

Toldos: Ya'akov and Esau - Two Manners of Service

 Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson
From the Sichos in English Collection

At the beginning of the Torah portion *Toldos*, the Torah relates that when Rivkah was pregnant with Ya'akov and Esav, “the children clashed within her.”¹ Our Sages explain² that, while still within the womb, Ya'akov was drawn to holiness, while Esav was attracted to idolatry.

Esav's behavior is difficult to fathom. The Patriarchs were, as the *Midrash* states,³ “truly the [Divine] Chariot,” which, as the *Alter Rebbe* explains,⁴ means that “all their organs were completely holy,” and that “through their lives, they served as a vehicle for nothing but the Divine Will.”

Understandably, their children were conceived and born in complete holiness, and within them was found not only the “power of their father” but also the essence of their father.⁵ How can it be that Yitzchak's son, Esav, should innately be drawn to idolatry?

Since⁶ “the deeds of the Patriarchs are a sign unto their progeny” (i.e., the deeds of the Patriarchs provide the strength and inspiration which their progeny need in order to emulate their behavior), it follows that all manner of spiritual service found in the Jewish people are also to be found — at least as a “sign” — within the service of the Patriarchs.

The *Rambam* explains⁷ that there are two general manners of spiritual service: the individual who desires to do only good, and the one who desires to do evil, but conquers his evil inclination.

Since the Patriarchs were on such a lofty spiritual level that they only desired to fulfill G-d's will, where is the “sign” within their service that inspires and empowers their descendants to overcome the blandishments of evil? The Patriarchs themselves were never subject to such temptations.

Moreover, even a person who conquers his evil inclination is merely tempted by evil — he does not actually succumb. However, Jews also have the service of repentance, wherein they rectify inappropriate behavior. How are we to find the “signs” of repentance within the behavior of such sterling individuals as the Patriarchs?

Although the Patriarchs experienced no internal conflict, they were still faced with external opposition to their way of life, opposition that they had to overcome. And, although conquest of one's own evil inclination may be much more difficult than overcoming outside opposition, nevertheless, the Patriarchs' service in this regard also served as an empowerment to their children, for the following reason: by conquering one's evil inclination, a person shows how greatly attached he is to G-d; although he desires to do evil, this desire does not hinder his will to do only good.

This is expressed even more forcefully through repentance. Though the person has actually *succumbed* to evil, his innermost desire to remain attached to G-d is so strong that he conquers his evil, regrets his past and returns to His service.

Herein lies the inspiration we all draw from the Patriarchs: this inner strength and complete unity with G-d, a unity so solid that nothing in the world can weaken it, is inherited by us from the Patriarchs, who were a “chariot” to G-d, such that it was impossible for them to sunder this connection for even a moment.

Thus, although the “conquest” of the Patriarchs only applied to external forces, the underlying root of their conquest — their unparalleled unity with G-d — empowers their children to overcome not only external evil but internal evil as well.

These two manners of service — “wholly righteous” and “overcoming evil” — were also mirrored in their children — Ya’akov was completely righteous, and Esav had the task of conquering an innate tendency towards evil.

Based on *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. XX, pp. 108-112

FOOTNOTES

1. *Bereishis* 25:22.
2. *Bereishis Rabbah* 63:6; *Zohar*, Vol. I, p. 139a; commentary of *Rashi* on the verse.
3. *Bereishis Rabbah* 47:6, 82:6.
4. *Tanya* ch. 23.
5. See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. XV, p. 135 and fn. 35 *ibid*.
6. See *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. V, p. 79 fn. 20; Vol. XV, p. 76 fn. 12 and places cited there.
7. *Shemoneh Perakim* , ch. 6.

Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson