



Parashat Toldot



English version

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LOVE WHAT IS

The Chafetz Chaim once asked a certain Jew how he was doing. The man said, "It would not hurt if life were a bit better." The Chafetz Chaim responded, "How could you possibly know that "it would not hurt" if life would be better? Hashem knows what is best for you, and since He is merciful and only good, He certainly *wishes* to give you more good than what He has given you. He is certainly *capable* of giving you more than He has given you. It is obvious from the fact that He has *not* given you more, that what you have and what you don't is what's best for you!

We internalize this message each and every day. Lesson one – **G-d is everything**, for He rules in all of our reality – וְאֵתָהּ מוֹשֵׁל בְּכֹל – Lesson two- **G-d is solely good**. טוב-יְקַנֵּן לְכֹל יְרַחֵם עַל-כָּל-מַעֲשָׂיו -

The Chafetz Chaim derived this No Complaints lifestyle from a Rashi in this week's Parasha. Rashi asks, when Yitzhak blessed his son with his whole heart, he blessed him in an unusual way. וַיְתַן-לֵךְ וַיְבָרֵךְ אֱלֹהִים *And Elokim shall give you...* Why would Yitzchak use the Name of Elokim, the Name of G-d of Judgement, when blessing his son? Wouldn't the Name of YKVK, the Name of G-d of Mercy, be more appropriate? Rashi writes what the blessing using G-d's Name Elokim infers אם ראוי *If it is appropriate for you, G-d will give you. And if it is not appropriate for you, He will not give you.... G-d doesn't just give us whatever we pray for, if it is not good for us. Because He trusts us that we trust Him.* (See Rashi 27;28)

Yitzhak knew that his son Esav was having difficulty with accepting Elokim, G-d's attribute of Judgement. As the Midrash says, אמר עשו - אף באותו *Esav said, how could it be that even my righteous grandfather Avraham died five years before his time? If so, there is no Judgement, and there is no Judge!*

Yitzhak was telling his son, No! All the blessings of life, all the blessings of G-d come in the form of difficulties. *As if* G-d is judging, behaving harshly. The greatest blessings that G-d gives you come with difficulty. Because the way that G-d gives His blessing is Elokim. Through difficulties and loss, tests and annoyances, sweat and tears.

Every single time the Tanach mentions that G-d blessed anyone or anything, it uses the Name Elokim, His Name of Judgement. וַיְבָרֵךְ אֱלֹהִים ; וַיְבָרֵךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-גִּם וְאֶת-בְּנָיו ; אֶת-יְוֹסֵף הַשְּׂבִיעִי וַיְקַדְשׁ אֹתוֹ ; (Except in two places, where those who were blessed with YKVK, G-d's Name of Mercy, were blessed with unusual blessings - Yosef's master, and Oved Edom HaGiti.) Here, in Yitzchak's blessing, the word Elokim is unique. It does not say Elokim. Rather, it says, HaElokim, The Elokim. When Yaakov blessed Yosef, he also used the Name HaElokim. וַיְבָרֵךְ אֶת יוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמֶר הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר הִתְהַלַּכְנוּ אִתִּי לְפָנָיו אַבְרָהָם וַיְצַחֵק הָאֱלֹהִים הַרְעָה אֹתִי מֵעוֹדֵי עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה *Why HaElokim?*

The Seforno on this word HaElokim comments: *When you focus on His goodness, even as G-d of Judgment, He will bless your fields.* The way for



the Jew to bring blessing upon himself is to search for the goodness in the difficulties, to recognize and then focus on the goodness in *The* Elokim, the judgement.

There is a strange story in the Talmud that brings this concept to light. *A certain R' Mani told his Rebbi R' Elyashiv, how his in-laws, who were rich, were acting in a haughty fashion and insulting him. So, R Elyashiv prayed that those rich in laws become poor. When they became poor, they started bothering R Mani, to support them. R Mani told R' Elyashiv, and R' Elyashiv prayed that they become rich again. Then, R Mani complained that he did not like the way his wife looked. R' Elyashiv asked for the name of R Mani's wife. Chana. R Elyashiv then prayed that Chana become beautiful. But then, when Chana became beautiful, she was constantly preoccupied with herself and haughty. She did not want R' Mani anymore. R Mani told this to R Elyashiv, and R' Elyashiv prayed that Chana return to her old looks.* (Taanit 23b)

This is something that we can learn from King David. Even when King David was cursed by the Chief Rabbi, Shimi Ben Gera, he said to himself, יְקוּם אִמְרֵי לֹא קִלְלָהּ, *G-d of Mercy (YKVK) commanded him to curse me.* (Shmuel 2 16:10) King David teaches that we should never take anything personally, because G-d is behind every insult... What? But why? Why would G-d want that person to insult me?

