

toldos

perceptions
Issue #870

Ya’akov said, “[First] Sell me your firstborn birthright.” (Bereishis 25:31)

ONE OF THE things that has always impressed me about Torah—not that Torah needs to impress me, or that I need to be impressed to accept its authority—is the way it is not afraid to relate stories in a way that can easily be misconstrued. It could easily leave out such stories, or adapt them for a wider audience, but Torah instead just seems to tell it like it was.

For example, when Eisav came home exhausted and on the verge of death, Ya’akov used the opportunity to “extort” the birthright from him. True, Eisav had worked himself to that point by murdering lots of people, as Rashi notes, but did Ya’akov know that? Perhaps he did.

Even so, how many people have looked at Ya'akov's actions with contempt? A lot. Personally, I have been asked several times over the years, "How could Ya'akov have acted so cruelly to his brother at such a time of need?" When I told them the Rashi, they looked at me suspiciously, as if Rashi was just a cover-up.

It doesn't help that Ya'akov later dressed up as Eisav and stole his brochos by deceiving his own father. Wasn't that a profanation of the Name of God? After all, Jews and gentiles have read the Bible throughout the ages, and the latter have often used the Chumash itself to indict the Jewish people.

Before dealing with that question, there is another matter. As Rashi points out, Ya'akov was the real firstborn anyhow. He was conceived first, just born second. And, as the title states, the right of the firstborn belongs to the one born first.

Okay. Then why didn't God just cause the babies to flip-flop before birth and cause Ya'akov to be born first? According to the Torah, they were constantly in movement anyhow, so, at the last second Ya'akov could have been maneuvered into position to be born ahead of Eisav. Think of all the logistical problems it would solved after birth!

No need to buy the birthright.

No need to steal the blessings.

No need to run to Lavan's house.

Etc.

Well, since God does not make mistakes, He obviously wanted Ya'akov to have to buy the birthright, and to do it the way he did. He obviously wanted Ya'akov to have to "steal" the brochos, and to have to run to Lavan's house to avoid the revenge of Eisav. Whatever Ya'akov went

through, it was what God planned for him from the start. The question now is, WHY?

There are a lot of reasons on various different levels of Torah understanding. One of them, though, is not discussed much at all, at least not directly. It has to do with something we learned from last week's parsha, when Avraham went out of his way to BUY Ma'arah Machpelah, in order to bury Sarah, just as Ya'akov would later buy Shechem, and Dovid HaMelech, Har HaBayis.

As was explained back at Succos time, regarding the obligation to actually OWN one's lulav and esrog on the first day of the chag, something mystical happens when we purchase something. A connection is made between the purchaser and what is purchased, on a soul level.

Now, one might argue that Eretz Yisroel, like all inanimate objects, doesn't HAVE a soul. That's not entirely true, but it does not matter in this case. People become VERY attached to objects because it is possible to invest oneself in them to a very large degree.

We become sentimental about things because of what they come to represent to us, and that itself is like an aspect of life. When we give up money to buy something, especially if we earned it, then we give up an aspect of ourselves.

The same thing is true with respect to relationships. When people lose a spouse after many years of a happy marriage, they feel as if they lost a part of themselves. They did. Over the years, each spouse invested more of themselves into the relationship, and once it ends, it takes that investment with it. It's the price we pay for years of happiness and growth.

This is why Avraham insisted on buying Ma'arah Machpelah. It was about more than just securing the

land. It was about investing himself in it, about building a spiritual connection to what is effectively the portal to Gan Aiden, so that he and his descendants would remain spiritually attached to it forever.

Likewise, Ya'akov HAD to buy the birthright. Only then could he TRULY own it, and therefore, make it a part of him. Only with such a strong spiritual connection to such a strong spiritual responsibility could Ya'akov Avinu take full advantage of the right of the firstborn.

We see this dynamic again when the tribe of Levi, at the time of the golden calf, inherited from the firstborn when they put themselves on the line to avenge God. Their self-sacrifice made them fitting to be leaders of the Jewish people, something they acquired when they responded to the call, "Who is for God, come to me!"

People sometimes joke about how Jews are always looking to get the best deal, maybe even get what they want for free. But the best things in life are NOT for free, because if they were, we could never really enjoy them, or use their spiritual potential to our spiritual advantage. And, if the Torah teaches us anything, it is how to use life to our best spiritual advantage.

Connecting the Dots, Issue #7

A Separate Mater, Chapter 2: All Mixed Up

WE'RE SO USED to our world being the way it is that it is hard to imagine it being any other way. We know Paradise once existed, but do not relate to what it was like. Many people dream of a more utopian society, but that usually means just a better one, not a completely different one.

The Talmud says that the only difference between history now and history in the Messianic Era will be the end of national oppression. Nation will not oppress nation anymore, but that's about it. The rest of life as we have lived it for almost six millennia now, seemingly, will remain the same.

