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THE TRUTH BEHIND EISAV



FROM THE SHIURIM OF

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PARSHAS TOLDOS



HARAV YISROEL BROG, SHLITA | ROSH HAYESHIVA, YESHIVAS TIFERES AVIGDOR
SHIUR PRESENTED IN 5782

WHO WAS EISAV, REALLY?

There are two *parshiyos* in the Torah that start with the words אלה תולדת. One is called Noach, and another is called Toldos. What's the difference between them? I would have thought that since Parshas Toldos is called ואלה תולדת יצחק, it should have been called Parshas Yitzhak. But the name of a parsha generally reflects its essence. What's the main subject in this parsha? By Noach, we call it Parshas Noach because it's all about Noach. He's the central figure in that parsha. But in this parsha, there's very little about Yitzhak. The central theme in the parsha is about his offspring, his תולדת. So therefore it's called Parshas Toldos.

Now, you have to know that when you approach the parsha of Yakov and Eisav, the truth of the matter is, it's pretty complicated. And there are different schools of thought about this Eisav.

Who was Eisav really? You have to know that Eisav, in spite of what he turned out to be and what he represents in the world, still and all, his greatness was on such a level that we can't begin to imagine! Some Chasidim say that Eisav wore a big *spodik*. Some Litvishe say Eisav wore a Rosh Yeshiva's frock with an uphat, with his *tzitzis*. But whatever Eisav wore, you have to know that he was a son of giants, of Yitzhak and Rivka. He was in a class by himself.

He may have been Eisav Ha'rasha, but he wasn't the kind of rasha like Lavan and Besuel were. If you look in some sefarim, where they discuss Lavan and Besuel, they expound on what Lavan and Besuel meant to respond to Eliezer and their discussion among themselves. But other *mefarshim* say why do these sefarim go out of their way to make Lavan and Besuel such big *lamdanim*? Who says they were such big *lamdanim*? But Eisav was a big man. You have to know that in addition to his great *yichus*, as a young man, he grew up together with Yakov. And he actually appeared similar to Yakov.

You could not tell the difference between Yakov and Eisav until they were *bar mitzva*. And his father, in spite of everything, wanted to give Eisav the brochos of Avraham. The Vilna Gaon says that if he would have gotten the brochos, the twelve *shvatim* would have come from him!

Rav Chaim Kanievsky in his famous ספר טעמא דקרא on the Chumash, has a whole *shtikel* Torah on the Chazal that says that Eisav came to his father and had all kinds of questions. One of the שאלות he had was, how do you take off מעשר from salt. A great *sheilah*.

So the world laughed at that *sheilah*. The world says it sounds like a *gantze shtikle amaratzus*. What kind of *lomdishe sheilah* is that? Salt is not a גידולי אדמה, it doesn't grow from the ground. What kind of *sheilah* is it to take off *ma'aser*? So if you look in Reb Chaim Kanievsky's sefer, he has a whole *shtikel* Torah to try to explain that Eisav knew the answer to the *sheilah* already, but he wanted to be *machmir* on himself. And he explains the *tzadadim*, what was Eisav's *kavana* to be *machmir*. And he explains a *gantze drasha* on it. Somebody who was very close to Rav Chaim, Rav Eliyahu Mann, wrote over a lot of Torah from Rav Chaim, and he has a ספר called דרך שיחה.

He asked Rav Chaim, "Why are you making Eisav out to be such a *lamdan*? You make a *gantze maaracha* Torah on Eisav's *kavana*." By Lavan and Besuel he didn't like the commentary that explained Lavan and Besuel's discussion in a *lomdishe* fashion.

Rav Chaim looked at him and said, "What? I don't understand you. Eisav grew up with Yitzchak. He grew up with Rivka. Eisav learned a lot of Torah. He was brilliant. Eisav had tremendous training in מצוות by the greatest of all the Avos. He had tremendous *ma'alos*. Lavan, on the other hand, was *gornisht*. Lavan was raised by Besuel, a rasha. Lavan was a rasha. But Eisav," said Rav Chaim, "was unbelievable."

