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THE KESSER SHEM TOV TREASURY

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Parshas Toldos
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WHAT IS A BIRTHRIGHT WORTH?

Bereishis 25:19–28:9 · with this week's Daf Yomi, Bechoros 51–57

Why Yaakov Ate Lentils

Shlomo HaMelech says, "Better is the long-suffering than the proud in spirit" (*Koheles* 7:8). The long-suffering one, says the Midrash, is Yaakov, who every day was patient and spoke gentle words. The proud one is Esav. Every day he ate from his hunt, and in his haughtiness he never gave Yaakov any of his food.

Once he went out to hunt and caught nothing. He saw Yaakov eating a dish of lentils and wanted them in his heart. "Let me gulp down some of that red, red stuff" (25:30). Yaakov said to him: Red you came out of your mother's womb, and red food you want to eat. Therefore he was called Edom.

Why was Yaakov eating lentils? Rabbi Eliezer says: lentils are the food of distress and mourning. The lentil has no opening, just as a mourner has no "mouth": he refrains from speech (*Bava Basra* 16b). When Hevel was killed, his parents ate lentils in mourning for him. When Haran was burned in Ur Kasdim, his parents ate lentils in mourning for him. And Yaakov?

> וַיְעַקֹּב הָיָה אוֹכֵל מַאֲכַל עֲדָשִׁים בְּאֵבֶל וְצָרָה עַל שֶׁהָיְתָה מַלְכוּת וְשָׁרָה וּכְהוֹרָה שֶׁל עֵשָׂו
> *"And Yaakov was eating lentil food in grief and distress because the kingship, the authority, and the birthright belonged to Esav."*

The privileges of the firstborn, kingship and the priestly service, were in the hands of one unworthy of them, and Yaakov mourned. So too, the Jewish people eat lentils in mourning for the *Beis HaMikdash* and for the exile.

The Midrash ends with a promise. The descendants of Esav will not fall until a remnant of Yaakov comes and gives them lentil food in grief and distress, and takes from them the kingship and the *bechorah* that Yaakov bought from Esav with an oath: "Swear to me this day; and he swore to him" (25:33).

Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer, ch. 35

Delight Loves Distance

"And Yitzchak loved Esav" (25:28). In the plain sense, it was for the game Esav brought him. The Maggid asks a different question: what could draw Yitzchak to Esav, of all people?

The name Yitzchak means laughter and joy, and that is delight. Pleasure is felt only against a background of its absence; unbroken, it stops being felt at all. And Esav was the son who stood far off:

> וְתַעֲנוּג תְּמִידִי אֵינוֹ תַּעֲנוּג, לָכֵן וַיֶּאֱהַב יִצְחָק אֶת עֵשָׂו, הַתַּעֲנוּג אוֹהֵב הַהִתְרַחֲקוּת
> *"And a delight that is constant is no delight, and this is why 'Yitzchak loved Esav,' for delight loves distance."*

So Esav comes to Yitzchak, from far to near, and Yitzchak asks him, "Make me delicacies" (27:4). *Matamim* comes from *ta'am*, taste: he is asking that the delight be increased.

This, says the Maggid, is why "great is *teshuvah*, for willful *aveiros* become like merits" when it is out of love (*Yoma* 86b). *Aveiros* set a person at a distance. From that distance comes the longing to rise, and as great as his desire and yearning, so great is the delight. So it is through those very *aveiros* that delight comes, and therefore they are like merits. Not the distance itself, but the distance that turns into longing.

So the Maggid reads the verse "From afar Hashem appeared to me" (*Yirmiyahu* 31:2): when I am the one who has become far, that is when He appears to me. And "peace to the far one" (*Yeshayah* 57:19) does not come in spite of the distance, but through it, once the distance turns into longing.

Or Torah of the Maggid of Mezeritch · Toldos §4

Three Tears

"You fed them the bread of tears, and gave them tears to drink, *shalish*" (*Tehillim* 80:6). The Midrash stops at the strange word *shalish*:

> ר׳ אֶלְעָזָר אוֹמֵר שָׁלֹשׁ דְּמָעוֹת הוֹרִיד עֵשָׂו מֵעֵינָיו, אַחַת שֶׁל יָמִין, וְאַחַת שֶׁל שְׂמֹאל, וְהַשְּׁלִישִׁית הָיְתָה קְשׁוּרָה בְּעֵינוֹ
> *"R' Elazar says: Esav shed three tears from his eyes: one from the right eye, one from the left, and the third stayed caught in his eye."*

These are the tears Esav wept when Yaakov received the blessing. It does not say *shalosh*, three, but *shalish*, which means both "three" and "a third": so there were three tears, but the third never fully fell. R' Berechyah says: he shed only a third of a tear. Because of those tears Esav earned the blessing "By your sword you shall live," and the Jewish people now drink tears under his rule.

