

By Rabbi Avrohom Lipszyc

The Goodness of Evil

Synopsis: The sicha begins with questioning how the Zohar could say that Esau was great, and in order to understand this, the sicha flips into asking how Esau, the son of Isaac, could be evil. Concluding with the difference between the "*Esau stated in the parsha*," the way he exists within the holy realm of Isaac, and the way Esau "*went out*" of Isaac, and manifested himself within evil. Thus, every Jew has within him the service of both, "*Jacob*" ("tent-dweller"; Torah-study) and "*Esau*" ("Expert ensnarer, man of the field"; transforming the physical world) *stated in the parsha.*"

In connection with the verse (-Genesis 25:27), "*And the children grew up*," the *Yalkut Shemoni* (-Joshua, Remez 23) states, "*And Esau is included in this, only that he spoiled it with his actions.*" Meaning, that the "*grew up*" does not mean only physically so, in their age, but also spiritually so, as well. As the *Yalkut Shemoni* states prior to this, on the verse (-Joshua 14:15), "*the greatest man among the giants*," "*Greatest, these are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who are called great*," and in continuation to this the *Yalkut Shemoni* is telling us that this which Esau is not spiritually great, but to the contrary, is a wicked person, is because, "*he spoiled it with his actions.*"

So too, do we find that the Zohar (-Toldot 138b) is defining the, "*And the children grew up*," to be referring to spiritual greatness: "*And the children grew up, the side of Abraham caused this that they became great, and his merit helped them, he would educate them with mitzvot, including Jacob and Esau.*" Thus we see the Zohar accentuating the thought of the *Yalkut Shemoni*.

Now, the *Yalkut Shemoni* can be explained as the verse teaching us of Esau's *potential* to being great, albeit that this wasn't ever actualized, due to "*he spoiled it with his actions.*" However, the Zohar's statement of, "*he would educate them with mitzvot*," clearly speaks of the verse attesting to Esau's *actually* being great.

Question: How can say that Esau was *actually* great, and only after his *actually* being great did he then, "*spoil this with his actions*," when (i) our sages (-Bereishis Rabbah 63:6, quoted in Rashi upon the verse) teach us upon the verse (-Genesis 25:22), "*The children (Jacob and Esau) struggled within her (Rebecca's womb)*," that, "*(the word) ויתרצצו 'struggled' as being an expression of ריצה 'running'. When she passed by the entrances of the Torah (academies) of Shem and Ever, Jacob would hurry and wriggle (to try) and come out, (and) when she passed by the entrance of (a place) of idol-worship, Esau would wriggle (to try) and come out.*" Thus, Esau, from the womb, was already drawn to idol-worship! (ii) More than this, immediately after the verse's, "*And the children grew up*," the verse goes on to tell us that, "*Esau became an expert in ensnaring, a man of the field*," meaning that *this* was his "*greatness*". Thus, how can we interpret the verse's, "*And the children grew up*," to mean spiritual greatness concerning Esau!?

Concerning the first question, we may try to answer that this which the embryo experiences within the womb does not have an effect upon the person's choices once they are born. For, we are taught (-Niddah 30b), "*And (a fetus) is taught the entire Torah (while in the womb)... And once (the fetus) emerges into the airspace of the world, an angel comes and slaps it on its mouth, causing it to forget the entire Torah.*" The reason for this is, that only through making the unborn child forget the Torah he learned in the womb is *Freedom of Choice* of (-Deuteronomy 30:15), "*Behold, I have set before you today life and good, and death and evil (equally)*," possible once he is born. So too, we must say concerning Esau, that once he was born, he *forgot* his "*behaviors*" of, "*being drawn*" to idol-worship, so that the education he received from Abraham would have its full impact upon Esau.