HOW DID EISAV'S HEAD END IN MA'ARAS HAMACHPELAH?

The Gemara says in Sotah that when they were bringing Yakov Avinu to bury him in the מערת המכפלה, Eisav tried to stop the burial. He had a טענה, a complaint. He said, "That's for me. It's not Yakov's place to be in the מערת המכפלה. I'm the one who deserves it. I'm the one who's *zoiche*." And they told him, "Sorry, you sold your brocha to Yakov, so now it's Yakov's." He said, "Show me the *shtar*." He knew they didn't have the *shtar* with them. The *shtar* was back in Mitzrayim. So they sent Naftali, who was quick on his feet like a deer, to run back to Mitzrayim and bring the *shtar* to show Eisav. Meanwhile, there was a nephew, חושים בן דן, the son of Dan, an *einekel* of Yakov Avinu, and he saw that something was holding up the burial.

And he didn't *chap* what the discussion was, but he understood one thing: that Eisav was holding up the *kevura* process. So he

got a little ticked off. And what did he do? He picked up a stick, he took one whack at Eisav's head and sent it flying. And, as the Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer says, it went rolling. And that was the first case of a home run in history, you could say. The first story of a home run. Or maybe it was the first golf putt, because it was a hole-in-one. But that's what he did. The fact is that Eisav's head ended up in מערת המכפלה and it is a *chiddush* because the *halacha* says, אין קוברין צדיק, אצל רשע. You're not allowed to bury a tzadik next to a rasha.

Al pi halacha, if a tzadik is buried next to a rasha, the tzadik's family can demand his removal, or he could demand from the rasha's family to put up a *mechitza*. There once was a Din Torah like this in Bnei Brak. It was a family plot of land and one brother died. When the brother died, they put him in the family plot. So his brother came to Beis Din and he said, "I don't want to be here next to my brother." They said, "What do you mean? Why not?" He said, "He's a rasha." "Rasha? He's a *frummeh* Yid." Everybody said, "He's a *frummeh* Yid." Who could challenge it? "No," his brother said. "He had internet in his house. That makes him a rasha!" This is a מעשה שהיה, Rav Yitzhak Zilberstein brings it down. The Beis Din *paskened* that the guy was right! He has a good claim; having the internet in his house was a valid reason to classify him as a rasha! They forced the family to build a *mechitza* between the plots. So be careful if you have the internet! It's another reason why not to have internet; not only because the school doesn't like it, but because in the Next World they surely don't like it. So Eisav's head remained in the מערת המכפלה. How could that be? Next to such *tzaddikei* olam like the Avos? You know what the *peshat* is?

EISAV HAD SOMETHING.

Eisav had something to him. The fact that he was there, you have to understand what happened to him. What happened to him? Where did he go wrong? Until thirteen, they couldn't tell the difference between him and Yaakov. Now, the Torah says that when they grew up, ויגדלו הנערים (Bereishis 25:27). Listen to this closely because you also maybe grew up in a wonderful family, a very special family.

Rabbosai, we want to make sure that we go on the pathway of Yakov and not the pathway of Eisav. It says, ויגדלו הנערים ויהי עשו איש. ידע ציד. He was a man that was into hunting. And Yakov איש תם יושב אהלים. You hear this? Now, it's very interesting, the Torah doesn't say Eisav was this rasha m'rusha. It doesn't say that. It says his life was in the field, he was an איש ידע ציד, "a skillful hunter," and Yaakov was איש תם יושב אהלים, "dweller in the tents" (ibid, v. 27). Now that's something to really consider. Because on the day that Eisav went off the *derech*, the Gemara in Bava Basra (16b) says: אמר רבי יוחנן

