

Living with Depth

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We live in troubled times, which is nothing new, as this has been the case for a while. What is different now is that it is often confounding to know which way to go. We see obvious truths mocked and disrespected. Superficially, everything looks fine, but scratch the surface and there is much angst.

We see the Jewish nation portrayed as genocidal murderers, while Western countries play along with the blood libel. A year after the October 7th tragedy, terror groups continue shooting rockets into Israel at the rate of hundreds a day, while the United States places a hold on weapons for Israel, turning a blind eye to Iran's web of terror. Nineteen U.S. Senators voted to place a blockade on the shipment of any weapons to Israel, which it needs to defend itself.

Leftists in the Jewish state, in a bid to topple the sitting prime minister, have targeted talmidei yeshivos and kollelim. A Lubavitcher shliach, who was bothering no one, was attacked and killed in the United Arab Emirates by Iranian agents. Thousands of terror sympathizers march in Montreal, Paris, and New York, and anti-Jewish expression spreads.

It's really nothing new and can be traced back to the parshiyos we study these weeks. The hatred is inbred and began with Yishmoel and Eisov, heirs to greatness who fell sway to superficiality and became overwhelmed with hatred for the goodness and holiness they broke away from.

After years of anticipation and tefillah, Rivkah was worried about what type of child she would give birth to. When she passed a place of holiness, the baby got excited, as if to express a desire to be associated with that place, much as it did when she passed a house of tumah. She was perturbed, as the posuk (Bereishis 25:22) records that she said, "Im kein, lamah zeh anochi," and went to Sheim for an explanation of the phenomenon.

The words "Lamah zeh anochi" are commonly translated as, "If this is the way it is, then what am I doing this for?"

Perhaps we can understand it on a deeper level. Rivkah, as the wife of Yitzchok, knew that Hashem had foretold to Avrohom, "Ki b'Yitzchok yikorei lecha zora," that his line would continue through Yitzchok. She knew that the child she was carrying would carry forward Avrohom and Yitzchok's mesorah. So when she said, "Lamah zeh anochi," perhaps she was referring to the Aseres Hadibros that her offspring were to receive which begin with "Anochi Hashem Elokecha."

She was concerned, for she knew that someone who is drawn to tumah – even if he is also drawn to kedusha – could not carry forth the mesorah of the avos and could not be the one to give birth to the shevotim, whose grandchildren would receive the Torah at Sinai.

Someone who presents himself as being holy when that stance is advantageous to him and poses as something very different when he thinks that will help him get what he wants cannot be a link in the transmission of Torah.

Torah is not the domain of those who are all things to all people.

Rivkah knew that as the child of Yitzchok and grandson of Avrohom, her son would be a leader, carrying the torch of kedusha, taharah, and dveikus. She was worried that the child she was carrying was demonstrating symptoms of being unprincipled and thought that she would have been better off without children.

Sheim relieved her when he told her that she would give birth to twins, one righteous and the other not. Although she would have been happier with two righteous children, she was comforted with the knowledge that she would be giving birth to a worthy mamshich of Avrohom and Yitzchok.

Not only in her day, but in ours as well, there is a dearth of proper leaders. In every society, in every country, and in every industry, people are disconcerted as they seek leadership in a drifting world. People look for someone to rally around, a capable person who can put their feelings into words, give voice to their concerns, and provide leadership. People seek a leader who is not only smart, but also principled and incorruptible.

The Torah is not some esoteric book available only to the smart and learned. The Torah is for everyone, at every time, and in every period. It is neither in the heavens nor available only in some remote region. It is for anyone who dedicates himself to its study and acquisition.

As we sit by the feet of good teachers and imbibe the lessons that were inculcated in them by their rabbeim, our minds are opened, our souls are purified, and our sensitivities are awakened to the needs and aspirations of our people.

When we seek answers to our questions, we should do as the Bubbeh Rivkah did and seek the word of Hashem in the bais medrash. Those who study the word of Hashem are equipped to guide us in times of disappointment and confusion. It is only with the Torah's perspective that we can appreciate what is happening and find direction and purpose in our world.

Talmidei chachomim, tzaddikim, and anoshim gedolim are people of depth, grounded in the truth of Torah and solid foundations of Torah.

Eisov doesn't see past the surface. The Kelmer baalei mussar point out that when he saw a pot of red soup, he was drawn to it strictly by its color. He said to Yaakov, "Haliteini na min ha'adom ha'adom hazeh – Give me some of this red soup." "Al kein kara shemo Edom – Therefore, he and his offspring are referred to as Edom" (Bereishis 25:30), because he referred to the soup as "edom," which means red.

By referring to the soup by its color, he exposed his own superficiality. He didn't know anything about the soup other than that it had an appealing color. That was enough for him. It could have been a pot of red paint, for all he knew, yet he traded away his future for the momentary pleasure of something superficially appealing.

We can suggest that this concept is reinforced later in the parsha (27:23), when Yaakov approached his father for the brachos. Yitzchok was confounded and wondered whether the son before him was Yaakov or Eisov. He said, "Hakol kol Yaakov, the voice is that of Yaakov," but "hayodayim yedei Eisov, the hands feel like those of Eisov."