I don't know. But once you accept that G-d is behind the insult, you can realize the benefits, the perks, all the good in the insult that you would not recognize if you would not accept it. Here is a list of a few possibilities. A. To develop acceptance of yourself B. To develop "elephant skin". C. Burn away some calories of pride and arrogance. D. You'll find out who your true friends are. E. You will go to the drawing board and improve yourself. And, many times, these are a good payoff for the insult.

The Midrash tells us that the power to bless with G-d's Name Elokim was given to Yitzhak. (See Baal Haturim 2;3) Why specifically Yitzhak? Yitzhak was the Patriarch who barely said anything, and who is symbolic of acceptance. Accepting a wayward child, accepting a runaway

son, accepting rebellious daughters-in-law, accepting his father's prophecy that G-d wills that he be sacrificed, accepting his mother's tragic death, accepting his grandchildren's decision to sell their own brother. He even accepted himself for making the biggest "mistake" of his life, of mixing up his own children, and blessing the "wrong" son. This is why Yitzhak blessed using G-d's Name Elokim.

I recently saw the following joke, and it taught me a lesson for Shalom Bayit. *A married couple was celebrating their 60th wedding anniversary. At the party, everybody wanted to know how they managed to stay married so long. The husband responded, "When we were first married, we came to an agreement. I would make all the major decisions, and my wife would make all the minor decisions. And in 60 years of marriage, we have never needed to make a major decision.*

This can be applied to the relationship between Man and G-d, as well, in accepting G-d as Elokim, and that He gives us only what is best for us. G-d wants us to accept what is, minding our own business in those areas in which G-d gives us no choice, and busying ourselves only with decisions in the areas that that G-d *does* give us choice. As Byron Katie wrote, *"I am a lover of what is, of reality, not because I'm a spiritual person, but because it hurts when I argue with reality. I can find only three kinds of business in the universe: mine, yours, and G-d's. Reality is G-d, because it rules. Anything that's out of my control, your control, and everyone else's control - I call that G-d's business. Much of our stress comes from mentally living out of our own business. When I think, "You need to get a job", "I want you to be happy", "You should be on time", "You need to take better care of yourself", I am in your business. When I'm worried about past or future, earthquakes, floods, war, or when I will die, I am in G-d's business. If I am mentally in your business or in G-d's business, the effect is separation. Every time in my life that I had felt hurt or lonely, I had been in someone else's business".*

Keeping connected with G-d is the only way to be connected to blessing. He doesn't want you to "get involved" in the "big decisions", the areas where you have no choice. He just wants you to say, all

day, again and again, יקנך אֱלֹהִים, that YKVK is our Elokim; or, in laymen's terms, that all the judgement of G-d is all His Kindness. To realize

that יקנך הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים YKVK is HaElokim! (Devarim 4;35)

Here are the Selfie Steps: The self-help steps that will help you access the blessings that Yitzhak and Yaakov blessed you.

1. Want what you have and don't want what you don't have. Embrace your life as it is, rather than as you wish it to be.
2. Each blessing you mention YKVK Elokenu, each Shema recital, remind yourself that the difficulties of your life are all G-d's Mercy and blessing.
3. Realize where you have choice in life, and only mind your own business. Not G-d's business. And not anyone else's business.

BIG-PICTURE THINKING

Life coaching is simply asking a bunch of not simple questions. In life, if you just focus on the smallest details, you never get the big picture right. The job of the life coach is to bring about bigger picture thinking, and to get the big picture right.

Thinking "big picture" is thinking like the Gedolim, the Jewish Leaders. It is the way that the Rishonim, the commentators on Shas, analyze the Talmud and come up with a deeper truth. By bringing in other seemingly contradictory pieces of Talmud and putting it all together, they find a deeper truth that is not recognized at first. If you focus only on the piece of Talmud you are learning at the present, you can never get down to the truth. Because, like the Aron Hakodesh that is symbolic of the Torah, Torah knowledge is a blend of width, length and depth.

