



Parshat Toldot: Obstacles in the Path of G-d

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur on Chassidut by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

The struggle of Yaakov and Esav is understood by our Sages as the quintessential struggle throughout the centuries between the Jewish people and their enemies. Esav is specifically identified with the Roman Empire, since he was their ancestor. The Shem MiShmuel asks several questions. How did the wicked Esav emerge from such holy parents? Why was he given the ability to compete with Yaakov? Even if Yitzchak did not completely fathom Esav's profound wickedness, he certainly saw that Yaakov was greater. Why then did he wish to give the *brachot* to Esav?

The Shem Mishmuel explains that Hashem embedded within both the physical and spiritual worlds a system of *ikar v'tafel* – primary and secondary concepts. Our physical world is secondary. The primary world is *Olam Haba* – the World to Come. This world can be understood on two levels. Every soul goes to *Olam Haba* after death. *Olam Haba* also refers to the time when *Mashiach* will come and rectify the flaws of this world. Our sages say that our physical world serves only as entranceway to *Olam Haba*, the palace. Our task is to prepare ourselves by completing the process of creation and developing our souls in this world so that we can eventually merit the next world, the primary purpose of creation.

The six days of the week are also a means of preparing ourselves for the focal point of the week, Shabbat. Our souls revel in the

unique, holy spirituality of Shabbat. During the week we are harried and busy with the mundane physical aspects of living. Shabbat is the day to focus on the *ikar* – what's really important – Torah, prayer, and family.

As we go through life, we will constantly encounter *ikar* and *tafel*. *Tafel* is earning the salary to support our families. *Ikar* is spending time and learning with the family. Does it make sense to get upset over such *tafels* as losing a business deal or earning an average grade in school? Isn't it more important to be thankful to Hashem for all the real blessings He gives us?

Why did Yitzchak and Rivkah fail with Esav? The Avnei Nezer explains that *gaavah* – haughtiness, blocks a person from *teshuva*. The Zohar says it is similar to a thick black cloud that prevents the sun's rays from piercing through. Someone who is truly egotistical is so black that the most profound words of *mussar* and *chassidut* cannot penetrate his heart. Esav, who inherited the *gevura*, power, of Yitzchak, was amazingly talented and strong. But whereas Yitzchak channeled his strength for the good, Esav distorted it for evil.

The Shem MiShmuel writes that the key event in Yaakov and Esav's life was the sale of the *bechora*, the firstborn's birthright. When Esav heard that Avraham had died, he lost faith in Hashem's justice and sold the *bechora*. There was a tradition in the family that Avraham would live to 180, but he died

at 175 in order to avoid seeing Esav descend to wickedness. Esav did not know this. He was haughty and claimed that Hashem had repaid Avraham's *chesed* with *din*. Therefore he exchanged the *ikar* for the *tafel* and sold the privilege of serving Hashem for a plate of lentils.

The mission of man is to combine this world with the next world, to meld the physical with the spiritual. Our world is finite, *Olam Haba* is infinity. The limited pleasures of this world do not compare with the beauty, wonder, and closeness to Hashem that we will experience in the next world. That is the world we should focus on.

Yaakov and Esav were both blessed with tremendous powers. Both were given free choice. The primary clash between the two was which world to focus on, which arena to focus their energies. Yaakov made the right choice and grasped onto the *ikar* – *Olam Haba*. Esav gave in to temptation in order to build empires in this world. He used the spiritual lessons of Avraham and Yitzchak for his own selfish ends. He would spend time learning with Yitzchak and pretend to be interested so that he would later receive the *brachot* and all the wealth belonging to Yitzchak. He perverted religion for self advancement. The enemies of Israel continue to follow in the footsteps of Esav. Yet at the end of time it will be proven that Torah Jews who embrace the *ikar*, personify truth.



Parshat Toldot: Potent Prayer

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

In Parshat Toldot we read how Yitzchak and Rivkah both prayed to Hashem for a child. Rashi explains that Hashem listened to Yitzchak over Rivkah because one cannot compare the prayer of a son of righteous parents to the prayer of a daughter of evil lineage. Yet Chazal teach that baalei *teshuva* are ranked greater than *tzaddikim*. They also teach that Hashem listens to all who call out to him in truth. What made Yitzchak's prayer greater than Rivkah's?

Rav Dessler explains that Yitzchak could have easily continued along the path of Avraham. Instead he worked hard to forge his own path in *avodat Hashem*. He was not content to follow a routine. Instead, he invested enormous effort to make *gevurah*, self discipline, his own way of serving G-d. In this way he was greater than Rivkah, who simply moved from outright evil towards righteousness. This is one of our greatest challenges. A person should not be satisfied with the level he has reached, but should constantly strive to reach greater heights in serving Hashem.