Then the Jewish people turn the tears into an argument. Knesses Yisrael said before the Holy One: "Master of the World! For the sake of three tears that he shed, You gave him rule from one end of the world to the other and granted him tranquility in this world. When You come to see our humiliation, and when we pour out our souls, how much more so!" In other words: if a few tears from Esav bought him the whole world, then the endless tears of the Jewish people must surely move Hashem to redeem them.

Midrash Tehillim, Vol. II · Ps. 80 §4

When Someone Lacks

"These are the descendants of Yitzchak son of Avraham: Avraham fathered Yitzchak" (25:19). The verse says it twice. The Baal Shem Tov reads it as a question and its answer.

The question, "Yitzchak son of Avraham": how can Yitzchak, who is *Gevurah*, restraint and holding back, be born from Avraham, who is *Chesed*, kindness that gives without limit? The answer, "Avraham fathered Yitzchak": *Chesed* itself produced the *Gevurah*.

> זֶה הַגְּבוּרָה הוּא מֵחֶסֶד שֶׁיִּהְיֶה צִמְצוּם בָּעוֹלָם, כְּדֵי שֶׁעַל יְדֵי זֶה יִהְיֶה נֶחְסָר לְאֶחָד וְהַשֵּׁנִי יִתֵּן לוֹ
> *"This* Gevurah *comes from* Chesed*: there is to be restriction in the world so that through it one person will lack, and the other will give to him."*

In a world where everyone had everything, no one could give. The lack need not be money: it can be knowledge, skill, confidence or calm. So "the world is built with kindness" (*Tehillim* 89:3). When you notice where you fall short, that gap is also someone else's chance to give; where you have more, the opening is yours.

Baal Shem Tov al HaTorah, Vol. I · Toldos §1

CONSIDER

Yaakov mourned that the bechorah was in Esav's hands, and Esav gave it away for a bowl of lentils. What did Yaakov see in it that Esav did not?

Esav's three tears bought him rule over the world. What, then, are our tears worth?

The Mourner's Lentils

Aruch HaShulchan, Hilchos Aveilus · Yoreh De'ah 378, with the boxes of later authorities · in press

Yaakov ate lentils as mourning food. What is the mourner's first meal today, and is it given on Rosh Chodesh?

Not from his own. A mourner may not eat his first meal from his own food. Hashem told Yechezkel, in his mourning, "the bread of men you shall not eat" (*Moed Katan* 27b), which implies that ordinarily a mourner eats the bread of others. "The reason for this matter has not been made clear to us," writes the *Aruch HaShulchan*. *Tosafos* and the Rokeach forbid his own food the whole first day; the Rosh, the Tur and the *Shulchan Aruch* forbid only the first meal, and so is the custom. If no one brought him food, or he is alone in that place, he eats his own: it is not reasonable that he should go hungry. Therefore it is a *mitzvah* on the neighbors to bring him the meal, and the *Yerushalmi* says: a curse on the neighbors who forced him to eat from his own.

Bread first. The essential thing is the bread, as the verse and the Gemara say. Cooked dishes he may eat from his own, and the custom is to bring the mourner bread and eggs only. Where the custom is to bring meat, wine and delicacies, they may do so, but:

> וּמְקוֹדָם מַבְרִין בְּבֵיצִים אוֹ בְּתַבְשִׁיל שֶׁל עֲדָשִׁים, שֶׁזֶּהוּ זֵכֶר לַאֲבֵלוּת, וְאַחַר כָּךְ מַבְרִין בְּדְבָרִים שֶׁיִּרְצוּ
>
> *"But first they provide the meal of consolation with eggs or with a lentil dish, for this is a remembrance of mourning, and afterward they provide whatever [foods] they wish."*

Why round. The Maharil records a custom to avoid legumes on days without *Tachanun*, because their round form "rolls through the world" and recalls mourning. The roundness of eggs and lentils recalls the wheel of grief that in time reaches every person.

What the meal must hold. The *Gesher HaChaim* (20:2): if they fed him only a cooked dish and drinks, with no bread or cake at all, the meal of consolation was not fulfilled. The custom is bread or cake with hard-boiled eggs or lentils and a cup of coffee or tea. Before the meal comes, he holds, the mourner may drink his own coffee or tea, since drinking alone is not eating, though the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* and the *Sdei Chemed* are strict even there. Some peel the eggs beforehand, following R' Akiva Eiger, so that the mourner should not look like a glutton peeling them himself.

