



Sicha Summary

Chelek 15 | Vayeshev | Sichah 1

The Parable:

Parshas Vayishlach concluded with a short, succinct review of Eisav's descendants. *Parshas Vayeshev* focuses in detail and at length on "the settling of Yaakov and his descendants." Rashi explains this contrast in attention with a parable: "This can be compared to a pearl that fell in the sand. A person feels the sand and sifts it in a sifter until he finds the pearl. And once he finds it, he throws away the pebbles and takes the pearl." (*Rashi to Bereishis 37:1*)

The Question:

Seemingly the nuances of the parable do not align with the analog of Eisav and Yaakov's life stories. If Eisav's life preceded Yaakov's, then it would be correct to say that to reach the "pearls" of Yaakov's life we first need to sift through the "sand" of Eisav's life. But that is not the case. Yaakov is Yitzchak's son, and his life runs parallel to Eisav's. Eisav's life does not unfold before Yaakov's. If Yaakov's life is more important, the Torah did not have to spend time dwelling on Eisav and his descendants at all; it could have simply moved from Yitzchak's life to Yaakov. What, then, is the meaning of this parable?

The Explanation:

The "settling of Yaakov and his descendants" does not just mean the plain facts of Yaakov's family settling the land of Israel, it refers to their ultimate mission and task in the world. The mandate of the Jewish people is to transform "Eisav and his descendants," the forces of this world that oppose and obscure the Divine reality, into a reality that expresses Divine unity. Thus, the "settling of Yaakov and his descendants" is inextricable from the

narrative of “Eisav and his descendant,” because the task of Yaakov’s family is to be embedded within Eisav, and to elevate and refine him from within.

“Eisav,” though, contains “sand, pearls, and pebbles.” Sand conceals what lies beneath it, but it does not cause harm. Pebbles, however, can be dangerous. The “sand” of Eisav are those elements of this world that conceal G-dliness but are not harmful. This alludes to that which is redeemable within this world. Ideas, emotions, experiences, and things that can be used to further the awareness of G-d within the Creation. “Pebbles,” however, allude to those elements of the world that are irredeemable, they are inherently harmful and must be discarded.

The task of Yaakov is to “sift it in a sifter until he finds the pearl,” to move through the world seeking out the sparks of Divinity buried beneath the “sand” of a seemingly ownerless reality. “And once he finds it, he throws away the pebbles and takes the pearl.” Once the spark is identified and revealed, what remains is understood to be “pebbles,” elements that are irredeemable and so must be “thrown away.”

The Lesson:

The Jewish people dwell in “the sands” of exile so that they can find the “pearls” of Divine truth and light within the world. In a person’s interactions with the world of exile, he must be diligent to distinguish between sand and pebbles. A Jew is to hold onto those experiences that can be incorporated into a narrative of seeking out the Divine, the “sands,” of exile. And a Jew must reject and distance himself from those experiences and things that only serve him from an awareness of G-d’s reality, the “pebbles” of exile.

If we preserve the pearls and immediately cast away the pebbles, we will have completed the task of the “settling of yaakov and his descendants, and G-d will immediately redeem us from exile.