חמש עבירות עבר אותו רשע באותו היום. That rasha Eisav transgressed five sins on that day. Number one, בא על נערה המאורסה, He had relations with a girl that was an ארוסה already. She was previously locked into a relationship with another man. Another thing he did was והרג את הנפש, he murdered somebody. Pretty big day for him. The third thing, וכפר בעיקר, He was *kofer* in Hashem. And the next thing he did was כופר בתחיית המתים. And he was מבזה את הבכורה, he disgraced the right of the firstborn. The Gemara says that Eisav did five things on the day when he “went off.” Now, that’s some pretty serious activities. Yet the Torah only mentions one thing. What does the Torah mention? מבזה הבכורה, he held the rights of the firstborns in disgrace.

To me that seems like the smallest of all the עבירות. Why did Chazal ignore those other major עבירות? The Torah could have said he’s a murderous man, he was עבד עבודה זרה, he was מגלה עריות, he was שופך דמים, the three cardinal sins! Yet the Torah doesn’t say that.

The answer is as follows. Eisav had tremendous *kochos*. He had tremendous abilities. But at the same time, he was aware of all the joy, the physical joy that עולם הזה had to offer.

OLAM HAZEH CONTAINS TEMPTATIONS

The fact of the matter is that עולם הזה has things that tempt us. Most people appreciate a good time. All young people appreciate a good time. They like to make the most fun out of their day.

Kids tell their parents, “I’m bored, I want to have a good time.” They all want to have a good time. So what are they going to do? How are they going to have a good time? How many times have parents called me, “My kid keeps bugging me about having a good time. I don’t have anything to do with him. What should I do?” I said, “Times are changing.” Today’s good times are not like they used to be. In the olden days, in my days, if you wanted to have a good time, you went out in the yard, and if you were a little older, you went to the street and you took a ball, at least that’s what we did in New York, and you got a broomstick, and you played stickball.

You played catch, you played tag, you chased people around, maybe you rode around the block on your bike. You came home, a little while later, and you were finished, exhausted. If you got really bored you climbed on a tree and you hoped you wouldn’t fall down. The wilder kids, the more precocious ones, tried to do a little more. Some people climbed on cars. I remember throwing small rocks at the cars as they passed. You know, until the guy stopped, got out of the car and broke your head or something. You know what I mean?

But Eisav was different. He had such a background in *gadlus*! He had such greatness behind him. And he knew that the purpose

of life in this world was for one goal. And what was that goal? What was his education he got in his home? What's the purpose of this world? To prepare for the Next World.

WE'RE HERE TO PREPARE FOR OLAM HABA

You'd better remember that. The purpose of this world is to prepare for the Next World. This world is only the lobby. Now, most people get excited when they walk into a beautiful lobby.

Have you ever gone into a lobby at a *chasuna*? At a fancy *chasuna*, they offer you some drinks right in the lobby. They also offer you free parking, free tickets for valet parking. They don't give them that at the *chasuna* itself, only in the lobby. They also take your coats, and hang them up for you.

I've been at *chasunos* where there were two people playing harps in the lobby. Nu? So a guy who's not too brilliant thinks: interesting type of *chasuna*. I never heard of a *chasuna* in the lobby. So he stays in the lobby and keeps on chugging down drinks, and before you know it, he collapses on one of the couches and misses the wedding.

Eisav grew up in a home where he knew that the only purpose in this world was for the Next World. But he chose to live in the moment. He chose to indulge in the pleasures of עולם הזה. Now I

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could understand if Eisav would had chosen to live for עולם הזה for maybe a few minutes. "What's the problem? I'll have a good time for a few minutes. So I will let my hair down for a little bit. So what?" And then he would get back on the horse. But when he went for it - abandoning the pursuit of Olam Ha'ba so he could enjoy Olam Hazei - he gave up his life for that choice.

REJECTING AVODAS HAKODESH IS A DISGRACE

He made that choice. There's a pasuk in Ovadya (1:2) that uses a very strong term : הִנֵּה קָטָן בְּתוֹכָם בְּגוֹיִם, "I made you small among the nations." Because of your behavior, Eisav, you were chosen to be the גָּדוֹל, not the קָטָן.