Nevertheless, we cannot answer as such, being that the Zohar clearly states that Esau's being drawn to idol-worship was, "*because of this*," that, "*his place that they showed him*," being that he was drawn to this while in his mother's womb. This, this is more than just what Maimonides writes (-*Eight Chapters*, Chapter 8), "*this is a temperament (that is but) prepared for a fault in character.*" Just as it is concerning with holiness, that even after they make the fetus forget the Torah he studied, nevertheless (-Ohr HaTorah, SHir HaShirim p. 73) there remains an effect of the Torah-study, that draws him to the Torah, after he is born. Thus, we return to our question of how can we say that, "*And the children grew up*," concerning Esau is referring to any spiritual greatness?!

In order to understand this, we will now turn to understanding a second interpretation to the verse, "*The children (Jacob and Esau) struggled within her (Rebecca's womb)*" (-*Yalkut Shemoni* and Rashi upon the verse): "*They struggled with each other and fought over the inheritance of two worlds*," "*over this world and the World to Come.*" Now, we must understand, if Jacob wanted the *World to Come*, and Esau wanted this world, then what was the fighting about?! Thus, we must say, that that both Jacob and Esau wanted *both* worlds!

Question: Why did the *wicked* Esau want the *World to Come*, which is all about *Divine* revelation?! As we find our Sages teach us (-Tanchumah, Terumah 9) that while Jacob partnered with Esau in this world, Esau did not partner with Jacob in the *World to Come*!

Now, to understand this, let us understand an anomaly in the first interpretation, that already in the womb Esau was drawn to idol-worship:

Question: Our Sages teach us (-Bereishit Rabbah 47:6), "*The Patriarchs are truly the [Divine] chariot.*" Meaning that just as the chariot is completely subservient, with no will of its own, to the rider, so too, our patriarchs were completely subservient to the will of G-d. The Alter Rebbe emphasizes this to mean (-Tanya, Chapter 23), "*for all their organs were completely... and throughout their lives, they served as a vehicle for nothing but the Divine will.*" It is therefore understood that all their children were born in a pinnacle of holiness, there existed within them the "*energy of their father,*" and even more so, the essence of their father. Thus, how is it possible that the son of Isaac, within the womb of his mother, of his very nature, is drawn to idolatry?!

The question is not concerning Esau becoming a wicked person, which was brought about through his choices of action, being influenced by his environment in Canaan, and his dealings with King Nimrod. For Esau's choices led to (-Pesachim 56a), "*Isaac, Esau came out of him,*" through which Esau (-Likkutei Torah, VaEtchanan 5a), "*went out and separated himself from the domain of Isaac.*" However, here we are speaking of Esau as he was in his mother's womb, before he was born, where no *Freedom of Choice* exists, and this way of being in his mother's womb even effects him in the choices he makes as he grows up?!

Explanation: The meaning behind, "*The actions of the Patriarchs are signs for the offspring,*" is that the essence of the "*sign*" is that it be an empowerment for the children to walk in the path of our Patriarchs. Thus, it is understood that each and every form of service to G-d must exist as a "*sign*" within the actions of our Patriarchs. Now, Maimonides (-ibid, chapter 6) explains well that there are two forms of service to G-d: (i) That of the "*Virtuous Chassid*" who from the start desires only goodness, and (ii) "*Conquers of his inclination*" who, "*desires bad behaviors... and conquers his inclination.*" How can it be that within the "*actions of the Patriarchs*" who, "*The Patriarchs are truly the [Divine] chariot,*" and thus have no inclination that needs to be conquered that there be a "*sign*" for the service of, "*One who conquers his inclination*"?

Note: The Rebbe points out in a footnote a possible answer concerning Abraham, who until he completely came to recognize G-d (being born and brought up in the house of an idol-worshipper), Abraham's being a chariot was in a fashion of, "*conquering his inclination.*"

Additionally, the Rebbe concludes the footnote with a parenthesis referring us to (i) Baba Basra 17a, which states, "*Three people over whom the evil inclination had no sway. They are: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,*" and then to (ii) *Tosfot* upon this Talmudic teaching which explains:

"We cannot interpret this statement to mean that the Evil Inclination had no power over them at all for if indeed that were the case how did the Patriarchs receive any reward for their actions, since they had no Evil Inclination to deter them But rather it is like that which the Talmud states, 'what does the verse mean 'He guards the feet of his Chassidim'? Once the majority of a person's years have passed and he did not sin, he will not sin further' Here too, regarding the Patriarchs since G-d saw that the Patriarchs were exerting themselves so much to distance themselves from a sin therefore G-d helped them from this point onward that the Evil Inclination had no power over them."

