

PARSHAS VAYISHLACH

תש"פ

Last week, we read Parshas Vayeitzei, and the week before, we read Parshas Toldos. Now Yaakov Ovinu finally confronts Eisov.

In Parshas Toldos, when Rivkah is pregnant with Yaakov and Eisov, she was told that it is not just two children inside her. These are two different nations and philosophies that will dominate the world. But only one will be dominant at a time. When one is up, the other is down. The older one will serve the younger one.

What are these two philosophies? Yaakov is the highest of the Ovos—he was zoche to found the nation of Klal Yisroel with all 12 children being committed to following the path of the Ovos. The first two Ovos had other children who did not follow that path.

The philosophy of Yaakov is the idea that this world is run by spiritual values and goals. The essence of a human being is his neshomo and the body serves the goals of the neshomo. Eisov believed everything that is valuable in life is physical—the goal of living is physical domination and physical pleasure of the body. It isn't to say that Eisov doesn't have any spiritual aspects to him. He does. But Chazal compare Eisov to the chazir—the pig. There are two simonim of kashrus—split hooves and chewing the cud. The pig and similarly Eisov have only one—the outer one. He displays his hooves for all to see that he is kosher. But it is a façade of ruchniyus—a sham. In his heart, Eisov only values the physical aspects of the world and of humanity—power and pleasure.

These are two philosophies of life. The world sometimes is run by spiritual values represented by Klal Yisroel—and the world recognizes that we represent ruchniyus. Hitler wrote this explicitly in his work—explaining why the Jews must be exterminated. He believed that human beings were essentially animals. The law of animal nature dictates that the strongest race must dominate the weaker ones. Only the human conscience tells people to protect the weak, and this conscience prevents us from living authentically as animals. Hitler said—correctly—that it was the Jew who brought the idea of conscience to the world. As long as Jews have a mission to influence civilization and bring morality to the world, we can never live authentically as the animals we want to be.

Throughout the generations, whether the Jews themselves recognized it or not, Jews were seen—and were resented—for bringing spiritual goals to the world.

Yitzchak was fooled by Eisov's deceptive exterior and thought Yaakov could just sit and learn while being supported by Eisov. He wanted to give Eisov the brochos for that purpose. Rivkah knew that Eisov was tricking his father and made sure Yaakov received the brochos of prosperity in order to avoid having to be dependent on Eisov's support.

Yitzchak's brocho to Yaakov was a brocho of material wealth. It was fulfilled in last week's parsha while working for Lovon. The Rambam in Hilchos Sechirus which says just like the employer can't cheat his employee, the employee cannot cheat his employer. We learn the halachos of ethics in the workplace from none other than Yaakov Ovinu. Even though he was working for an outright charlatan, who changed his contract a hundred times or more, Yaakov was scrupulously honest. When Lovon searched through all of Yaakov's belongings when he was looking for the teraphim, the midrash says he didn't find a single item of his—not even a fork or a spoon—even after living in the same household for twenty years! The Rambam explains that it wasn't just the brochos which caused Yaakov to become wealthy. It

was that scrupulous honesty in his dealings with Lovon which granted Yaakov the blessing of material success. He refers to Yaakov here as the tzaddik—completely just and righteous.

The world we live in—whether we like it or not—is the world of Eisov. Even in our frum circles, physical pleasure and physical success is what people are avidly pursuing in life. The task we were given is to remain a Yaakov while living in Eisov's world—while living in Lovon's household! Rashi says Yaakov survived for 20 years in Lovon's house and was not influenced one iota by Lovon! The question is a very simple one. How did Yaakov pull it off? How do we pull it off?

The night before Yaakov meets Eisov, he is confronted by the Sar of Eisov. The next day, Yaakov gives Eisov all the gifts and Eisov offers to accompany Yaakov on his journey. Yaakov declines the offer. He promises to meet up with him some day on Har Seir. Chazal explain this as follows.

At that point, after 20 years of living with Lovon, Rochel gives birth to Yosef. This means it's time to go back home. Why? Because Yosef is the counter-force to Eisov. Through Yosef, Yaakov can overpower Eisov. But this is puzzling because we don't see Yaakov overpowering Eisov with Yosef at all after he leaves Lovon. Just the opposite—we find him giving gifts and appeasing him—avoiding confrontation and pushing Eisov away—until Moshach comes to Har Seir!

When Yaakov left Yitzchak's house, he has already spent his life learning and was 63 years old. How did he prepare himself to live with Lovon? Chazal say he spent 14 years learning in Yeshivas Shem Vo'Ever. But this needs explanation. He was already learning in his father's beis midrash! Assuming Yitzchak is living in Be'er Sheva, why does Yaakov have to pick up and move down the block to learn in Yeshivas Shem Vo'Ever which was also in Be'er Sheva?

The answer is that these were two vastly different botei midrash. Yitzchak's beis midrash was completely open to the outside world. Yitzchak was carrying on the work of Avrohom Ovinu spreading the knowledge of Hashem to the public at large. And there was an influence from the outside world. Yeshivas Shem Vo'Ever was secluded and insulated. In order to survive in Lovon's house, Yaakov said he needed to learn in a place of total immersion with no distractions.

