

Parsha Pearls

FROM THE WORDS OF THE GEDOLIM

Toldos 5769

And Yitzchok loved Esav, for catch was in his mouth. (25:28)

The Midrash Seichel Tov (Bereishis 33) calls Yaakov Avinu the “choicest of the patriarchs.” What did Yaakov do that was greater than his predecessors, Avraham and Yitzchok? Rabbi Yosef Chaim Zonenfeld explained that Yaakov passed a unique test that none of the other patriarchs confronted. Avraham Avinu recognized the Creator on his own, in defiance of his idol-worshipping father. He did not expect any support from his father. Yitzchok learned the path of G-d from his father and had his father’s full support. But Yaakov, although he learned from his father to serve G-d, saw at the same time his father’s love for his wicked brother Esav, who rejected all that his father represented. Yaakov was the one following in Yitzchok’s ways, studying Torah and serving G-d, yet Yitzchok preferred Esav to Yaakov. This gave him pause to reconsider: Was Esav on the right path after all? Should he also begin to act like Esav? But Yaakov Avinu strengthened himself in the conviction that he was doing the right thing, and continued to be a straight man living in the tents of Torah. This is why he deserved the title “the choicest of the patriarchs”.

Faithful Torah Jews today face a similar trial. We know we are following the right path, yet we see the success of the Zionists. Their organizations have all the money and they control all the Jewish newspapers. Sometimes we are tempted to wonder: perhaps their success indicates that G-d approves of their ways? Perhaps we should, G-d forbid, be like them? But we must emulate Yaakov Avinu and say: we will continue to do and believe what is right, regardless of whether we are successful or not.

The parallel between Yaakov Avinu and ourselves goes further. Just as Yaakov Avinu realized that Yitzchok’s love for Esav was part of G-d’s plan and it should not deter him in his service of G-d, so too we must accept G-d’s decree of exile, in which Esav and other nations rule over us. We must not be like the Zionists, who attempt to put an end to the love of Esav before its time.

The Midrash Shir Hashirim indeed says that Yitzchok’s love for Esav is behind our exile, and is the meaning of the word “love” in Shir Hashirim (2:7). “Do not arouse the love before it is desired” is understood by the Midrash to mean: “Do not use actions to upset the love of Yitzchok for Esav before the desire of the patriarch [Yitzchok] has been achieved.”

The Shach on the Torah, in the name of the Shaarei Orah, explains that Yitzchok loved Esav because he saw that Yaakov’s children would one day sin and deserve to be punished in Gehinom. In order to spare them this punishment, Yitzchok chose for them the lesser punishment of exile, and chose Esav to carry out the exile. In this manner, he followed in the footsteps of his father, Avraham Avinu, who also chose exile for his children (Bereishis Rabbah 44:21).

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