Nevertheless, in the simple Chassidic understand of the, "*The Patriarchs are truly the [Divine] chariot,*" the question asked, remains.

More than this, the question gets greater, being that, "*Conquers his inclination,*" there exists no actual bad actions, but only a desire for bad behavior, while in fact, among the service to G-d of Israel there exists the service of repentance for actual bad deeds committed! How can there be among the actions of, "*The Patriarchs are truly the [Divine] chariot,*" a "*sign*" of empowerment for their offspring to do this repentance service to G-d?!

Note: One might considering that while the Patriarchs did not need to deal with any internal inclinations (which is far different than Abraham's having to "*conquer his compassion*" for Isaac by the test of the *Akeida*), nevertheless, they had to deal with external blockages, and this conquering of external blockage is the "*Actions of the Patriarchs are signs for their offspring,*" for Israel to be able to conquer their internal inclinations. However, this answer does not suffice, being that internal inclination is far harder than to overcome external blockages. Thus, from where does Israel take the *sign of empowerment* for this harder conquering one's inclination?

An explanation giving for this is that the virtue of conquering one's inclination is (-Ethics of Our Fathers 4:1), "*Who is strong? One who overpowers his inclinations,*" the attribute of being strong. Even more than this is the virtue of strength in doing repentance, in which his internal bond with G-d is so strong that it brings him to a remorse over his past bad deeds, and to return to the service of G-d. Thus, the, "*The actions of the Patriarchs are signs for the offspring,*" for conquering one's inclination and for repentance is the strength of our Patriarchs, who were always a "*chariot*" to G-d, in a manner that it was impossible for there to be any disruption to the Patriarchs' bond with G-d, "*even for one moment.*" Thus, even though the strength of the Patriarchs expressed itself only concerning the external blockages, nevertheless, this "strength" of the Patriarchs served as the "*sign for their offspring*" that Israel conquer their internal inclination.

Note: In a footnote the Rebbe points out an amazing difference with in the *Baal Teshuvah* in which there is

- (i) The greater virtue of *Repentance from Love*, which (-Yoma 86b) "*The intentional sins become merits*," and this virtue existed by the Patriarchs as well, through their tests, for through their tests they two transformed the "*Sparks of the Three Husks of Impurity*." This virtue of the greater repentance (of love) is an outcome of their great love to G-d, which is an inheritance from our Patriarchs.
- (ii) That which the *Baal Teshuvah* is drawn to G-d with a greater love, in which the *Baal Teshuvah* is greater than Abraham who was a "*chariot*," this is not from the *Baal Teshuvah's* "*G-dly Soul*," but from their "*Vitality Soul* (the spiritual of the physical)," once they transform it to holiness. Nevertheless, even concerning this level of repentance, the essence and reason for the *Baal Teshuvah's* closeness to holiness comes from the strength of the bond of the "*G-dly Soul*" to G-d, and this is an inheritance from our Patriarchs.

Being that within our Patriarchs there are these two dimensions of service ((i) being within total holiness. (ii) Overcoming (external blockages) so too, our Patriarchs each had these two forms of services among their children. Abraham had (i) Isaac ("*an unblemished Burnt-offering*") (ii) Ishmael ("*he lived in the desert and became an archer*"); Jacob had (i) Issachar ("*And Issachar in your tents (of Torah-study)*") (ii) Zebulun ("*rejoice Zebulun in your going out*") and so too Reuben ("*you opened the gateway with Teshuvah*"). And for our discussion of the, "*Offspring of Isaac*," (i) Jacob ("*tent (of Torah-study) dweller*") , the one who represents "*Elevated Chassid*" and (ii) Esau ("*an expert in ensnaring, a man of the field*"), who represents "*Conqueror of His Inclination*." And the distinction and existence of these two forms of service to G-d exist already as they were becoming the "*offspring*" of Isaac, in their mother's womb.

