

Good Shabbos, everyone.

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May the *neshamos* have an aliya and may the sponsors be rewarded for their support of the shul with *bracha*, *hatzlacha* and good health.

In this morning's Parsha, we meet Yaakov and Esav. Born as twin brothers, they come from the same womb and are raised in the same home, but end up on very different paths in life.

There are many angles to explore in their relationship—the the “sold” bechora, “stolen” bracha, the faceoff and reconciliation later in life—but let us go back further to Yaakov and Esav in the womb.

According to **Rashi**, it seems that Yaakov was created good and Esav was created evil. To quote **Shakespeare** in *Twelfth Night*: “Some men are born great.”

Rashi offers a famous explanation for ויתרוצצו הבנים in the name of Chazal.

רש"י בראשית פרשת תולדות פרק כה פסוק כב ויתרוצצו - על כרחך המקרא הזה אומר דורשני, שסתם מה היא רציצה זול וכתב אם כן למה זה אנכי. רבותינו דרשוהו לשון ריצה, כשהיתה עוברת על פתחי תורה של שם ועבר יעקב רץ ומפרכס לצאת, עוברת על פתחי עבודה זרה עשו מפרכס לצאת.

Vayisrotzetzu ויתרוצצו comes from language of rutz רץ—run. Each one was “running” to escape the womb. When Rivka passed the Yeshiva of Shem V'Ever, she felt kicking, as if the fetus was running to escape, and when she passed a place of avoda zara, she felt kicking, as if the fetus was running to escape.

At first glance, this seems to imply that Yaakov was born great, pulled towards the *Beis Medrash*, while Esav was evil from birth, pulled to *avoda zara*.

But, this explanation is difficult to accept, in light of what the **Rambam** teaches us (Hilchos Teshuva 5:2),

רמב"ם הלכות תשובה פרק ה הלכה ב
אל יעבור במחשבתך דבר זה שאומרים טפשי אומה"ע ורוב גולמי בני ישראל שהקב"ה גוזר על האדם מתחלת ברייתו להיות צדיק או רשע, אין הדבר כן אלא כל אדם ראוי לו להיות צדיק כמשה רבינו או רשע כירבעם או חכם או א סכל או רחמן או אכזרי או כילי או שוע וכן שאר כל הדעות, ואין לו מי שיכפהו ולא גוזר עליו ולא מי שמושכו לאחד משני הדרכים אלא הוא מעצמו ומדעתו נוטה לאי זו דרך שירצה,

Permit not your thought to dwell upon that which ridiculous fools of other peoples and a majority of foolish individuals among the children of Israel say, that the Holy One, blessed is He!, decrees at the very embryonic state of every man whether he should be just or wicked. The matter is not so. Every man is capable of being as just as Moshe our Master or as wicked as Jeroboam, wise or silly, merciful or human, miser or philanthropist, and so in all other tendencies. There is none to either force things upon him or to decree things against him; either to pull him one way or draw him another way, but he alone, of his own free will, with the consent of his mind, bends to any path he may desire to follow.

Rashi further complicates the discussion by commenting, in the name of **Medrash Rabba**, on the Pasuk that says Esav emerged אדמוני, red...

רש"י בראשית פרשת תולדות פרק כה פסוק כה: **אדמוני** - סימן הוא שיהא שופך דמים:

RED — a sign that he would always be shedding blood (Genesis Rabbah 63:8). Did he have a choice?

The **Maharal** (*Gur Aryeh Breishis* 30:25) answers this question and explains that Esav was not predetermined to be evil. He was called *admoni* because he was born under the “*mazel*” of Mars, which in Aramaic is *maadim*—blood.

גור אריה בראשית פרשת ויצא פרק ל פסוק כה: ויש רמז גם כן כי כה עשו הוא כח מאדים,

The **Ben Ish Chai** (19th century Rabbi Yosef Chaim of Baghdad) writes this as well in his *Aderet Eliyahu* 15b and explains its relevance to Esav based on **Gemara in Shabbos 156a**.

תלמוד בבלי מסכת שבת דף קנו עמוד א

אמר רב נחמן בר יצחק: וצדקן במצות. האי מאן דבמאדים יהי גבר אשיד דמא. אמר רב אשי: אי אומנא, אי גנבא, אי טבחא, אי מוהלא. אמר רבה: אנא במאדים הוא! - אמר אביי מר נמי עניש וקטיל.

One who was born under the influence of Mars will be one who spills blood. Rav Ashi said: He will be either a blood letter, or a thief, or a slaughterer of animals, or a circumciser. Rabba said: I was born under the influence of Mars and I do not perform any of those activities. Abaye said: My Master also punishes and kills as a judge.

