



Parshas Toldos 2018, adapting to succeed

This week's Parsha Perspective is dedicated in memory of Shlomo Ben Edward, and Yosef Ben Zev Wolf. May their souls be uplifted and their memories a blessing.

This week's Parsha Perspective is also in honor of Sasson Betzalel ben Batya and Sapir Bas Ariela. May they have a quick and complete recovery.

This week's Parsha Perspective is dedicated in memory of Rabbi Gabi and Rivki Holtzberg, H"YD. They were killed on the 29th of Cheshvan in 2008 while helping Jewish people in Mumbai, India. May their memory continue to inspire Jews all over the world. And may G-d bless their son, Moshe, with much health and happiness!

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 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 blessing him.

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: For lack of a better alternative, the word tam is generally translated as "simple." Unfortunately, translations often fail to convey the word's true meaning. Rashi explains that Tam is described as an honest, straightforward person who is not sharp at deception. Indeed, Yaakov's central character trait is emes- truth. So why is it that Rashi told us that Yaakov was a person who was not adept in the art of cunning, and yet he stole the blessings from his brother?

In the introduction to Orchos Tzadikim, the author teaches us that character traits are like recipe ingredients. The secret of a gourmet chef is his expertise in knowing when to use various ingredients and in what proportion.

The same is true of traits. Every situation we go through in life has a unique recipe for success. At times, the situation calls for calm and extreme patience; sometimes, great boldness is called for, yet other situations call for softness, and certain situations require an external showing of anger.

Depending on the given situation, one must decide which "ingredients" to use and how much of each (i.e. to what degree). The greatness of Yaakov Avinu is that his essential personality was one of purity, wholesomeness, and simple honesty; yet, at the same time, his character didn't control him; rather, he was in control of his character.

His intellect was always behind the steering wheel, directing him precisely on how to behave in every situation. When confronted with a situation that required a specific mode of conduct, he would proceed accordingly, even if it meant overcoming his essential nature and character.

This is a key lesson for a successful life. For example, a person who may have a naturally meek character cannot allow that to become an excuse for failing where strength is necessary. Likewise, a person with a naturally loud, outgoing character cannot allow that to become an excuse for possibly offending people who are of a more shy and reserved nature. This idea is a theme that extends through all of one's life.

Of course, one is given particular characteristics and strengths to fulfill a role specifically suited for that nature, and one should use one's essential character to serve G-d.

Nevertheless, we are also given character flaws, and part of our work in life is to correct them. Similarly, we are sometimes faced with situations that require us to override our basic character - and that is what we need to do in those situations to serve G-d properly.

We need to constantly work on ourselves to refine our character with good and pure traits to the extent that they become our very nature. At the same time, though, we need to constantly keep our intellect behind the steering wheel so that we are prepared to utilize any character trait. Even one prone to evil (like anger), if necessary, in a given situation, to accomplish this is to become a true warrior.

"The measure of intelligence is the ability to adapt"

-Albert Einstein

*Have a great Shabbos,
Rabbi Sholom Yemini*