However, concerning the *offspring* of the Patriarch, which are not "*Patriarchs*," but outside of them, there already exists a potential of tangible evil, in a manner that this evil exists but for the purpose of the service of "*Conquer His Inclination*." Unlike the Patriarch himself, in which there can exist no potential even for internal evil."

Note: This existence of a potential of tangible evil by the *offspring* of the Patriarchs, only for the sake of then serving G-d with it in the service of, "*conquering His Inclination*" is as the meaning behind the teaching of our Sages (-Bereishis Rabba, end of Chapter 2), "*I do not know in which of them He (G-d) desires, if it is in the actions of (the righteous), or if it be in the actions of these (the wicked)*." What does this mean that the Sage is questioning if G-d desires the actions of the wicked?!

The explanation is that G-d's desire in the actions of the wicked is referring to the service of repentance. For to G-d, Who (-Psalms 5:5), "*evil does not abide with You*," the entire existence of "*actions of the wicked*" is not the evil of these actions, but of the service of repentance that comes about through them.

So too, concerning Esau, that which he was born with the temperament of being drawn towards idolatry, from the place of Isaac's domain, this existed solely for the sake of the service to G-d of, "*Conquering His Inclination*." However, Esau being a man with *Freedom of Choice* he "*spoiled it with his actions*," "*stepping outside of Isaac*," Esau disconnected himself from the holiness of Isaac, and brought about from the *potential* of evil into an *actuality* of evil.

With this we will now understand the teaching upon, "*The children (Jacob and Esau) struggled within her (Rebecca's womb)*," that Jacob and Esau were fighting, "*over the inheritance of the two worlds*." Being that we are speaking here of Esau being within the womb of his mother, as he is within and part of the domain of holiness, it is thus understood that Esau's wanting this world was for the purpose of goodness, being that Esau at the moment was within, "*Offspring of Isaac*." Esau's desire of this world for the sake of goodness means, that the difference between the service of the "*Exalted Chassid*" is that his aspiration is for the *World to Come*, in which there is but the elevation from one level of holiness to the next. Nevertheless, the "*Elevated Chassid*" needs to have within him the service of "*Conquering His Inclination*," in which his service must take place in this world. So too, the "*Conqueror of His Inclination*," who's entire aspiration is the service of overcoming the spiritual challenges of this world, nevertheless, he must also have the the service being to detach from this world, including from the service of elevating this world, and submerge himself completely into the "*World to Come*" moments of being a, "*Tent (of Torah-study) Dweller*."

This was the fighting of Jacob and Esau, as it was within their being "*Offspring of Isaac*," within the holiness of the womb of their mother. From the perspective of the "*Elevated Chassid*," his entire descent into this world is but for him to achieve a higher level of holiness within the *World to Come*. Hence, Jacob's paradigm was that it is the *World to Come* that one must want, to the point that this is the sole purpose of this world! While, from the perspective of Esau, as the service of, "*Conqueror of His Inclination*," the entire purpose of his moments of being a "*Tent Dweller*," is but for the purpose of growth that his service in this world be complete. Thus, from Esau's paradigm, it is this world that one must want.

Now we can understand how the Sages saw the verse, "*And the children grew up*," to be speaking of --even concerning Esau-- spiritual greatness, and the Zohar's seeing Esau's spiritual greatness to have actually happened, through Abraham's educating him with mitzvot.

Being that Abraham had the power (which is why Abraham, who's power it was to draw down from Above, was successful in educating his grandson Esau with mitzvot, and his own son Ishmael to eventually repent, , and not Esau's father Isaac, who's power iot was to draw from below to Above, could not shine upon Esau to eventually repent) Of (-Genesis 18:19), "*he instructs his children and his household after him to keep G-d's ways by acting with righteousness and justice,*" thus, Abraham influenced Esau to have conquered his inclination.