That Gemara implies that a tendency and a proclivity exists in all people, but the individual decides in what direction to take it his inborn nature. **Those choices are up to the individual, not fate.**

Shlomo Hamelech offers a keen insight on the education of children in Mishlei (22:6)

משלי פרק כב פסוק ו: חנך לנער על פי דרכו גם כי יזקין לא יסור ממנה:

Train a child in the way he ought to go; He will not swerve from it even in old age.

The **Vilna Gaon** explains, in his commentary on Mishlei, that Shlomo Hamelech is alluding to the idea presented in the Gemara in Shabbos 156a. People are born with certain proclivities and tendencies, and a teacher should help develop a child to be their best within their nature if they want the lessons to stick. They should work with the child's nature, not against them.

גר"א על משלי (כב,ו)

חנך וגו' כשהוא עוד נער ואז גם כשיזקין לא יסור. והענין כי האדם אי אפשר לו לשבור דרכו. כלומר מזלות שנוולד בו. כמו שכתוב האי מאן דבצדק יהיה גבר צדקן וכו'. וכשנוולד במזל רע אז על זה ניתנה הבחירה ביד האדם שיכול לאחוז במזלו לאיזה דבר שירצה להיות או צדיק או רשע או בינוני. כמ"ש במסכת שבת האי מאן דבמאדים יהיה שופך דמים אמר ר' אלעזר או מהולא או טבחא או ליסטים. וזכר אלו הג' והוא לפי שמזו מורה שיהיה שופך דמים אך בבחירתו יוכל לבחור באלו הג' או מהולא והוא צדיק שעושה מ"ע או טבחא הוא בינוני או ליסטים והוא רשע שופך דמים כמשמעו.

The concept of “teaching a child according to his nature” is based on the idea that a person cannot fundamentally break their inner tendencies, which are determined by mazel. . . as it says in Maseches Shabbos, one who is born under the influence of Mars will spill blood...but he can determine if he will be a bandit, a shochet, a doctor. These three examples are brought as three broad categories—a Tzadik, a beinoni, and a rasha.

Although Esav was born with a passion for blood, it was up to him to decide which way he would direct his abilities. Would he become a hunter and murderer, or a valiant warrior and leader, a doctor, or mohel. And, indeed, there was another famous אדמוני, who chose a very different path in life. The **Baal HaTurim** notes that only two people in Tanach are described as אדמוני, Esav and David Hamelech. David Hamelech was a warrior, a great leader, and a creative poet. This shows us the potential Esav had within him...

בעל הטורים בראשית (פרשת תולדות) פרק כה פסוק כה

(כה) אדמוני. ב' במסורת. ויצא הראשון אדמוני. והוא אדמוני עם יפה עינים (ש"א טז יב) גבי דוד. כשראה שמואל את דוד אדמוני, אמר זה שופך דמים כעשו. ועל כן נאמר "עם יפה עינים", כלומר עם דעת סנהדרין הוא עושה, שנקראו עינים שנאמר (במדבר טו כד) אם מעיני העדה (ב"ר סג יא):

And this explains why Yitzchak thought Esav should be given the *brachos*. He saw the tremendous potential in Esav; a potential King of Israel.

So what went wrong? **Rav Hirsch** attributes the blame to the parents. He writes on the Pasuk (Breishis 25:27)

ויגדלו הנערים ויהי עשו איש ידע ציד איש שדה ויעקב איש תם ישב אהלים:

When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the outdoors; but Jacob was a mild man who stayed in camp.

Rav Hirsch understands from Midrash Rabba 63:10 that, in his words, *"mistakes in their upbringing" caused the tension in Yaakov and Esav's relationship. As long as they were little, no one paid attention to the differences in their hidden natures; they were given the same upbringing and education. Their parents overlooked the cardinal principle of חנוך לנער על פי דרכו Bring up each child in accordance with his own way. Each child should be guided in accordance with the path intended especially for him, the path that suits the qualities and tendencies latent in the depth of his personality, and thus he should be educated, both as a man and as a Jew. The great Jewish task is basically one, but the ways of its fulfillment are manifold and diverse, as human character traits and paths of life are manifold and diverse.*

But I believe the bulk of the blame lies with Esav himself. A person is responsible to make good choices in life. As Avraham Avinu, whose parents certainly made mistakes in raising their children, shows us, a person can chart their own course in life, despite challenges. And Esav had wonderful role models—in his parents and brother. He was born with a spiritual silver spoon in his mouth, but he made poor decisions. He **rejected** his heritage, with all the opportunities and benefits presented to him.

What was the root of his mistake?

Rashi provides a very valuable insight into Esav's mindset when he confronted Yaakov about purchasing the *bechora*. He suggests that when Esav said למות ולמה זה לי בכורה, he rejected the *bechora* not because he was afraid of dying from starvation, but because the *bechora* carried with it the responsibility of *avoda*...and the stakes are quite high with *avodas Hashem*.