NO big deal?

YES big deal.

There is a reason mankind has yet to achieve WORLD peace, or anything close to it. Most nations haven't even been able to achieve NATIONAL peace. The answer is, the Klipos. As long as the Klipos remain in existence on ANY level, peace will be temporal, if at all, as the national divorce rate makes eminently clear.

Therefore, if the Messianic Era is going to be an internationally peaceful one, then it is going to have to be Kli-

pos—yetzer hara—free. And, indeed, the Talmud says that it will be:

Rebi Yehudah elucidated: In the Time-to-Come, The Holy One, Blessed is He, will bring the yetzer hara and “slaughter” it . . . (Succah 52a)

And HOW will God slaughter the yetzer hara? The same way WE are meant to, as the following begins to explain, step-by-step:

As a result of the sin of Kayin and Hevel, all souls became mixed together with the Klipos, and this is called the “mixing of good with evil.” (Sha’ar HaGilgulim, Introduction 20)

There is a lot of important information in this short paragraph. To begin with, it explains that the world we know is really the result of some unfortunate “mistakes” made long ago, not God’s, but man’s. Once upon a time, though for a very short while, it was very different.

To begin with, people were pure. They didn’t have an evil bone in their bodies, though there were only two at the time. Had Adam and Chava not sinned, then everyone born would have been just like them, pure and evil-free. The only thing at the time that seemed to be associated with both good and evil was the Aitz HaDa’as Tov v’Ra—the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

It didn’t last long, though. Very shortly after being created the first man and woman DID sin, and themselves became a mixture of good and evil. And once they had children, Kayin, Hevel, and their twin sisters, they were

born this way, a mixture of good and evil, making it possible for them, and us, to sin.

PHYSICALLY, we just see people who basically look and act like us, who walk the same earth as we do. It's not as if one person hovers above us, and another one above them. Physically, we're all basically on the same level and breathe the same quality of air, unless we PHYSICALLY do something to change that.

SPIRITUALLY, it is a different story. If we could see the world that way, we'd see what looks like a huge, filthy, detestable SWAMP called the "Klipos." And, if we could see through the filth, we'd see all those people's souls "floating" in that swamp at different levels, each struggling for spiritual air. The amazing thing is how two TOTALLY different realities can overlap without one being reflected in other.

In truth, they are. When a person who does a despicable act, they have revealed the location of their soul in the Klipos at that moment. It's the Klipos that encourage them to do it. If their conscience is unaffected, then they must be quite deep in the Klipos.

On the other hand, if a person performs a spiritually admirable act, then it is clear their soul must be somewhere close to the "surface" of the Klipos. If they are spiritually conscientious, then they must be almost out, THEIR separation from the Klipos almost complete.

Since then the souls have been continuously separated out from within the Klipos, like the refinement of silver from the waste. (Sha'ar HaGilgulim, Introduction 20)

This has been the backdrop of history since the souls became mixed together with the Klipos. Billions of people

have lived and died since then, creating history that looks like little more than an ongoing series of Godless cause-and-effects. Yet this has really only been the side show. All of this has really only been the means to carry out a VERY Godly process called “Birrur.”

It happens in general through Nature, and through man, the result of what he thinks, says, and does. When people consciously participate in the “program,” they are rewarded for it. When they don’t, they are not, even though they are a part of it.

Once all the souls will have been separated out completely . . . [the Klipos] will no longer have any life at all and will disappear like smoke . . . When this has occurred then Moshiach will come . . . (Sha’ar HaGilgulim, Introduction 20)

This is the “slaughtering” of the yetzer hara. It is more like a starvation technique, because what is really happening each time a soul leaves the Klipos is a reduction of its “food” supply. Like everything else in Creation, the Klipos live off of holy sparks of Divine light, which souls are. Separating a soul from the Klipos reduces its access to its source of survival. Remove ALL the sparks and the Klipos literally starve to death—forever.

Once that happens, the world will be free of all evil, even the potential for it. Doing bad won’t even cross a person’s mind, not even for a brief moment. Everyone will NATURALLY be on the same page as God, and pursue only spiritual goals. That’s why nation will no longer oppress nation at that time.

As one might expect, as the time for Moshiach approaches, that LAST possible time, the birrur process will

have to be close to completion. If history is on schedule, then the “landing” should be subtle and smooth. If it is behind schedule, then “things” will occur, as per Hashgochah Pratis—Divine Providence—to accelerate or just complete the process, and to FORCE-separate souls from the Klipos.

We choose what we do because of who we are and what we have become. That can stay hidden, even to us, until an event occurs that “compels” us to respond one way or another. Having made our FREE WILL choice, we will have taken a side. But, before going into that in more detail, it’s important to first know where we stand historically.