Prayer is about working on our relationship with Hashem. It connects us to the Source. We so often see prayer as simply a means of procuring our needs. Yet the essence of prayer means moving beyond ourselves to a larger and greater reality. The first step to

growth in *tefilah* is to recognize that Hashem is the center of a person's life. This ultimately leads to *deveikut*, closeness with Hashem.

Rav Dessler explains that good *bechira* entails moving beyond complacency in order to see the truth. Each of us has different battle points. For example, a habitual liar who repeatedly overcomes his evil inclination and tells the truth will find after a while, that it is no longer a battle for him. He has moved his point of *bechira* further up. Now the battle will be in a different area. The purpose of creation is to exercise our free will and use it to elevate ourselves to greater levels. The challenge most people face with *tefilah* is that they fail to focus on what they are saying and to whom they are speaking. Their prayer lacks depth and passion. Yitzchak mapped out for us the paradigm of a *tzaddik ben tzaddik*. He could have davened just the way his father taught him. But he understood that he needed to develop his own personal relationship with Hashem.

The Imrei Shefer writes that normally when a diplomat comes to visit a foreign country, a diplomat of equal stature comes out to greet him. Is it proper for us to send our bodies, our lower selves, to greet the King of Kings as we stand before Him in prayer? This should be our battle. It takes a great deal of practice and self control to reach full concentration.

Thinking about the meaning of two or three words at a time helps. Rav Segal recommended pointing to each word. This slows you down and forces you to think.

The second step to growth in *tefilah* is moving outside yourself to a larger realm where you feel the anguish another person as if it were your own. The Tiv Avodah writes that Yitzchak was a *tzaddik* and he believed that Hashem's decree that he be childless was for the best. Yet he felt his wife's pain so strongly that he prayed for her with depth and passion. The Gemara writes, "One who prays for another and is need of the same request, he is answered sooner." The one who prays becomes a conduit for blessing, which then affects him first. This is why Yitzchak's prayer was accepted before Rivkah's.

The third level of *tefilah* is *bitul*, nullifying your will before Hashem's will. Rivkah prayed for the ultimate *tzaddik*. In contrast, Yitzchak asked for a child who would be best for them in their *avodat Hashem*. A *tzaddik ben tzaddik* tends to rely on his *yichus*. Yitzchak went against his natural nature and completely nullified himself before the will of Hashem. This was the greatness of Yitzchak's *tefilah*.

Rebbetzin's Perspective

Excerpted from Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller's Question and Answer series on Naaleh.com

Question:

I am a wife and a mother to a one year old boy. I work part time from home for a Jewish outreach shul. I end up working a lot more than my official hours because I am constantly called on to help people. On the one hand, my child and husband suffer because of this, but on the other hand, how can I refuse to help people in need? How do I reconcile that I'm so often put in situations in which I can do so much good at the expense of myself/my family? How do I know when to stop or how?

Answer:

suggest you dedicate two hours every day when you will not answer the phones at all. These hours should be the hour that your husband is expected home and one hour during the day that you should devote exclusively to your son. It's not much. But

it will take self discipline to give both of them your full attention. This can change things. If you keep these hours sacred for your family, then you won't have to worry so much about the other times. It's ok to do *chesed* over the phone while holding your baby or cooking for Shabbat. It may also help if your shul has a congregant who would volunteer on a technical level. You can delegate to her work that will save you time and benefit her.

Make sure to give yourself focused time too so that you don't become distracted and stressed out. Have your babysitter stay an extra hour and grab a nap during the day. Improving your home organization skills can also make a big difference. Have a shopping list that's all inclusive so that you can buy almost everything once a month. Cook and bake in bulk so that you have meals on hand in the freezer. If you can

keep the kitchen and living room uncluttered, the floors swept, and the bathroom clean, everyone will have a good feeling about the house. Don't worry about the little things. Put your family first, mentally and emotionally. When they talk, really listen to them. When they need you, be responsive. As long as your husband and child feel beloved, they will participate with you instead of trying to disengage you. I believe that children grow up unhappy because they feel unloved, not because they were never given enough attention. In conclusion, you can only do as much as your limited time and strength allows. Leave the rest up to Hashem. You need to develop enough *bitachon* to realize that if you cannot accomplish things on your scale of priorities, then Hashem does not want you to do it.