



Parshas Toldos 2022, G-d's belief in us

This week's Parsha Perspective is dedicated to my dear aunt, Lynne, who returned her holy soul to her maker this week. She was an amazing woman and aunt and loved by all who knew her. May G-d comfort my mother and my aunt, Rhea, amongst all the mourners of Jerusalem and Zion. May her memory be a blessing for our family.

Our Parsha introduces us to the third and final forefather of the Jewish people: Ya'akov Avinu. His parents, Yitzchak and Rivkah, had a similar issue as his grandparents, Avraham and Sarah; they were both childless for a long time.

But after twenty years, G-d finally accepted their prayers, and Rivkah gave birth to twins, Ya'akov and Esav. Even from birth, Ya'akov and Esav were extreme opposites; the firstborn, Esav, was naturally red, hairy, and energetic.

On the other hand, Ya'akov was small and only managed to emerge from his mother's womb because he grabbed onto his brother's heel. As the Pasuk writes (25:26), *“Then his brother emerged, holding on to the heel of Esav; so they named him Ya'akov.”*

As the two grew older, the differences between them became more evident. Esav was a man of the field and an expert hunter, contrasting Ya'akov, a gentle and modest person. Esav also served idols and married women from Canaan (which displeased Yitzchak greatly). At the same time, Ya'akov studied Torah and developed his relationship with G-d.

At the age of 123 years, Yitzchak summoned Esav and stated that he wished to bless him but first asked him to hunt an animal and prepare a meal so he could eat.

Rivkah, who overheard this conversation, quickly cooked some meat and told Ya'akov to put on some of Esav's clothing to trick his father into giving him blessings.

Ya'akov did as instructed: he put on Esav's clothes, took the meal his mother had made and went into his father's tent. Under the impression that Esav had returned (because he was blind), Yitzchak gave Ya'akov the blessings that he intended to give to Esav. These amazing blessings included the most important one: mastery over his brother.

As soon as Yitzchak concluded the blessings, Ya'akov left his father's presence just as Esav returned from the field. Esav entered Yitzchak's tent and offered him the food that he was asked to prepare. Yitzchak realized he was tricked and informed Esav that he had already given blessings to Ya'akov. Esav, now enraged, was determined to kill his younger brother. But Rivkah had already sent Ya'akov far away to Charan so he could find a wife.

However, a question comes to mind: The Torah gives a clear reason why Ya'akov was given his specific name. The Pasuk writes (25:26), *“Then his brother emerged holding onto the heel of Esav; so he was named Ya'akov.”* The root word of Ya'akov's name is **Akev** which means **heel**. But why was he given a name that implies he left his mother's womb only because he grabbed onto Esav's heel? Certainly, there could have been a better name for the third and final forefather of the Jewish Nation!

Rashi (*Rav Shlomo Yitzchaki, the leading commentary on the Torah*) answers this question by explaining that this was common practice at that time. In those days, people would name their child after an identifiable occurrence that happened to the child.

For example, his brother was named **“Esav”** because he was born hairy like an adult. As the Pasuk details (25:25) *“the first one emerged red and hairy all over; so they named him Esav.”* Similarly their father was named Yitzchak because his mother, Sarah, laughed when she was told that she will have a child at an old age. (Vayera 21:5) *“Sarah said, “G-d made me laugh, and all who hear will laugh with me.”*

According to this explanation, the name Ya'akov is not degrading or humiliating in any way. It was just the traditional and common practice in those days.

However, the Sforno (*Rav Ovadiah Sforno, an Italian commentator and doctor from the early 1500s*) gives a deeper and more profound explanation. He writes that it was actually G-d Himself who named Ya'akov. He learns this from the Pasuk quoted, *“Then his brother emerged holding onto the heel of Esav; so he was named Ya'akov. Yitzchak was sixty years old when they were born.”*

The pasuk does not say that Yitzchak gave Ya'akov his name but does tell us that he was sixty years old at the time. So the Sforno, amongst many others, learn from here that it was G-d who named Ya'akov.

The Sforno explains that **G-d gave him that name because his descendants will forever hold onto G-d's heel.** Meaning, that no matter how dire the situation is, the Jewish people will never stop believing in G-d.

We will never let go or abandon the mission that G-d has entrusted with Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov. The responsibility of making G-d's lofty name known throughout the world. To illuminate the darkness of this world with His holy light.

This lesson is ever more prevalent as we begin the month of Kislev on Friday. Daylight is about to get shorter, and the darkness of night will be longer. But the holiday of light, **Chanukah, reminds us that light shines on the gloomiest of nights.**

In our daily life, when we hit that inevitable bump in the road, we must look upward to G-d for hope and salvation. For it is His belief in our potential to rise above ourselves that keeps the world existing. Our history and heritage stem from people who never stop believing. Who never let go of the understanding that our trust in G-d affirms His faith in us.

“Behind the ethic of responsibility is the daring idea that more than we have faith in G-d, G-d has faith in us.”

-Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks of blessed memory

*Have a meaningful Shabbos,
Rabbi Sholom Yemini*