If you want to live a life of truth, you cannot focus on the present, alone. When making big picture decisions in life, we need to bring in the future and all the possibilities that it may bring. We need to look at the past and how that might affect the future. Big picture thinking is something we can learn from our Forefather, Yaakov.

וַיְהִי עֵשָׂו אִישׁ יָדַע צֹדֵד אִישׁ שָׂדֵה וַיַּבְקֵב אִישׁ תֵּם יֹשֵׁב
And Esav was a man who knew hunting, a man of the field, while Yaakov was a simple man, who sat in the tents (of Shem and Ever). Of the Four Sons in the Haggadah, the *Tam* is just a simpleton. On the other hand, Yaakov is described with the virtue of being an *Ish Tam*, a simple man.

In which way is simplicity a virtue? And how can we learn from it? Also, if Yaakov was known for being the Man of Truth, תָּמָן אָמַר לְיַעֲקֹב, why then was he titled *Ish Tam*, a simple man, and not *Ish Emet*, a man of truth? And why was Yaakov known as the man of truth? Wasn't he dishonest to his blind father Yitzhak when he presented himself as Esav while taking the Berachot, even if they were rightfully his?

Rabbeinu Bachye explains that there is a level of truth greater than that of being honest. And that is the level of being *Tam*, an "all-inclusive truth". *Tam* is a מַכְרִיעַ *Machriah*, a blend and underlying truth between two opposing truisms. (See Alei Shur B; Emet) How so?

In our holy Seforim it is written that there are seven Middot of G-d, and that Avraham personified the Middah of חַסֵּד: that even if you are not deserving of something, G-d will, in any case, give it to you. Yitzhak personified the Middah of גְּבוּרָה, that G-d will give you only what you deserve. But Yaakov personified G-d's Middah of תַּפְאָרֶת, or a blend between his father's and grandfather's personification. A blend between גְּבוּרָה, strict judgment and, חַסֵּד, endless kindness. That sometimes, even if the truth is that you do not deserve kindness in the present, nevertheless, it could be that something in the past or future has made or will make you deserving of kindness or mercy. This big-picture-truth was the truth of

Yaakov. *Tam* is not just honesty. *Tam* is finding the all-inclusive, *underlying* truth.

It is true, in the present, Yaakov was dishonest. But in the big picture, when we figure in both the past and the future in the equation, Yaakov was Emet. For in the past, Esav had sold his rights of the firstborn to Yaakov, and in the future, Esav was not competent to accept the Priesthood and its responsibilities. Esav not only sold the firstborn rights to Yaakov. He scorned them, by selling them for lentils.

The Talmud teaches us that the difference between אמת and שקר is that אמת has “legs” to stand firmly on, while the שקר has just one-legged letters. (Shabbat 104a) In order for you to access the underlying truth, you can’t get stuck on one point, on one leg. You need a broader knowledge and awareness, like the two-legged letters of אמת. Big-picture thinking is the way G-d runs His truth in His world of optical illusions. The Chafetz Chaim explains why the signature of G-d is Truth. Because when you look at the letters אמת on a signet ring, they appear to be backward. Only after the letters are stamped can we see the message that is intended. The same is with recognizing the truth of G-d in the world: we need big-picture thinking. In the present, when we are looking at the letters of Emet on the signet ring, it does not look like Emet, for in the present, the world looks like it is full of Sheker. But only when one is able to see the bigger picture of past, present, future can one see the Emet, the truth that G-d is really in charge. Real truth, eternal truth, is always a blend of past, present, and future. When we get locked into the present, we cause ourselves unnecessary stress, aggravation and frustration. As an Egged bus driver once said, *No one ever misses a bus. They just got early for the next bus.*

When the Torah tells us תְּמִים תִּהְיֶה עִם יְקִוּק אֱלֹהֶיךָ Rashi explains this – Do not inquire (through unnatural means) after the future, and accept whatever G-d brings upon you. How did Rashi understand that the word *Tamim* means to accept the present, or accept the future? Because being *Tam* is thinking bigger picture, not getting stuck on something you do not understand.