בְּזוּי אֶתָּה מָאָד, “You’re extremely disgraceful.” That’s a disgrace. When a person gives up his whole purpose, his *tachlis*, for the opposite, for only This World, בְּזוּי אֶתָּה מָאָד, that’s a terrible disgrace. For a person who *farshteit* the importance of עוֹלָם הַבָּא and knows what the ultimate goal is, and struggles for a balance between עוֹלָם הַזֶּה and עוֹלָם הַבָּא, okay. But when Eisav made that rejection, וַיִּבְזֶה אֶת הַבְּכֹרָה, that was a major *bizayon*.

It says he was an איש יודע ציד, and the *meforshim* (Onkelos, etc) explain this means he was a גָּבֵר נֶחֱשִׁירָכָן, a hunter. Tosfos says that he was a person who looked for enjoyment and fun in his life. He liked chilling. Tosfos says נֹחַ וּבָטֵל. He was a man that didn’t want to work. The Torah says, וַיִּבְזֶה אֶת הַבְּכֹרָה because the *bechora* was dependent on the *avodah*, and Eisav wasn’t interested in that. But Yaakov made the right choice. Yakov chose *avodah*. Yakov understood that the purpose of This World was for *avodah*. And he had a good time doing the *avodah*. He was עֲבָדוֹ אֶת ה' בְּשִׂמְחָה, *avodah b’simcha*. But Eisav for some reason was overcome by his יִצְרָהּ, and he became a דוֹגְמָא of an איש שְׂדֵה, a hunter a fishing guy, a boating guy. It’s the kind of stuff they like to do. There’s a whole group of people in the world who see that as their dream life. They can’t wait to get their own boat. And when they first get their boat, they go out on the water, as they call it, as much as they can. After work, they go down to the boat. And then they take a day off, they go Sundays. And then they go more, and then they finally wait till the day they retire, and they go in the boat with their friends, and they paint a name on the back of the boat: “Having Fun,” “Retired,” “Having a Blast,” “My Best Years.” *Gornischt*. That’s Eisav! They live for golf.

By the way, you gotta be such a bored type of a guy to go golfing. It’s unbelievable. I mean, to walk around 18 holes, it takes שָׁעוֹת אֲרוּכוֹת. And half the time, you’re walking around, and even if you get in and out of that golf cart and you’re too lazy to walk a few feet and you drive another couple of feet, you have to wait for everybody to get their turn. You can’t just go, you don’t own the court. Nobody has a private course. If you’re Donald Trump, you get private golf courses, but then it gets a little boring to play by yourself. So you have to wait for the other guy, you have to see where the ball went, you have to chase the ball into the woods or into the lake or into the sand. You know what I mean? It’s a job. Down the block here, there’s a golf course that I’ve walked through many times and watched the guys fishing out the balls from the puddles. It’s unbelievable. People have nothing to do with their lives. That’s what they do. It’s not a quick, fun type of activity. It’s an אָדָם בָּטֵל, אָדָם נֹחַ. And people designate their life for that. And Hashem says, בְּזוּי אֶתָּה מָאָד.

“For you, Esav, rejecting the Avodas Hashem, you’re a *bizayon*.” And this is so because he made a choice to be *מבוזה*, even though as a child he looked like he was into it. He was doing great. He got A’s and A pluses on all his tests.

He could talk and *hondle* like the Vilna Gaon. You better believe it! You could be sure in his father’s house, with Yitzhak and Rivka, he and Yakov learned up a storm. Not like in today’s *chadorim*. Today in a *cheder* if you know the *alef beis*, it’s amazing. They don’t start teaching you *alef beis* until you’re around seven or eight and they teach you a couple of Mishnayos and then they introduce you to Gemara. They learn on such a low level. By the time you are Bar Mitzvah you know little.