Yaakov was defined by his internal feature, for he was a person of depth. Speech comes from inside the body and is a gift given to man, separating him from animals. When the Torah says in Bereishis, "Vayipach b'apov ruach chaim," that Hashem blew ruach chaim into Adam, the Targum explains that it was "ruach memallila," meaning speech.

Yaakov was defined by how he used that special gift of Hashem. Eisov was defined by his hands, external limbs of the body, which he used to murder, pillage and sin.

And as Eisov was, so are his children. The nation of Edom to this day fails to perceive beyond what it can touch and feel. Hence, the fascination in our world with looks, color, and presentation. There is no depth that's meaningful to them beyond the surface image. Marketing is all about attracting people superficially and emotionally to a product and cause. Rarely, if ever, is there anything more to the promotion.

Though we live in Golus Edom, we must ensure that we do not become enamored with – and influenced by – the external and the superficial. We must remain purposeful and discerning people with content and depth. We must not permit ourselves to be misled by glib, empty rhetoric, half-truths, and distortions. We need to be thoughtful and intelligent about what we do, discuss, and care about.

People these days are low information. They don't care to read or be educated about topics they discuss or that matter to them. They hate Jews and they hate Israel just because, not as an outgrowth of objective examination, consideration, study, and thought. There is no debating them, because you cannot undo a feeling that was arrived at with no interest in history, law, or the facts.

Let us not be swayed by the prevailing trends of the moment or transient currents of popular opinion. Let us do our best to be people of depth and understanding.

We need to act as our avos and imahos did. When we study the parshiyos of Bereishis, we should not be content with just a superficial reading. The takanah of shnayim mikra v'echod targum includes the study of Targum or Rashi, or both, for that reason. Torah study is not a superficial activity. It requires work, concentration, and much thought.

In an age when instant gratification and fleeting trends dominate people's attention, the importance of living a life of depth is ever more crucial. It's all too easy to slip into a pattern of superficiality, seeking the approval of others, accumulating material possessions, or chasing after short-lived pleasures.

A life rooted in depth offers a sense of meaning, purpose, and fulfillment that superficiality can never provide. To live deeply is to engage with intentionality, to seek understanding, and to align our actions with Torah values and principles taught to us by our rabbeim, moros, and gedolim.

The superficiality of Golus Edom focuses on creating impressions and appearances in order to bring on external validation. People caught in superficiality are always searching for the next trend or the next success to validate their self-worth. This inevitably leads to a sense of emptiness and a lack of fulfillment or accomplishment.

As Bnei Avrohom, Yitzchok, and Yaakov, we are meant to emulate them and live with depth. This means not only going beyond surface-level appearances, but also pursuing wisdom, understanding Torah by learning with deep concentration, and seeking out seforim and shiurim that go beyond the surface and explore the depth of chochmas haTorah. It means seeing in everything lessons for personal improvement and growth. This comes from how we learn Chumash and its meforshim, and also from engaging in the study of sifrei mussar and machshovah that elevate us and instill in us why we were created and what our purpose in this world is.

Arriving at the tachlis of our being requires much learning, effort, and introspection. This leads to lasting satisfaction because it grounds us in eternal Torah values that transcend the moment.

In times of confusion and want, the bais medrash and its leaders offer time-proven guidance on how to overcome dissolution and achieve success.

We all have our missions in life. We all seek to be worthy links in the chain going back to Avrohom, Yitzchok, and Yaakov. We face many financial pressures just to be able to maintain a stable family life. We feel pulled from all sides.

We have to be honest not only with others, but also with ourselves. We have to understand what we are doing and what our motivations are. If the cause is not as holy as we think, or if we are doing something that we can't really afford, we should not let ourselves be fooled into something improper or unrealistic.

Flee from an overtaxed life and carve out moments of silence to hear your heart and soul, ensuring that they are focused on proper goals. Escape the noise of the world and find a tent, as our grandfather Yaakov did.

Eisav sought to succeed at all costs. Unprincipled and deceiving, he has been remembered throughout history as the epitome of fallaciousness. Yaakov, the ish tam yosheiv ohalim, was not a participant in the rat race and did not spend his life trying to impress people.

Those who seek to get away from the noise, frustration, and pressure need to find themselves getting more seriously involved with Torah. In the ohel of Yaakov is found inner peace, brought on by real accomplishment and growth. Check into a bais medrash near you and get lost among those who seek no attention or fame. Watch them as they work to understand the timeless words and wisdom of the Torah, oblivious to all else. Taste the sweetness of life as you appreciate the satisfaction of really understanding a Rashi, a Tosafos, a Rashba, a Maharsha, and the words of Rav Akiva Eiger. Appreciate the blissful joy of bringing it all together and understanding a sugya. It's not easy, but it brings you the best life that man can desire.

It makes all the sacrifices that were undertaken to enable you to reach that moment worthwhile. It makes you and your wife worthy links in the chain stretching back to Avrohom and Sarah, Yitzchok and Rivka, Yaakov and Leah, and Rochel, and reaching forward until the arrival of Moshiach, whom we all long for.