Yeshivas Toras Moshe
ישיבת תורת משה
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Rosh Yeshiva

PARSHAS TOLDOS

תשפ"ז

Remaining Yaakov in the Physical World

This parsha tells us about Yitzchok Ovinu and the relationship between his two sons. It also tells us what our purpose is in this world and how we are supposed to succeed in it.

ויעתר יצחק לה' לנוכח אשתו כי עקרה היא.

Through their tefillos, Rivkoh Imeinu became pregnant. But the twins struggled within her, and she went to Sheim ve'Eiver to understand what was happening. She received a nevuoh:

שני גוים בבטנך ושני לאומים ממעיך יפרדו ולאום מלאום יאמץ ורב יעבוד צעיר.

Two nations would emerge from these twins, and the older would serve the younger. Rashi explains that the relationship between Yaakov and Eisov is like a seesaw. When one rises, the other falls. They do not both stand at the height of their power together.

Who is Yaakov? An 'ish tom yosheiv oholim'. He worked on himself to become a complete human being, and he sat and learned Torah. Eisov was a hunter, a man of physical strength. He trapped animals, but he also knew how to trap people with his dishonesty. He could deceive even his father.

The posuk tells us that Yitzchok loved Eisov because 'tzayid befiv'. Was Yitzchok Ovinu impressed by someone who hunted animals? Was that what attracted him? No. Rashi explains that Eisov deceived him. Yitzchok saw one son whose life was entirely spiritual and another who was a tzaddik involved in the physical world. He could not see through Eisov's falsehood.

These two sons represent two ways of approaching life. One says that this is a physical world, and physical strength is what rules it. The other says that we are here for a spiritual purpose, and that we need the physical world to fulfill that purpose. Which is the goal? Money and power, or avodas Hashem? Both cannot be the ultimate purpose at the same time.

A human being uniquely combines the physical and the spiritual. Hakodosh Boruch Hu formed him from the dust of the earth and gave him a neshomo:

ויפח באפיו נשמת חיים.

The question is which serves which. Does the spiritual serve the physical, or does the physical serve the spiritual? The nevuoh to Rivkoh tells us the proper relationship: 'verav yaavod tzo'ir'. The physical world is supposed to serve the spiritual world. The ultimate purpose is avodas Hakodosh Boruch Hu.

What Yitzchok Saw and What Rivkoh Understood

Yitzchok was an oloh temimoh, an unblemished offering. His entire life was holy, dedicated to Hakodosh Boruch Hu. He was not even permitted to leave Eretz Yisroel.

Chazal tell us that when he lay on the mizbeiach, the malochim cried, and their tears fell into his eyes. This was a cause of his blindness. What are Chazal teaching us? Yitzchok lived in a world of such complete ruchniyus that he did not see the evil Eisov concealed. Evil was foreign to his world. He was "blind" to it completely.

To see through Eisov, he needed Rivkoh. She had grown up in the home of Besuel and Lovon. She knew what falsehood looked like, had seen through it, and had remained pure herself. Hakodosh Boruch Hu brought together Yitzchok, with his extraordinary holiness, and Rivkoh, who understood the reality of evil in the world from which she had come.

Eisov did possess tremendous kibbud ov. But he was also a murderer, a thief, and a person involved in every kind of wrongdoing. Yitzchok was unaware of that side of him. He saw the son who honored him and asked questions that made him appear deeply concerned about spiritual matters.

As Yitzchok grew older, he looked towards the future. He envisioned a partnership between his sons like Yissochor and Zevulun: Eisov would be involved in the physical world and support Yaakov, who would sit and learn. Both would be tzaddikim, each contributing something different. It was a beautiful vision.

But there can be a difficulty for people who live in a very ideal world. They may not recognize the realities with which they have to deal in order to accomplish the Torah's purpose. Rivkoh knew that Eisov was not the partner Yitzchok imagined. To make Yaakov's physical survival dependent on him would be a disaster.

Two Different Brochos

Why did Yitzchok want to give the brochos to Eisov? To understand this, we have to distinguish between the two brochos he ultimately gave Yaakov. One was given when he thought Yaakov was Eisov. The other was given when he knew exactly whom he was blessing.

At the end of the parsha, before Yaakov leaves for Padan Aram, Yitzchok instructs him not to marry a woman from Canaan. This is the same concern Avrohom had when choosing a wife for Yitzchok. Then Yitzchok gives Yaakov the brocho:

ויתן לך את ברכת אברהם לך ולזרעך איתך לרשתך את ארץ מגוריך אשר נתן אלקים לאברהם.