But you know, they all know one thing, all the kids know how to use a computer. That they know! I don’t know how they figured it out, I don’t know where they learned it. But all the kids that I met are computer experts. I said, “How do you know it?” That’s stuff they pick up quickly.

So a mensch has to know and he has to convey the message to himself that even if he’s not a rasha - if he’s choosing to live a life without *avodah*, if he wants to live a lazy man’s life - it’s a natural phenomenon. The Mesilas Yesharim (6:6) explains that the *teva*, the nature, of every human being is *כבד מאד*, weighed down and very heavy. You know what the Mesilas Yesharim says? The nature of a person is that he’s very “heavy.” You know why? *כי עפרייות הקמרייות* על כן. Because earth, materialism, *עפר*, is a dead weight. And therefore, no person wants to exert himself, *בטורח ומלאכה*, with effort and work.¹

BY NATURE, PEOPLE DON’T WANT TO WORK HARD

People don’t want to put in effort, and people naturally don’t want to do *מלאכה*. But if a person wants to be *עובד הבורא יתברך* and to get to *Olam Haba*, *צריך שיתגבר נגד טבעו עצמו*, he has to go against the grain and overpower his own nature - *ויתגבר* and strengthen himself and motivate himself. Because if he’s going to leave himself in the natural state of heaviness, there’s no question, he won’t be *מצליח*.

Once a person rejects *avodah* and the lifestyle of working on himself, he goes on this slippery slope of *נפילה*. You can lose everything in one day. You may end up doing many *עבירות* in one day. Big *עבירות*.

But it all comes from the *שורש*, from the root of having rejected

¹ ותראה כי טבע האדם כבד מאד, כי עפרייות הקמרייות גס, על כן לא יתפץ האדם בטרח ומלאכה. ומי שרצה לזכות לעבודת הבורא יתברך, צריך שיתגבר נגד טבעו עצמו ויתגבר ויזדרי.

השם. עבודת השם. You forgot the purpose for which you were put into this world. Now this is not an easy thing, because every time you open up a publication, especially if it's a frum magazine, the kids read those ads to see what they have in them, what they're offering in Palm Springs for the *besserer menchen*. How many meals a day they serve, how many golf courses they have, how many pools they have, how many bicycles they have, this path and that path, and in the winter they have skiing and everything you can imagine!

But of course they write in those ads that they have a "stocked Beis Medrash." Let me tell you something - the stocked Beis Medrash doesn't move! It remains stocked. You don't have to worry about finding *sefarim* in that Beis Medrash. They don't get lost, those *sefarim*. You go, and what you go for is not the stocked Beis Medrash. And then they go for Shabbos Chanukah. And then they put on extra Shabbosos between Sukos and Chanukah. And then they have one between Chanukah and Pesach. And then there's an Erev of this day, and an Erev that day, and post this and post that. It's unbelievable. But a person reads this and says, "Wow. It's amazing! This life is *gevaldik!*" And then he says, "The other side of the coin is תורה בבורה." ²

YAKOV MASTERED AVODAH

It says by Yakov, there was nobody that was ever *meyageya* in Torah like Yakov Avinu. This is what *shteit* in Chazal. Yakov was called the perfect man, even more than Avraham. You know why? Because it says: אין לך אדם שהיה יגע בתורה כאבינו יעקב. This is a quote from the Midrash Tanchuma (Vayishlach 9:1). That was his thing. And because he was like that, he mastered the תורה. He mastered the *avodah*. He removed from himself any form of laziness. He wasn't afraid of work. He mastered that. That's what the Gedolim mastered. And that's what made him Yakov Avinu. That's why he was a יושב אוהלים. And the people that do that are the ones who are successful.²

Now, sometimes you meet certain types of people, mostly from the previous generation, who are able to talk in learning, but they do not practice Yiddishkeit at all. And they know a lot of Torah. They even enjoy talking in learning! I am serious. There was once a mayor in Tel Aviv. He was a former Telzer *talmid*, from Lita. And he was a major יודע תורה. But from there he became a *sheigetzh hachi gadol v'nora*. And there was