The month of *Kislev* is a month in which we are to accept that the reason why we sometimes have difficulty accepting G-d’s decisions is because we are behaving like the *Ksil*. The fool. How so?

יָדַע וְכִסִּיל לֹא יִדְעוּ אִישׁ-בְּעַר לֹא יִדְעוּ וְכִסִּיל לֹא יִדְעוּ אִישׁ-בְּעַר לֹא יִדְעוּ אִישׁ-בְּעַר לֹא יִדְעוּ *A simpleton will not know, and a fool will not understand this.* The problem with the fool is that he sees a whole airplane, but he walks over to one specific screw and asks, “Why is *this* screw *here*?” וְזֹאת. I want to understand this one little screw; why is it here?! Fool! First understand the whole plane, and then you will be able to understand the reason and place of that screw! But we think that we have better questions than that fool. *I want to understand why I did not catch this bus. I want to understand why people are not being nice to me (most of the time, they themselves don’t know). I want to understand why I do not understand why...*

In the big picture, when we bring in past and future, we have a lot to be humble about. All haughtiness is a lie, for it is focusing on one moment. This was the key to our forefather Avraham’s humility, especially when he was praying to G-d for G-d to change His decision about Sodom. וְאָפָר וְאָזָנִי עָפָר וְאָפָר *And I am like dust and ashes.* Why dust and ashes? Because Ashes are something that may have had a glorious past before you burnt them, but now, they are only ashes. Dust may have had no past, but it has potential for a glorious future. Avraham said to G-d, *My greatest feeling of humility comes from looking at my past and my future. Then I realize how humble I need to be. I realize that You have reasons that human beings are not capable of understanding, when they focus on the details of the present.* One of the names the Torah uses for the word “grave”, is the word שאול, pronounced as *Sheol*. Doesn’t that word mean loan? Why do we call a grave, a loan? As Amin Adjmi once told me, *All that we own in life is a loan, except for our own souls...*

Many times in life, we don’t want to face the truth, because the truth may be too hard to accept, too humbling. And our ego is sometimes more precious to us than our ability to get on in life. So then the sad thing happens: we lie to ourselves again. And a lie told often enough eventually seems to us to be the truth. All this makes life complicated. But Yaakov was a simple man. He

was the man of truth. He was the other extreme of his twin brother, who was loved by Yitzhak כִּי-צָדִיק בְּפִי because he had game in his mouth. What does that mean? A hunter's trade is to fool its prey into thinking that the coast is clear, while actually, the trap has been set. The greatest danger is when someone fools himself. Like the enticing appearance of prey, as it looks in the present, but in the big picture, when we bring in the future, the person is just setting himself up for a trap. Esav was so good at fooling his father, he even fooled

G-D, WHY THE DELAY?

People don't have as hard a time believing in G-d as they do accepting G-d. So many times, people pray and G-d makes the person wait, and then, sometimes, only after a while, G-d gets things moving. Many times, many people have a hard time understanding G-d, and accepting that He has His reasons for the delay.

Everything in the Shidduch of Rivka was clearly the Hand of G-d, and how it all happened so fast is amazing. It is so strange then, that G-d made them wait so long for a child. Yitzhak and Rivka prayed, and G-d put them on hold. Why should they have to wait so long to have a child?

Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld points to an amazing thing in our Parasha. וַיַּעֲתֶר לוֹ ה' And G-d allowed *Himself to be entreated by Yitzhak's plea*. Rashi adds, ונתפצר ונתפס ונתפתה לו G-d was *persuaded* by Yitzhak, and G-d granted Yitzhak children. Here, Rashi is stressing, that G-d allowed Himself to be persuaded to grant Yitzhak children, something He was not really ready, otherwise, to do. What does this mean?

We know that Yitzhak's son, Esav, on the day of his Bar Mitzvah, transgressed the cardinal sins. He came home, and found Yaakov busy brewing lentils, the food that is traditionally eaten by mourners. This is because Avraham had just passed away, and Yitzhak was in mourning.

The Midrash teaches that Avraham died on that day because G-d did not want him to see how his grandson, Esav, had left religion. This would not be a *שיבה טובה*, a happy ending, for Avraham. So Avraham actually had to die five years earlier than

himself. Yaakov was the opposite of fooling himself; he totally accepted himself, as he was. Everything was clear, thought out – past, present, future. Yaakov never, ever, fooled himself.

