

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Toldot
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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

Toldot – Why was Yitzchak blind?

In this week's Parasha of Toldot, we read the famous story about Yaakov “stealing” the brachot from Eisav. This entire episode is very enigmatic and the commentators offer a number of different explanations. The following explanation contains a powerful message.

The story

Yitzchak was getting old and he was blind. He told Eisav that he wanted to give him a bracha before he died. Rivka overheard the discussion. She wanted Yaakov to receive the bracha instead. She instructed Yaakov to impersonate his brother so that Yitzchak would give the bracha to him instead of Eisav. Yaakov was not happy about the idea but he followed his mother's command.

Rivka understood that Yaakov was the more appropriate recipient of the bracha. As the mother of the twins, perhaps Rivka had a keener understanding of the true nature of her boys. She also had the benefit of a prophecy that she had received from the prophet Shem¹. When she was pregnant with the twins, she went to a prophet who told her that the two boys would separate into two nations. The older son would be wicked and the younger would be flawless. And the older would serve the younger. It seems that she did not share this prophecy with Yitzchak.

Why was Yitzchak blind?

Rashi² brings a number of explanations for why Yitzchak was blind. The third reason³ that Rashi provides is that Yitzchak became blind in order that Yaakov should be able to take the brachot. This is an astounding suggestion! Why did Hashem have to make Yitzchak suffer with blindness just so that Yaakov would be able to deceive him and take the brachot? Why didn't Hashem just tell Yitzchak to give the brachot to Yaakov!?! When Avraham was reluctant to follow Sarah's request to banish Ishmael and Hagar⁴, Hashem intervened and told Avraham to comply with Sarah's request. Yitzchak was also a prophet. Why didn't Hashem simply instruct him what to do?

It seems that Hashem specifically wanted Yaakov to obtain the brachot through deception. But why?

Yitzchak always intended to give two brachot

It is important to understand that Yitzchak always planned to give two brachot. One was for success in the physical realm and the other was for success in the spiritual realm. The bracha that Yaakov “stole” only related to the bracha for *physical* success: “the dew of the heavens... the fatness of the

¹ See Breishit 25:23 with Rashi's commentary.

² In his commentary to Breishit 27:1 (Parshat Toldot).

³ Based on the Midrash Tanchuma 8. The first two reasons that Rashi provides are that Eisav's wives would burn incense to their idols and the smoke affected Yitzchak's eyes; and when Yitzchak was bound up on the alter the angels were crying and their tears fell on Yitzchak's eyes.

⁴ Parashat Vayera, Breishit 21:9-13.

earth... abundant grain and wine... nations will serve you... be a lord to your brothers”⁵. After Yaakov had “stolen” the bracha for physical success, and just before he was forced to flee from Eisav’s anger, Yitzchak summoned Yaakov and gave him another bracha: “May He grant you the bracha of Avraham, to you and to your offspring with you, that you may possess the land of your sojourns which G-d gave to Avraham”⁶. This is the spiritual bracha that Yitzchak had always intended to give to Yaakov.

The different views of Yitzchak and Rivka

Yitzchak thought that ideally Yaakov and Eisav would work in partnership. Together they would carry out the covenant with Hashem and build up the world. Yaakov would be responsible for the spiritual aspects of this Divine mission and Eisav would take care of the physical aspects. That is why, according to Yitzchak, Yaakov needed the spiritual bracha and Eisav needed the physical bracha. However, Rivka disagreed. She understood that the wicked Eisav could not be a part of the Jewish people at all. According to Rivka’s perspective (and based on the prophecy that she had received), Yaakov needed both of the brachot.

Why did Yaakov have to obtain the physical bracha through deception?⁷

We mentioned above that Hashem wanted Yaakov to obtain the physical bracha through deception. Why? Perhaps Hashem wanted to teach Yaakov (and us, his descendants) a very important lesson. Yaakov belonged in the spiritual tents of Torah. The physical plane was more Eisav’s domain. However, as part of the Divine plan, Yaakov needed to also be involved in the physical world. To convert this world into a dwelling place for Hashem necessitates involvement in the physical. But Yaakov had to always remember that whenever he was involved in physical endeavours, he was not really being true to himself. He was just “pretending” to be Eisav.

We too need to be involved in the physical world. We need to work. We need to earn a livelihood. We need to find a place to live, clothes to wear and food to eat. And we need to pay for all of that. But we also need to remember, and to feel in our hearts, that when we are involved in these pursuits, we are involving ourselves in a realm which is not ideal. We are only involved in the gashmius (physicality) out of necessity, because this is the way that Hashem wants it to be in this world. We are dressing up as Eisav out of necessity. As long as we feel that we don’t really belong in the physical world, the gashmius will not pose too great a threat to us. However, if we become too involved in the physical, we run the risk that we are no longer just pretending to be Eisav. We might actually *become* Eisav. And that would be a tragedy because we are meant for greater things.

Let’s try something this week:

1. Remember, when we are involved in the physical world such as in the workforce, we are just impersonating Eisav. Though this is necessary, we must make sure that we don’t forget our spiritual essence and actually become Eisav!
2. We should not feel too comfortable while we are working or involved in material pursuits. We should make an effort to minimise our time in that world and to leave as soon as we are able to. That will free us up to devote our time and efforts to do what really counts.

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Ledder

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⁵ Parashat Toldot, Breishit 27:28-29.

⁶ Parashat Toldot, Breishit 28:4.

⁷ This idea is based on a d’var Torah that I heard. Unfortunately, I do not have an accurate source.