² יובא יעקב שלם (בראשית לג יח). "ילמדנו רבינו, מהו לדבר דבר יתר בשבת, כך שנו רבותינו, נשאלין נדרים שהן לצורך השבת, הרי דבר שאין לצורך השבת אין נשאלין, ואין צריך לומר שאסור להרבות דברים בשבת, אמר ר' הונא אם נתקלקל אדם בעבירה, מיד מלאכי חבלה סוטנין אותו, שנאמר ותקרב לשחת נפשו (איוב לג כב), מה יעשה אדם יעסוק בתורה ויתקיים, ואם אינו יודע לשנות יקרא, ואם אינו יודע לקרות, יחזק בתורה ויחיה, שנאמר עץ חיים היא למחזיקים בה (משלי ג יח), שאם לא היה בן תורה יאמרו מחזיק בספר ובמשנה שהן מלמדין תורה, והוא זוכה לחיות, שנאמר עץ חיים היא למחזיקים בה, אבל אם היה בן תורה התורה מרפא אותו מכל דבר רע ומכל מכאוב. שנאמר מרפא לשון עץ חיים וגו' (שם טו ד), זה התורה, אין לך אדם שהיה יגע בתורה כאבינו יעקב, כד"א ויעקב איש תם יושב אוהלים (בראשית כה כז), אין כתיב כאן יושב אוהל, אלא יושב אוהלים, יוצא מבית מדרשו של שם, והולך לבית מדרשו של עבר, ומבית מדרשו של עבר, לבית מדרשו של אברהם, לפיכך כיון שנתאבק עם המלאך היה צולע על ירכו, שנאמר ויזרח לו השמש וגו' והוא צולע על ירכו (בראשית לג לב), מיד נגלה עליו הקב"ה ורפאו והביאו שלם לעיר שכם, מנין ממה שקראו בענין יובא יעקב שלם וגו'.

once a *bachur* who needed a favor for somebody, not for himself. And he went and asked this mayor for a favor. The guy said, “I’ll do it for you on one *tenai*. If you let me come and talk in learning with you every week.” I don’t remember if it was for 15 minutes or for a half hour. And the *bochur* wrote that the guy’s *simcha* when he spoke in learning was *mamash gevaldik*. But we can’t really understand or imagine that, because we don’t see such people anymore. We only meet elephants. We only meet baboons. *Beheimos* we meet! To see a person like Eisav?! He was a well educated מחונך, he was well taught מלומד, and he appreciated it. One used to ask him various שאלות, and he would talk in learning with you! He was able to, and he had a tremendous appreciation for it. But on the other *tzad*, he couldn’t commit to living like that. He had to live in a way of an איש נוח ובטל.

He had to have that type of chilled, laid back lifestyle. And this *nekudah, rabbosai*, is what undermined him, and what turned him into Eisav HaRasha. ברוי אתה מאוד. This is the truth behind Eisav, *rabbosai*. We must understand this.

❧ IN SUMMARY ❧

Yakov Avinu is our prime example of a person who serves Hashem and uses This World as preparation for the Next World. Yakov invested *yegia* in his *limud haTorah*. Eisav also grew up in the home of *tzadikim* but he rejected *avodas Hashem*. He had to have enjoyment and he chose to be laid back; he ended up becoming the archetypical *rasha*. Yet from all of Eisav’s aveiros, the Torah only mentions that Eisav held the *bechorah* in contempt. We learn that that aveirah was the cause of the rest of his evil deeds. Eisav knew better, having seen perfect role models, yet he chose to abandon the pursuit of Olam Haba so he could enjoy Olam Hazeih. This week, I will (bli neder) pay attention to where I am “weighed down” with *chumrius* in my life, try to reduce dependency on items of relaxation and places of enjoyment, and try to counteract that with 10-minute chunks of Torah learning done with effort.

