming of Yaakov still stands strong.

(בנאות דשא – תולדות תשפ"ג)



וַיִּקְרָאוּ שְׁמוֹ עֵשָׂו

And they named him Esav. (25:26)

Rashi explains that the name עֵשָׂו derives from עֵשׂוּי, *completed*. When Esav was born, he was physically complete as if he were many years old.

When a child is given a name, it reflects his essence. Why was Esav named after what was essentially a one-time fluke?

The Gemara (Eruvin 13b) relates: “For two-and-a-half years, Beis Shammai and Beis Hillel disagreed: one said it would

be better for man not to be born, and the other said it is better for man to be born. In the end, they took a vote and concluded that it would be better for man not to be born, but once born, he should inspect his actions.”

Why was it necessary to take a vote on this question? What practical difference does it make?

There is, indeed, a great difference. Clarifying this question can teach us how to survive our journey through this world of temptation without becoming influenced by its material interests. When they decided that man would have been better off not born, it became clear that our existence in this world is *bedieved*: we would prefer it otherwise, but we must make do with our present situation.

A person who internalizes this mindset will not become distressed when things do not go just so, when he lacks some “necessities” in this world. His days will be focused on making it to the other end of this vestibule so that he can enter the ballroom of *Olam Haba*.

Esav was the living antithesis of this. He was born *asui*, completed — he was ready to embrace *Olam Hazeh* as his permanent abode. Esav needed his physical matters to be tended to with perfection, since life was all about his lifetime in this world. Thus his name, Esav, defined his essence.



וַיְהִי עֵשָׂו אִישׁ יָדַע צֹד, אִישׁ שָׂדֶה

Esav became one who knows hunting, a man of the field. (25:27)

The wording of this pasuk is interesting. Why is Esav referred to as

אִישׁ יָדַע צֹד, *one who knows hunting*, and not simply צַיִד, *a hunter*? Also, why does the pasuk repeat the word אִישׁ, and not say simply, אִישׁ שְׂדֵה יוֹדַע צַיִד, *a man of the field who knows hunting*?

The Midrash⁶ relates that Eliyahu Hanavi once chanced upon a fisherman who was neglecting his Torah study. To Eliyahu's reproof, the man replied, “I was not gifted from Heaven with knowledge and understanding.” Eliyahu pointed out that he clearly had learned the skill of fishing from somebody; if so, he could surely learn Torah, too. The fisherman responded, “In this area, Heaven gifted me with understanding.” Eliyahu retorted, “If you were gifted understanding to cast nets and retrieve fish from the sea, then you were certainly gifted understanding to learn Torah, about which is written (Devarim 30:14), כִּי קָרוֹב אֵלֶיךָ הַדְּבָר מְאֹד, *the matter is very near to you*.” Immediately, the fisherman raised his voice in weeping, recognizing that if he only wanted, he could, indeed, learn Torah.

The Kotzker Rebbe explained: this doesn't mean that learning Torah is easier than fishing. It means that had the fisherman felt that Torah was as vital to his life as earning a living, then Hashem would surely have had pity and granted him the necessary insight to learn Torah.

We may now understand the intent of our pasuk. The Torah is lamenting that even as Esav was אִישׁ יָדַע צֹד, a man knowledgeable in the skill of hunting, he remained אִישׁ שָׂדֶה, a boorish man of the field, ignorant of Torah wisdom. Instead of using his intellectual capacities for Torah, he wasted them on foolishness.

(בנאות דשא – תולדות תשפ"ד)

6 Tanna D'Vei Eliyahu Zuta 14.