A lie can travel half way around the world while the truth is still putting on its shoes. Because for the truth, we need to decelerate making the final analysis. Not to jump to conclusions. To be "simple", not to assess the present without factoring in the past and future.

he was supposed to. He died at 175, instead of dying at the age of 180, like his son Yitzhak.

Now, the reason why he died five years earlier was because of his grandson Esav's misbehavior when Esav reached bar mitzvah. This means that if Esav would have come into the world on the day that he was supposed to, Avraham would have lived a full life of 180 years. So, why was Esav born five years before his time? Because Yitzhak prayed and prayed, so much, that G-d was persuaded, and gave him a son five years earlier than planned.

Of course, we need to pray for things that are important. But when G-d does not answer us as fast as we want to, every minute of a delay has a reason.

There is a wild story that happened with the Arizal. The story is cited in the Sefer Kav Hayashar. A forty-year-old man approached the Arizal, saying that he had not yet merited finding a wife. As much as he dated, it never bore results. Either she did not want him, or he did not want her. The man asked the Arizal for a bit of advice. Shockingly, the Arizal told him, "Your shidduch lives in Alexandria, in Egypt. Go there. Her name is so-and-so, and her father's name is so-and-so".

The man who believed the Arizal traveled the dangerous roads from Tzfat down to Egypt, and when he finally arrived in Alexandria, he asked if anyone knew the father. It turned out that the man was a well known member of the community, in charge of the taxes in town. When he asked about the daughter, he was told that she was of marriageable age and that a suitable husband was being sought for her. She was said to be a

wonderful person, attractive, and only twenty years old.

He went to the shadchan in town and asked if it was possible to arrange him a meeting. The shadchan approached the father of the girl and said, "I have a nice, 40-year-old man, and he would like to meet your daughter. The father agreed, and the two met. They enjoyed each other's company, and after a few meetings, they agreed to get married a month later. The engagement worked out nicely, and the wedding was well attended by Rabbis and respected community members. They had a beautiful wedding.

The father of the girl gave a whopping 150 thousand dinars for the dowry. The man was very happy with his new wife, but not for very long. Three months later, the wife got sick. Her situation got so bad that she died within a few days. For him, this was, obviously, a huge shock and a great tragedy.

Broken, he went back to the Arizal in Tzfat, and asked, why the Rabbi had sent him to marry that girl. It would have been better, he said, if I would never have known her!

The Arizal told him to take a seat. He had a few questions to ask him. "Do you remember what you worked in 20 years ago?" The man responded that he had owned a bakery. The Arizal asked, "Do you remember who your partner was?" The man said, Yimah Shmo, that cursed man! That partner robbed me of all my money! Because of him, I lost out on 150 thousand dinar!

The Arizal told him that that was the answer. The woman you married – her soul, in her previous life, was that partner. He died shortly after he ran away with your money, and in Heaven it was decided that he would need to come back, in reincarnation, to marry you, and bring you pleasure for three months, to rectify the pain that this Neshama caused you when you were partners in the bakery. So, after the three months, her Tikkun was done, and her Neshama returned to its Creator. And because the amount that you lost was 150 thousand dinar, you were paid back in the dowry. And this is the reason why your marriage was delayed until you were 40, for you needed to wait until she was

ready to get married. Now, it is time for you to go and get married to the wife that you will remain with, happily ever after.

R' Yitzhak Fanger recently told a story that a certain woman had told him. The woman was doing laundry, while her six year old daughter was looking for sweets that were high up in the kitchen cabinets. The girl fell backwards, on her head. The loud noise of the fall startled the mother, and she lost herself when she saw her daughter on the floor, in a bad state. The ambulance came as fast as it could and took mother and daughter to Terem, where it was decided to rush the girl to the Emergency room in the hospital. Things looked much too serious for Terem. When they got to the hospital, a nurse came, looked at the child, and decided (something she was not allowed to, as she was not a doctor) that the child's condition was not an emergency and could wait. They waited 6 hours, from 8 pm until 2 am. The child was very hungry, so the mother searched in her purse, finding only a bag of raisins, which she gave her daughter. She waited impatiently until a doctor arrived, who immediately decided that the child needed anesthesia, so that he would be able to begin complicated head surgery. The doctor asked why the mother had waited 6 hours to come after the child had fallen. The mother frowned and said that she was there earlier, but the nurse decided that it was not an emergency.

