

## Parshas Toldos 5764

These last few weeks the פרשיות have been very busy with שידוכים. Last week, the שידוך between יצחק and רבקה; next week, the שידוך between יעקב and רחל and לאה. And this week, also, although we talk about it less, there is also a שידוך in the פרשה – between עשיו and the daughter of ישמעאל. A very צוגעפאסטע שידוך; its surprising the שדכנים didn't think of it sooner. On the one side, רוצה עשיו, on the other side, ענבי הגפן בענבי הגפן; פרא אדם ישמעאל, really הגפן הגפן. The mind almost boggles in imagining the חתונה.

So today, as we read of the union between עשיו and ישמעאל, it might be appropriate to consider the character of these two מחותנים.

You all know the מדרש that when הקב"ה was about to give the Torah to us, he first offered it to the children of עשיו and ישמעאל.

Says the מדרש:

ה' מסני בא זרח משעיר למו הופיע מהר פארן וגו' מלמד שהחזיר הקב"ה את התורה על אומות העולם, ולא קבלוה, עד שבא אצל ישראל וקבלוה, שנאמר זרח משעיר למו, אלו בני עשו, שהן בני שעיר, הופיע מהר פארן, אלו בני ישמעאל שנאמר וישב במדבר פארן...

Why did עשיו and ישמעאל refuse the Torah? Says the מדרש in ילקוט שמעוני:

בתחלה הלך לבני עשו ואמר להם מקבלין אתם את התורה אמרו לו מה כתיב בה אמר להם לא תרצו, אמרו לו כל עצמן של אותן האנשים אביהם רוצה הוא שנאמר והידיים ידי עשו... הלך ומצא את בני ישמעאל אמר להם מקבלין אתם את התורה, אמרו לו מה כתיב בה לא תגנוב, א"ל כל עצמן של אביהם לסטים היה שנאמר והוא יהיה פרא אדם...

So עשיו refused the Torah – because לא תרצו is the antithesis of what he represents, and ישמעאל refused the Torah, because לא תגזל is the antithesis of what he represents.

כלל ישראל, of course, accepted the Torah. And what words did they use when they accepted it?

נעשה ונשמע.

There is a fascinating Vilna Gaon, who connects the refusal of עשיו and ישמעאל, and our acceptance with the words נעשה ונשמע, in a most unbelievable way:

The עשה of נעשה is עשה, which is the שרש of עשיו's name; and the נשמע of נשמע is שמע, which is the שרש of ישמעאל's name. These two words, נעשה ונשמע, says the Gaon, corresponded – to עשיו and ישמעאל – so that, in contrast to עשיו, in opposition to עשיו, we said נעשה, while in contrast and opposition to ישמעאל, we said נשמע.

What does this mean?

There are two dark impulses that man harbors in his heart – the urge to unbridled pleasure and gratification, and the urge to violence. From the very beginning of history these two impulses have accompanied man – אדם הראשון – fell when he could not refuse himself the gratification of the עץ הדעת; and קין fell prey to the impulse to do violence. The ראשונים call these two urges כעסני and תאוני; Freud, who was intimately familiar with all the dark places in human nature, gave them names from Greek mythology: Thanatos – the personification of death - and Eros, the personification of desire.

עשיו, the איש ציד, the hunter, epitomized the urge to do violence. And therefore the Torah – which gave the world the imperative of לא תרצח – could not be given to ישמעאל. עשיו – whom שרה sent away because she saw him מצחק, literally, fooling around – epitomized the urge to unbridled pleasure, which expresses itself in robbery – the license to take whatever I want, even if it doesn't belong to me, because my pleasure and my desire overrides everything else – and so the Torah – which contains the imperative of לא תגנב – could not be given to ישמעאל.

However, it is axiomatic that everything that הקב"ה created has a purpose. And if הקב"ה created within us these urges – the כעסני and the תאוני - Thanatos and Eros – then they have a purpose too. Because of properly channeled and harnessed, they can become positive forces.

The Gemara tells how אנשי כנסת הגדולה wanted to eradicate the יצר הרע of עריות, to bottle up Eros. And they saw that the chickens stopped laying eggs, people stopped having children – even חדוותא דשמעתתא, the joy of learning, disappeared – and so they had to release the יצר הרע. Eros, the urge to pleasure, to sensual experience, to self-gratification, is tied up with the capacity for joy; a person who is so desiccated that that he can't experience pleasure, cannot experience joy, even spiritual joy, even the joy of חדוותא דשמעתתא. אנשי כנסת הגדולה discovered that if you stop up the wellspring in the psyche that feeds Eros, you stop up the capacity for joy. The spring has to be channeled in the right direction, not stopped up at the source. (This was an insight that was rediscovered by חסידות.)

And just as Eros has two aspects – a negative aspect and a positive aspect – so too Thanatos. The יצר הכעסני, the urge to violence, is the desire to impose my will on the world around me. It is the urge to conquer, to destroy whatever stands in my way. It is the urge that drives men to war, and to the most terrible acts. And yet, it, too, has a positive aspect. The same wellspring in the human psyche that urges men to violent conquest, feeds the urge to change the world for the better, to impose our vision on the world, to build and invent and create. It is drive, and ambition, and energy, and action. It should not surprise us that many great conquerors were also great lawgivers – Charlemagne, for example, and Napoleon.



let us strengthen ourselves in that great resolve which is our answer to them – נעשה ונשמע, to devote ourselves as much as we are able to the study of Torah and to the pursuit of מצוות, individually and as community ...

And through the power of our נעשה ונשמע, we will overcome both עשיו and his son-in-law ישמעאל, until that when והיתה לה' המלוכה.

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