This is birkas Avrohom: the continuation of Avrohom Ovinu's mesorah, including Eretz Yisroel. The bris between the Ovos and Hakodosh Boruch Hu centers on Eretz Yisroel, the place designated for its fulfillment. Yitzchok intended Yaakov to receive that legacy. He had never intended to give it to Eisov.

What, then, was the brocho he had intended for Eisov?

ויתן לך האלקים מטל השמים ומשמני הארץ ורב דגן ותירוש.

It was a brocho of material abundance: the dew of heaven, the richness of the land, grain and wine. Chazal associate Eisov with Rome and the fertility of Italy. In our terms, we might think of the oil wealth of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf. These are the physical resources of the world.

The brocho continues:

יעבדוך עמים וישתחוו לך לאומים, הוה גביר לאחיך וישתחוו לך בני אמך.

Eisov would have wealth and power, and Yaakov would depend on him. Yitzchok imagined a partnership in which Eisov's resources would sustain Yaakov's Torah. He did not know the nevuoh Rivkoh had received, that the older son would serve the younger.

Rivkoh understood that Yaakov had to receive the material brochos as well. He could not place his livelihood and survival in Eisov's hands. That is why she sent him to receive the brochos intended for his brother. He would have to take responsibility for his own physical needs while remaining Yaakov.

The Condition Attached to Eisov's Power

When Yitzchok discovered what had happened, he trembled. But he accepted that the brochos had gone to Yaakov through the hashgocho of Hakodosh Boruch Hu. He affirmed, "גם ברוך יהיה". He would not take them back. There are times when a person sees where the hashgocho has led him and has to accept that this is the direction he must follow.

Eisov pleaded for a brocho of his own. Yitzchok answered:

הנה משמני הארץ יהיה מושבך ומטל השמים מעל.

Notice the order. In Yaakov's brocho, the dew of heaven comes first, followed by the richness of the earth. In Eisov's, the earth comes first. Then Yitzchok tells him:

ועל חרבך תחיה ואת אחיך תעבוד.

You will live by your sword, but you will serve your brother. Yitzchok

now recognized something about Eisov that he had not recognized before. Eisov's way was physical power and dominance. Nevertheless, the authority already given to Yaakov would remain in place.

There was, however, a condition:

והיה כאשר תריד ופרקת עולו מעל צוארך.

Onkelos explains:

ויהי כד יעברון בנוהי על פתגמי אוריתא.

When Yaakov's descendants transgress the words of the Torah, Eisov will be able to throw off their yoke. Yitzchok's brocho now defined the conditions governing the relationship foretold to Rivkoh.

There are two kinds of power here. One is the sword: armies, atom bombs, fighter jets, physical domination. The other is Torah. What is the world for? What is supposed to govern it? Among other nations, military strength may determine who prevails. But the relationship between Yaakov and Eisov is governed by something else.

When Yaakov remains Yaakov, he rises. When he tries to become Eisov, he loses the basis of his own strength, and Eisov rises instead. Yaakov cannot compete with Eisov by becoming Eisov. He does not have to. That is not his purpose.

What Defines Klal Yisroel

We live in confusing times. What does it mean to be a Jew? What does it mean to be a Jew in Eretz Yisroel? Our mission is not to produce the most billionaires, possess the strongest army, or win the most Nobel Prizes. Our mission is Torah. To the degree that we understand and live by that mission, we fulfill our role in the world. When we redefine ourselves through planes, bombs, missiles, and worldly achievements, we abandon the source of our strength.

Think about the development of secular Zionism over roughly the past 140 years. It sought to create the "new Jew." The old Jew of golus, who spent his evenings in the beis medrash learning Torah or saying Tehillim, was to be replaced. The new ideal was physical strength, military power, and building a country. This was supposed to solve anti-Semitism.

But that is not how the world works. Today, the physical power of Jews in Eretz Yisroel has itself become the greatest focus of anti-Semitism. It has not removed the problem. Our identity as a nation is avodas Hakodosh Boruch Hu. When we try to become Eisov, Eisov can tell us that he is better at being Eisov than we are. That is his identity, not ours.

The same question applies outside Eretz Yisroel. Jews have tremendous wealth, including frum Jews. But who are our heroes? What do we admire? Which serves which? Is the money serving avodas Hashem, or has money become the purpose? The purpose of being a frum Jew is avodas Hashem.