The doctor asked to make sure, before administering the anesthesia, that the child had not eaten anything for the last few hours. The mother felt horrible, because she did give her daughter some raisins, just a half an hour before! Sternly, the doctor said that she would need to wait another 6 hours without food, so that he could begin anesthesia and surgery.

Now, the mother was beside herself. She started asking G-d – why?. Why did the nurse say that it was not an emergency? Why did she make the foolish mistake of giving the girl the raisins, without asking the doctor first? And why does she have to wait another six hours to start the surgery? Doesn't G-d have mercy on her daughter?

When the 6 hours had passed, the doctor came, ready to start his medical procedures. He checked

the child, and told the mother that now, it does not seem as though the child will have to go through head surgery. Something happened over those six hours.

Now all delays made sense.

THE HOLY THIEF

Next to the grave of the Sabba of Shpoli is the famous tombstone that says, “Here lies Yossele, the Holy Thief”.

The judge became enraged with fury and sentenced Yossele to death. Both for Yossele’s thievery, and for Yossele’s Chutzpah.

The Hassidic masters tell that the Saba from Shpoli would spend a lot of his time with the Jewish thieves in town. “I can rely on my bandits. I trust in them.” One day, the band of thieves planned to steal the treasures of the local church. The church was locked, triple locked. But the thieves learned about a narrow side window, which was close up to the roof of the church. Next to this window, on the inside of the church, was a ladder. The thieves turned to Yossele, who was thin and tall, flexible and swift, brave at heart and perfect for the mission. Nimble as a cat, Yossele climbed up onto the slanted roof. He opened the window and slid down the ladder. A large tapestry served well to package golden idol trophies and silver coins that Yossele found. He tied a rope around his bundle of goods, climbed up the ladder, and pulled up the rope. From above, he called his band, but he did not know that, in the meantime, the police had shown up, and his friends had already fled in every direction. The police noticed Yossele calling up from the roof. They opened the front door of the church and escorted Yossele, from the top of the ladder straight to the bottom cell of the dungeon.

But before Yossele’s execution, he was offered an ultimatum. “After you did such a brave act, it is a waste of your life that we execute you. If you convert to Christianity, we will make you into a Christian saint, and you will have a great life of glory and honor.” Yossele responded, “Yossele is a thief, but Yossele will not rebel against his G-d!” He repeated this statement, again and again, each time they attempted to persuade him.

In front of the whole town, Yossele was brought to a pot of boiling tar. “Yossele, this is your last chance. Convert to Christianity, and you will have life of luxury!” And Yossele responded, “Yossele did a lot of bad things, but Yossele will not rebel against his G-d.” They forced his hands into the boiling lead, and reminded him, “Last chance!” Yossele screamed, “Yossele stole, but Yossele won’t rebel against his G-d”. And those were his last words, as he repeated them, before his body was pushed brutally into the lead.

At his court case, Yossele defended his life to the judge with his story. “I saw that all the townsfolk would bring all different types of presents to the statues in the church. Gold and silver. I wanted to check if the statue was for real, or if the townsfolk were being fooled into giving their hard earned money to a hoax. I entered the church; I pinched the idol’s nose, but he did not flinch. I started taking the idol’s things right in front of his eyes, and he did not make a peep. I got so mad, I said, “This statue is a swindle! I will take all of the money from the statue and give it back to the good, hardworking townspeople.”

The Rebbe from Shpoli told his chassidim, before he died, “I want to be buried next to Yossele, the holy thief.”

Yitzhak blessed Yaakov, but only after Yitzhak had smelled with his Ruach Hakodesh the Jewish evildoers of the generations that do Teshuvah. וירח את ריח בגדיו *He smelled the scent of Yaakov’s clothes*, hints to וירח את ריח בגדיו, He scented the scent of Gan Eden that emanated *from the rebels*, the evildoers, who repented. Even the rebels of the Jewish Nation die with the smell of Gan Eden. He smelled Yossele, the holy thief, and he smelled Yosef Mashita.

