

Although this is the written version of the Shabbos drasha, I would like to wish a mazel tov to Azriel Schachter, whose bar mitzvah was this past Shabbos and whose family was the inspiration for these words of Torah. It was a special privilege to have Azriel's bar mitzvah in shul with the Schachter and Tropper families, and we look forward to much nachas from Azriel in the future.

The parshah begins with the birth of Yaakov and Eisav. Although the rest of the parshah continues telling the story of Yitzchok and Rivkah, the birth of Yaakov is a moment we have been waiting for since the beginning of the story of the Avos. In many different ways, the Sages tell us that Yaakov is the culmination of all that his parents and grandparents have been working to create. Yaakov is referred to as *בחיר שבאבות*, the select one among the forefathers; he is the *בריה התיכון*, the middle pole that holds the whole Mishkan together; *אשר פדה את אברהם*, he redeems Avraham because he finishes the work that Avraham did not himself finish.

It is striking, then, that based on our introduction to Yaakov in this week's parshah, he does not seem to possess the qualities that would recommend him as the linchpin of the spiritual work of the forefathers. For one thing, he is born hanging on to the heel of his older, stronger brother. But more to the point, the Torah tells us that he was an *איש תם* *יושב אהלים*, a humble man who sat inside the tents of Torah.

Would we have imagined that someone who stays inside the tents of Torah would be the one to bring the work of the Avos to its most meaningful fulfillment? Avraham and Yitzchok made it their mission to be *ויקרא בשם ה'*, to publicly share and proclaim their faith in Hashem and to teach others to do the same. But Yaakov seems to be the opposite kind of person, the one who sits in the tent and studies, with neither the interest in or facility for proclaiming the name of Hashem to the masses. And this does not seem only to be a function of Yaakov's relative youth; even when Yaakov grows older and goes out to the world, spending time interacting with different people and foreign societies, we do not find him spreading faith like his father or grandfather did. What, then, is the quality that makes him the *בריה התיכון*, the pole that holds everything together?

It is, as it always is, a profound topic with many insights for us to absorb. But one important element is that there is a special spiritual skill inherent in the quality of being a *יושב אהלים*, the one who sits in the tents, a skill without which everything else is at risk of coming to an end.

We know that the Torah is referred to as a *שעשוע*, a game. *לולי תורתך שעשועי, if your Torah had not been my game*, says Dovid Hamelech, I would have been lost in my poverty. What spiritual value is expressed by describing the Torah as a game? Rav Moshe Shapira zt'l would explain that when you play a game, it occupies all of your attention and energy because it is completely self-contained. A game does not bring you towards some other accomplishment; the game itself is its own reward. That is the deeper texture in the word *שעשוע*. The root *שע* means to turn, and so the double verb *שעשוע* -- means that you are turning and turning, not moving forward towards something else but staying within your circle because the game itself is the goal. It is the reason

someone committed to playing a game of football will hurl themselves to the ground in an attempt to catch a pass; there is no reason to save yourself for anything else when the game is the end in itself.

This is what Dovid means when he calls the Torah a *שעשוע*. It means that the Torah is not a means to an end, not a collection of tasks to be accomplished and accumulated; it is the whole task. To be completely wrapped up in the Torah as you would be wrapped up in a game, to know that the Torah is the sum total of your achievements and you want to devote every ounce of strength you have to it because it is all that is important -- that is the unique quality of the *יושב אהלים*. The Avos achieved many, many things; Yaakov shows us that is everything. That was the *ברייה התיכון*, the piece that holds everything together. It is Yaakov who teaches us that being with Hashem is an end in itself, and it is he who frees us to devote everything we have to that pursuit.

It is interesting to see that even as the Torah shows us this quality in Yaakov, it gives us an indication that Eisav had a similar quality. Eisav, the Torah says, was a *יודע ציד איש שדה*, a person who knew how to hunt, a man of the field. I confess that I have never hunted. But from what I understand, the successful hunter has to be completely absorbed in the pursuit of his prey. He has one goal and one goal only in mind, and if he allows himself a moment's distraction, he might miss the snap of the twig that alerts him to the presence of his quarry. Eisav, then, had the quality of being able to immerse himself completely in the game. But he uses it to become a hunter -- he devotes himself completely to the temporal, to the pursuits that are a dead end. Yaakov uses this quality to be with Hashem and His Torah; he loses himself in eternity.

In our modern world, we have many opportunities to throw our energies into all manner of experiences and interests; we all have *שעשועים*, games and playthings that absorb our attention. Some are worthwhile, some are healthy outlets, some are a waste of time and some are utterly destructive. But like all *midos*, all personal qualities, this one holds the possibility of tremendous holiness and spiritual achievement. The *שעשוע* of the Torah is the only place we ever need to be.