This does not mean Yaakov can ignore the physical world. Rivkoh was right: Yaakov cannot depend on Eisov for his parnossoh or his survival. He has to be responsible for himself. But how does he succeed in both worlds? How does the 'ish tom yosheiv oholim' take responsibility for material life without ceasing to be Yaakov?

Yaakov in Lovon's House

There is a very important Rambam at the end of Hilchos Sechirus that I always show people. It explains how Yaakov became so successful even in olom hazeh.

Yaakov spent twenty years with Lovon, a master swindler. Some people think that when you deal with a thief, the only way to survive is to outswindle him. He is dishonest, so you have to be dishonest as well. Otherwise, how will you make a living?

Yaakov did not approach it that way. Yaakov is emes. The Midrash describes Lovon pursuing him after he left and searching through his possessions. Think about it: Yaakov had lived there for twenty years, had four wives and children, and had packed up his household and left. Yet Lovon could not find even a small household implement that Yaakov had taken from him. Yaakov was that careful. That is emes.

Lovon repeatedly changed his wages and tried to cheat him. Nevertheless, Yaakov worked with all his strength. He did not cut corners or neglect his responsibilities. The Rambam explains that an employee must be scrupulous about his employer's time and work with all his strength, as Yaakov did. That is why he received his reward even in this world: "ויפרץ האיש מאד מאד".

Why did Yaakov become so wealthy? Because of his honesty and the way he worked. He did not have to become a swindler in order to succeed among swindlers. He could be intelligent and outsmart Lovon without cheating him. He remained completely committed to emes.

That is how Yaakov wins. The moment he crosses over and tries to become Eisov, he loses. He may gain something temporarily, but in the end he has given up the very quality through which he is meant to succeed.

A Brocho for an Honest Business

I often repeat a story that happened to me. A very wealthy man was supporting Yeshivas Toras Moshe. He was making a fortune and giving twenty percent of his income to tzedokoh. When he visited Eretz Yisroel, he knew that I was very close to Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, and he asked me to take him for a brocho.

I explained to Rav Shlomo Zalman that this was a very successful businessman who gave twenty percent to tzedokoh. He wanted a brocho to continue succeeding and to continue giving. Rav Shlomo Zalman asked me, "Is it an ehrliche business? Is it an honest business?"

I answered that I was not inside the business and could not personally vouch for everything that happened there. The man told me it was honest, and it appeared to be, but I did not know its inner workings.

Rav Shlomo Zalman asked me to bring him in. He told him, "If your business is ehrlich, you should be very successful." We walked out, and the man was not happy. He asked me to take him to Rav Shach.

I was also close to Rav Shach. We drove to Bnei Brak, and I presented the same request: a very successful businessman, giving twenty percent to tzedokoh, supporting the yeshiva, and asking for a brocho to continue succeeding and giving. I was myself a beneficiary of his support through the yeshiva.

Rav Shach's response was the same. They had not rehearsed this! He asked, "Is it an ehrliche business?" I gave the same answer: the man said it was honest, but I was not inside the business and could not vouch for it. Rav Shach called him in and told him, "If it is an ehrliche business, you should be successful."

We walked out. He did not ask me to take him anywhere else. I followed his financial history from time to time. He remained wealthy, very wealthy, for a long while. Then, one day, everything changed.

Giving tzedokoh was not the only question these gedolim asked. They wanted to know whether the business itself was honest. Yaakov's success in the physical world has to remain the success of Yaakov.

Representing the Emes of Hakodosh Boruch Hu

We are a mamleches kohanim vegoy kodosh, a spiritual people. Whether we like it or not, we represent a spiritual ideal to the world, and we have to live up to it. This applies to Jews generally and to anyone who seeks to represent the Jewish people.

Hitler, yimach shemo vezichro, sought to eliminate every Jew. His philosophy reduced the human being to an animal. A Jew represented the opposite ideal, and as long as that ideal remained, it challenged his entire outlook. Iran's determination to eliminate Jews also confronts us with the fact that we represent something beyond our physical existence. We cannot escape the responsibility to fulfill that ideal.

This is not merely a derosho. It governs how we live. Yitzchok accepted that the material brochos belonged to Yaakov, and Eisov would serve him. But if Yaakov's descendants abandoned the Torah, Eisov would be able to break that yoke. Our success depends on remembering who we are.

Yaakov became extraordinarily wealthy while dealing with a man who constantly tried to cheat him. Through it all, he remained Yaakov Ovinu. He took responsibility for his livelihood and represented the emes of Hakodosh Boruch Hu in every situation he faced. That is what we have to understand deeply: who we are, what defines us, and how we are meant to succeed.