As the Roman who attempted entering the Temple was struck by an angel, the Romans did not dare to loot it. They needed a Jew to initiate that move. They found the right man. Yosef Mashita. They

told this *Rasha* that the first thing he would take out of the Temple would be his to keep. On each successive time, whatever he took out would belong to the Romans. Yosef Mashita had the audacity to enter the Temple and take out a golden Menorah! The Romans looked at it, and he was shocked when they said to him, “This is a candelabra that belongs in a palace, not in the home of a commoner, like you. Go into the Temple again, and the next thing you take out will be yours.” Yosef did not go back in. He refused, saying, “It is enough that I have angered my Master once; I cannot do it again...” They offered him a three-year position of levying taxes (an important and lucrative office). He refused. They threatened him with a death of suffering and torture, but he adamantly refused to repeat his transgression. “It is enough that I angered my Master once; I cannot do it again...” They did not just kill him. They tortured him to death, inflicting upon him unspeakable suffering; but, with his waning strength, he said, over and over, “Woe is to me for I have angered my Maker”. (Breishit Rabbah 65; 22) *וירח את ריחה בוגדיו* *And he smelled the scent of the rebels*. When Yitzhak smelled these descendants coming from Yaakov, he smelled the scent of Gan Eden, and he understood, intuitively, that we need this blessing of superhuman strength.

And then, Yitzhak blessed Yaakov with the blessing that Yaakov’s descendants needed in order to stand strong and live their last breaths, sanctifying G-d’s Name. And he said, *ויתן לך האלקים. And may He give you, the Elokim...* The blessing hints to the source from which the Jewish People got this superhuman strength. Listen closely. *And may He give you the Elokim, ...* May G-d give us the G-dliness we need to stand up strong for a higher purpose. G-d’s *גבורה*, G-d’s Might, is His strength in allowing His Attribute of Mercy to override His Attribute of Judgement. We all have this G-dliness, this *צלם אלקים* inside us. It is the ability to exercise self-discipline; it is the ability to have self-sacrifice. No matter how low a Jew has fallen, there is a point of self-sacrifice he

can find from within, a blessing that we received from Yitzhak, *ויתן לך האלקים*.

What is the secret that separates Yaakov from Esav? It all boils down to self-talk, allowing this voice of G-dliness to take over the inner conversation. The midrash tells us the difference between the Tzaddik and the Rasha. The Tzaddik speaks *אל לבו* or *על לבו* *to his heart* or *on his heart*, *חנה מדברת על לבה*, *ויאמר דוד אל לבו*, while the Rasha speaks *בלבו*, *in his heart*. *ויהאמר המן בלבו* *ויהאמר עשו בלבו* *It is being confined to the thinking of one’s heart that makes all the difference.* (M. Rabbah Esther 10)

There is not much written in the Torah about Yitzhak’s life, in comparison to the amount written on Avraham and Yaakov, who needed to deal with people. Why? Because Yitzhak’s life was about *גבורה*, overcoming inner battles. Akeidat Yitzhak, self-sacrifice. Yitzhak needed to concentrate on striving to be the best possible father for a son like Esav. And when he saw Esav’s Gehinom, when Esav entered his room at the time of the Berachot, it was an even greater Akeidah for Yitzhak than the Akeidah, itself. *ויחרד חרדה גדולה* *Maybe I am accountable for this? Maybe my approach as a father was faulty?* These were all internal struggles of *גבורה*, of how to behave with his son.

When Yaakov entered, Yitzhak smelled that same smell (of Gan Eden) that he had smelled at the Akeidah. For Yaakov to listen to his mother, and to risk even the one beracha that was meant for him, and to go against his nature, was an Akeidah for Yaakov. That Akeidah, going against your nature to serve G-d, is the secret path to Gan Eden. The Ben Ish Chai explains that this is the concept of Fear of Heaven. Why not Fear of G-d? Because Heaven, *שמים*, is made up of *אש ומים*, fire and water. Fire’s nature is to make water evaporate, and water’s nature is to put out fire. Fear of Heaven is about going against one’s nature when it is necessary, just as fire and water dwell together, to serve G-d. That is what Gan Eden is all about. It is all about the Akeidahs that you go through in life.

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