When he tells Eisov that he remained Yaakov, he is saying he received no influence from Lovon and he lost no level of his limud haTorah. What was his secret? His strategy? He kept learning the entire time.

Without the constant connection to limud haTorah after he left Yeshivas Shem Vo'Ever, he would have lost everything he gained.

Another aspect of Yaakov's strategy was keeping to the middas ho'emes and openly acknowledging that Hashem is helping him. When Yaakov dealt with such a deceptive trickster like Lovon, we find that Yaakov attributes all his success in parnossoh to Hashem's supernatural intervention and protection from harm. Yaakov does all the hishtadlus with sticks by the feeding trough to breed a certain type of colored sheep, but then he has a vision that showed him all his efforts were just for show. At night, Hashem was sending malochim to bring the colored sheep to impregnate the ewes and enrich Yaakov. But Yaakov knew that this was only because he was scrupulously honest—he had Hashem in front of him the entire time.

We find that Yosef has a similar trait which kept him connected to the house of Yaakov. How did he remain faithful after 22 years in the midst

of tumas Mitzrayim? How did he survive? How do we survive amidst all the wild pursuit of material wealth and success all around us?

Just imagine Yosef's message to Yaakov after he framed the brothers and terrorized Yaakov and his family from the minute the brothers showed up in Egypt. You know who that monster really was? It's me, Yosef! Not exactly a comfort! How is Yosef going to convince Yaakov that he is not some terrible monster but the same Yosef Hatzaddik? By showing Yaakov that he is still connected to limud haTorah. He is still holding in the last sugya they learned together 22 years ago.

This is what Yosef had to do to hold on to his level. This is why Yosef is the counter-force to Eisov. He is able to survive in the most difficult of circumstances. How? By staying connected to learning.

We see another strategy Yosef employed to remain faithful to Yaakov's spiritual goals and values. Just like Yaakov, he constantly attributes all his success to Hashem's help. The posuk says that Yosef made it apparent to everybody that it was Hashem giving him success. He is different—not an ordinary Egyptian slave. The same thing happens in the jailhouse. Yosef is given all the responsibilities of maintaining the jail—but he is different and he lets everyone know it. Yosef makes sure to project an image that he is being helped by Hashem and that all his success is coming from Him.

It wasn't just that Yosef kept learning and having emunoh. He projected it to others around him. This is a strategy for us to maintain our level in a hostile environment when we go out into the world someday. What image will you project to others who you work with? That you are just like everybody else? Or that you are different? Ultimately, the image you project to others affects and shapes how you think about yourself. You need to hold yourself to a higher standard in the workplace as well as at home. You don't have to be embarrassed to be held accountable by Hashem at all times.

Yosef continues this way of life in front of Pharaoh himself. He could have marketed himself in a completely different way—taking advantage of this big opportunity by taking credit for every accurate prediction and pearl of wisdom he offered. It might have helped him get ahead in Pharaoh's kingdom. But instead Yosef again presents himself as simply communicating Hashem's insight to him—he does not take any credit. That was Yosef—he is different. And when they sat down to eat—even in his own royal residence, he insisted on remaining separate and distinct from the Egyptians in his household.

We will elaborate on the nisayon of Eishes Potiphar another time. But for now, suffice to say that Chazal describe the super-human strength needed to resist the temptation. She promised Yosef everything he could want—freedom and nobility. Imagine if Yosef had failed the test chas vesholom, and then looked back years later to contemplate where he would be if he refused her. Surely, Yosef would have been certain that his refusal would have only lead to more misery and hardship. Surely Yosef would have congratulated himself on his decision to take the opportunity to advance himself—without realizing that by giving in to temptation, he lost the opportunity to become second only to Pharaoh himself!

We learn from Chazal that the two strategies we have been talking about weren't going to do the job at hand. Yosef was about to crack from the pressure until, at the last moment, he saw the image of his father in front of him. This is what brought him back—realizing that he is at a fateful crossroads between sharing his olam haboh with his father or with this Egyptian man's wife. One has to have an image of a real human being who he feels beholden to—someone whose very image demands of him to maintain his moral and spiritual standards. He will take no excuses—even in the most difficult circumstances. This is the Mishnah of Asei lecha Rav.

Yosef was able to do it all because of all these tools. He was able to survive and will ultimately defeat Eisov.

Yaakov started off fleeing from his brother and without a penny. He survived and thrived by keeping himself different and distinct—projecting an image to the world that he is different. He kept his level by holding on to the Torah of his father Yitzchak and immersing himself in the Yeshivah of Shem Vo'Ever with no distractions.

Right now we live in a world where Eisov dominates—and there is no pretense of morality and spiritual values anymore. All of that is gone. We need to learn from Yaakov and Yosef how to survive. Someday we will confront Eisov on Har Seir—when Yaakov's message of spiritual goals and values is ready to take over the world. But until then, we need to maintain our level in the golus of Edom by projecting the image that we are different, by having an image in front of us of someone who demands that we never compromise on our standards, and maintaining that constant connection to limud haTorah after years of total immersion in learning for the years you are in yeshiva.