On Rosh Chodesh. When the death was on Yom Tov or *Chol HaMoed*, the *Aruch HaShulchan* rules that no meal is given; and with the Rema, whenever the first day of mourning is pushed off, the meal is not given later. The *Gesher HaChaim* rules with the Rambam, the Tur, the *Shulchan Aruch* and most *poskim* that it *is* given on Rosh Chodesh, Chanukah, Purim, and even *Chol HaMoed*. On *Chol HaMoed*, he says, bring cake and coffee instead of eggs and lentils, to mark the day. On Yom Tov itself there is no meal of consolation at all.

On Shabbos. During the week the greatest of the comforters breaks the bread and puts the mourner's piece into his hand: "Zion spreads out her hands." On Shabbos the mourner breaks the bread himself, as on any Shabbos, for "the blessing of Hashem, it enriches": this is Shabbos, "and He adds no sorrow with it."

A Pidyon Without a Kohen?

Shu"t Chasam Sofer, Yoreh De'ah 301 · the Kornitzer Edition

The rumor. Word reached the Chasam Sofer that people were saying in his name that a firstborn may be redeemed through an Israelite who takes the money on behalf of his wife, a *Kohenes*. He sent word that no such ruling ever came from him. Now the story had come back, so he wrote "to publicize there publicly that whoever says this in my name is speaking in confusion." Then he tells, in his own words, what had actually happened:

> מְסֻבִּין הָיִינוּ בִּישׁוּעַ הַבֵּן וְחָטַף אֶחָד וּבֵרַךְ וְשָׁכַח לְיַטּוֹל רְשׁוּת מִכֹּהֵן וְשָׂחֲקוּ עָלָיו לֵאמֹר אֵיךְ אֶפְשָׁר לְפִדְיוֹן בְּלֹא כֹּהֵן
>
> *"We were sitting at a* pidyon haben *feast. And one [person] seized [the opportunity] and recited the blessing. And he forgot to ask a Kohen's permission. And they laughed at him, saying: how can there be a* pidyon *without a Kohen?"*

The joke. When a Kohen sits at a meal, one asks his permission before leading the bentching. This guest jumped in and led it without asking, so the others teased him with a play on words: at a *pidyon haben*, of all places, where nothing can be done without a Kohen, he made a "*pidyon* without a Kohen"!

The remark. The Chasam Sofer, who was at that meal, joined in: it is indeed possible [to have a *pidyon haben* without a Kohen] according to *Tosafos*, through a *Kohenes* married to an Israelite. He added that he used to give the priestly gifts, the foreleg, cheeks and stomach, to his brother-in-law, the husband of a *Kohenes*, as the *Shulchan Aruch* permits. "But regarding *pidyon*, far be it from me to decide between *Tosafos* and the Rosh."

Not a ruling. And even if the Chasam Sofer had decided between *Tosafos* and the Rosh, what he said at that meal would still not be a ruling. No one had asked him a question for practice; he only said it in passing, while learning, and one may not act on such words (*Bava Basra* 130b). "It is a *mitzvah* to publicize broadly and to rebuke those who wish to act based on hearsay, estimation, and conjecture."

The law. *Tosafos* (*Kiddushin* 8a) suggest that Rav Kahana took a scarf for a *pidyon* on behalf of his wife, a *Kohenes*, just as he ate priestly gifts for her, since for priestly gifts "Kohen" includes a *Kohenes* (*Chullin* 131b). But that is only one of their two answers. The Rosh, at the end of *Bechoros*, rules: of the redemption money the Torah says, "give the money to Aharon and his sons" (*Bamidbar* 3:48), so daughters are excluded; so too the Tur and the *Chinuch*. We do not leave their certainty for the doubt of *Tosafos*. Still, if no Kohen can be found on the day, give the money to a *Kohenes* without a *berachah*, on condition that it counts only if no Kohen is found; if one is found later, redeem the child again with a *berachah*.

Rosh Chodesh Kislev: The Women's Reward

Aharon wanted to delay the making of the calf until Moshe came back. So he asked the men for their wives' earrings: he thought they would refuse, and the quarrel would hold things up. They did refuse: "You wish to make an abomination that has no power to save?" The men used their own instead, and Hashem rewarded the women. "In this world, they observe the New Moons": they refrain from work on Rosh Chodesh. In the World to Come they will be renewed like the moon. The Lubavitcher Rebbe (*Igros Kodesh* vol. 26, 9689) notes their double merit: they turned from evil at the calf, and were the first to give their ornaments for the *Mishkan*.

Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer, ch. 45

THIS WEEK'S SOURCES

Bilingual editions: Hebrew with English translation and elucidation · scan to see the book

Pirkei DeRabbi Eliezer *Ratner Family Edition*

Or Torah *The Maggid of Mezeritch*

Midrash Tehillim *Vol. II · Vol. III in press*

Baal Shem Tov al HaTorah *Vol. I, Bereishis*

Aruch HaShulchan *Hilchos Aveilus · in press*

Shu"t Chasam Sofer *YD Vol. I · YD 301 in press*