This also explains why the verse immediately defines Esau's, "*And the children grew up,*" as, "*Esau became an expert in ensnaring, a man of the field.*" For within the holy domain of Abraham and Isaac, the, "*became an expert in ensnaring, a man of the field,*" for solely the purpose of goodness. In order to successfully be a, "*a man of the field (this world),*" in conquering one's inclination, he must learn how to become, "*an expert in ensnaring.*" For, to conquer and transform this world of deceit, one must garb himself within the garments of the object to br transformed. Thus, the soul must become an "*expert in ensnaring,*" in which it engages within physical eating, drinking, etc., while in truth, doing so solely for the sake of Heaven, through which the person refines and cleanses the "*G-dly Spark*" within the physical food and physical objects that he is engaging with.

Nevertheless, this is how it all is from the paradigm and domain of Abraham and Isaac. However, in actuality, after Abraham died and Esau wasn't being educated and influenced by Abraham, on the very day that Abraham died, Esau "*stepped out*" and disconnected himself from his connection with Isaac's holiness. Then, Esau spoiled, and made, his being a, "*became an expert in ensnaring, a man of the field,*" into its literal meaning, and went into a bad culture.

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This understanding of Esau's birth from Isaac is of Esau's originally being good matches the *Alter Rebbe's* explanation as to why Isaac had wanted to give the blessings to Esau: *Isaac looked upon Esau as Esau existed within Esau's source, Esau's head* (which upon Esau's death, rolled --and returned-- into the bosom of Isaac), where only the good and virtue of the service within this world is emphasized. To not be effected by the concealment of this world, but on the contrary, to transform this world, through conquering and bringing about that this world be refined and cleansed, and elevated into holiness.

Nevertheless, at the end, the blessing had to go to Jacob, for only Jacob had the power to successfully *deceive* this world, and refine, elevate, and transform this world into holiness. For it is only through the service of "*Tent* (of Torah-study) *Dwelling,*" with the power of the Torah, that one can thereafter go on to transform the world into "*An abode for Him, blessed be He.*"

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The Practical Lesson: Albeit that Jews are the children of Jacob, nevertheless, they cannot suffice with just the service of, "*Tent* (of Torah-study) *Dwelling.*" Our Sages teach (-Yevomot 109b), "*He who says that I have but Torah* (-study), *even Torah he does not have.*" Rather, one must also engage in the service of, "*A man of the field.*" A Jew must know that (-Genesis 25:19), "*These are the offspring*" refers to (-Rashi on the verse) "*Jacob and Esau mentioned in the parsha.*" Meaning that there must be the service of two "*offspring,*" only that the latter service be not as Esau actually manifested it in evil, but rather, as the offspring is, "*mentioned in the parsha,*" Isaac's domain of holiness. And in order to accomplish this, one must first do the service of Jacob (as Rashi reversed the order and listed Jacob, the younger twin, first). One must first devote himself completely to the study of Torah in the manner of, "*Jacob was a guileless man,*" searching but for the truth of Torah.

With this, however, one must know that he cannot just suffice with this service of Torah-study. After the service of being a "*Tent Dweller*" one must then work and effect "*the field*" in order to "*ensnare*" worldly things and prepare them to be "*delicacies*" for G-d, our Father in Heaven.

Even though to successfully work the *Field* of this world, one must garb himself within the ways of the world, speaking the local language, engaging his fellow Jew with that which "*speaks*" to the Jew in the field (Maimonides, Pirush HaMisnayos, Sanhedrin, beginning of Chapter HaChelek), "*to encourage the study with things that are beloved to him due to the smallness of his years... nuts... honey. And when he grows... shoes... And when he becomes more whole in his intellect... and people will honor you... And all of this is despicable. And, nonetheless, it is necessary because of the smallness of the human intellect,*" nevertheless, being that one is engaging with the world as such in continuation to his original service of "*Tent Dweller,*" this will protect over him that his service in the *Field* be but in accordance with the Torah, "*These are the offspring of Isaac... mentioned in the parsha.*"

And by working both sorts of service of the "*offspring of Isaac,*" we will quickly merit the era of the true and complete redemption, through our righteous Moshiach, when we will specifically say to Isaac (-Shabbos 89b), "*For you are our father.*"