רש"י בראשית (פרשת תולדות) פרק כה פסוק לב

(לב) הנה אנכי הולך למות – (מתנודדת והולכת היא הבכורה שלא תהא כל עת העבודה בבכורות כי שבט לוי יטול אותה ועוד) אמר עשו מה טיבהל של עבודה זו, אמר לו כמה אזהרות ועונשין ומיתות תלוין בה, כאותה ששנינו אלו הן שבמיתה שתויי יין, ופרועי ראש. אמר אני הולך למות על ידה, אם כן מה חפץ לי בה:

Rav Moshe Feinstein wonders, if according to Rashi, Esav rejected the *bechora* because of this concern, why does the Torah write *ויבז עשו את הבכורה*, that Esav disgraced the firstborn status. Rav Moshe answers that his aversion to taking responsibility, because fear of the risk is, shows that he did not value spirituality, which is by definition, a disgrace.

דרש משה

ולכאורה תמוה מה שנחשב זה לבזיון הבכורה, כיון שמרוב חשיבותה היה ירא לקבלה. ונראה שהוא משום שאדם צריך לקבל עליו לעשות לכבוד שמים אף שיש בזה אחריות כבדה ואף שיהיה עליו כמה ערעורים ע"ז זה, ואם אינו עוהכך הוא בכלל בזיון, דכדאי הוא כבוד שמים ומצות ה' שיקבל עליו לעשות אף שיש בזה כמה עיניני אחריות, דלא כהרבה אנשים שאין רצים לקבל רבנות וכדומה מצד יראת האחריות ויראת אנשים שיערערו וכדומה.

Esav was born with great leadership qualities...but becoming a leader and developing greatness involves hard work and taking risks. Esav was willing to accept the risk when it came to hunting

and providing for luxuries. But when it came to self-improvement, he was not willing to put in the work. He was not willing to take any risk or put in any effort.

Esav was afraid to push himself and to challenges himself.

Chazal teach us, in Brachos 7a, that a name defines character. The names of Esav and Yaakov are no exception; they describe their essential character, worldview, and attitude.

Esav was born first. Rashi points out that, even as a newborn infant, he was, in his covering of hair, as physically mature as a man. Rishonim (**Rashi, Rashbam, Radak**) indicate that his name, Esav, is rooted in the word עשוי ונגמר. He was mature, developed, complete. This was not just a description of his physical characteristics. His name also confirms the defining aspect of his character: completion, maturity, fully realized-- **one who expects no further development or growth, one who does not push himself further**. Esav never advanced in life; he never improved his character or challenged himself to change his ways, to be better or greater. He saw himself as set in his ways, he treated life as predetermined; He was not willing to take risks to perfect himself.

The exact opposite was true of Yaakov. He was born second. He followed Esav out of the womb and into life. But he was born hanging onto his brother's coattails, or, to use the original biblical idiom, his hand holds the heel—the *ekav* of Esav: hence his name יעקב. He was always looking to advance—to grab onto more than he had been handed. And to do that, he was always struggling, always pushing himself, never accepting the status quo.

We will read next week of Yaakov's wrestling with the angel, an incident that is crucial in his life. As a result of this encounter, his name was changed to "Yisrael." As we will read, כי שרית because you struggled (as **Onkelos** translates it) to become the commanding power with God and man, and you prevailed. Notice that the name ישראל does not incorporate the word ותוכל the concept of victory, important as it is. Rather, it incorporates the word שרית, highlighting the concept of **struggle** to command power; because the struggle is more significant than the triumph. The identification of Yaakov as Yisrael symbolizes struggle; development, growth, progress, the fight to grow and improve oneself ...to develop a new identity.

The story of Yaakov and Esav is a study in contrasts. A contrast between the one brother who was born with incredible potential, but arrives on the scene and leaves it in the same manner, experiencing no change or growth; and the other brother, who by sheer will and resolve and fierce determination, struggles to actualize all his strengths and achieve superiority and triumph שרית. . ותוכל.

The character of Yaakov who becomes Yisrael teaches us a major insight into Judaism, as we are called Bnei Yisrael, the children of the one who struggle and persevere. We must follow the model of Yaakov Avinu's life. Judaism is predicated on our ability to utilize our strengths and abilities for good things, and to transform ourselves. Esav is the perennial enemy, representing unrealized potential. Yitzchak saw Esav's potential to be a David Hamelech, but he never put in the hard work to make it a reality. May we push ourselves like Yaakov Avinu, and may we see the day when Yaakov will model for the world what it means to take responsibility for *kevod Shamayim*.