



PARSHAT TOLDOT

THE ANNALS OF LOVE

At the onset of *parashat Toldot* we read about the birth of the brothers Jacob and Esau. Jacob and Esau are two powers in the world. Though they are two brothers, twins even, they are completely different. Esau is, “a man who knows how to hunt, a man of the field”¹ and Jacob is “an earnest man who dwells in tents”; they possess opposite natures. All the more reason for us to be surprised when we learn that, “Isaac loved Esau because there was [a taste of] game in his mouth, and Rebecca loved Jacob.”² This split in love between Isaac and Rebecca foreshadows the events of the entire *parashah*. The great wonder is of course how a holy *tzadik* like Isaac could love Esau?

In order to understand the deep reasons for Isaac’s love of Esau and Rebecca’s love of Jacob we need to look at the very source of love in the world and how love was passed down through the generations as described in the Torah.

The first time the word love appears in the Torah is in reference to Abraham’s love for Isaac. God commands Abraham, “Take your son, your only one, whom you love, Isaac.”³ One of the principles of Torah study is that everything follows its first appearance and thus, Abraham’s love for Isaac is the source of all love in the Torah and thus the root of all love in the world. All subsequent expressions of love (both documented and undocumented in the Torah) are an extension of the initial love of Abraham for Isaac. Indeed, Abraham, our forefather, is the master of all love, as we know that Abraham is the archetypal soul of loving-kindness (חסד), whose inner motivating force is love. Moreover, love is the power that creates something from nothing. This is alluded to in the word “when they were created”⁴ (בְּהִבְרָאם), which is a permutation of “in Abraham” (בְּאַבְרָהָם) suggesting that all of creation exists in Abraham’s soul of love.

The second instance of love in the Torah is found when Isaac wed Rebecca and brought her to his mother’s tent. The Torah describes that, “He took Rebecca for a wife and he loved her.”⁵ Thus, Isaac’s love for his wife Rebecca is the second instance of love. The third and fourth instances of love appear

in our *parashah*, in the verse we quoted earlier: “Isaac loved Esau... and “Rebecca loved Jacob.”

The Chassidic masters explain that when love is given from one person to another, it can be either the essence of love that is given or expressions of the essence (in Chassidic terminology, these expressions are called “lights”). Let us apply this understanding to the first mention of love, Abraham’s love for Isaac. The verse does not say that Abraham loved Isaac, rather, while commanding Abraham (to sacrifice Isaac) God states that Isaac is Abraham’s object of love. Because it appears in a command, we learn that this statement is akin to God commanding Abraham to direct the entire essence of his love to Isaac. Put another way, God wants Abraham to transfer all of his power of love to Isaac.

The transmission of love is similar to the manner in which the Torah is transmitted. The sages tell us that, “Moshe received Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Yehoshua, Yehoshua to the elders...”⁶ Similarly, Abraham, the source of all love in the world, received the root of love from God and it is God who commands him to transmit the love onward to Isaac (Abraham, the root of all love is the only one whom God explicitly addresses on this matter and tells him who to pass the essence of love to).

After Isaac receives the essence of love, he gives all of it to Rebecca, “he loved her.” Rebecca received the essential aspect of love from Isaac. Following the order, we see that Rebecca passed her essential love on to Jacob, who gave it all to Rachel, who then gave it to the object of her love, Joseph. So the annals of love start with Abraham, continue with Isaac, then Rebecca, then Jacob, Rachel, and finally Joseph, the last person who we are told specifically about in this respect.

We can now understand how it was possible for Isaac to love Esau. The essence of love Isaac gave to his wife Rebecca, so the love with which he loved Esau was not essential but only an expression of love, which is relatively external. That is also why the Torah gives a reason for Isaac’s love, mentioning

that it was because Esau provided him with the tastes of the food he hunted. Just as the reason for the love was external, so was the love itself. Indeed, the Torah does not explain why Rebecca loved Jacob, for her love for him was essential, above and beyond reason.

With this understanding of love as our foundation we can explore Isaac and Rebecca's love. Isaac's love for Rebecca was essential. It left an imprint on him that drew him to love Esau as well, because to an extent Esau reminded him of Rebecca. Rebecca as the recipient of Isaac's essential love was also drawn to love Jacob because he reminded her of Isaac. How so?

Though both Jacob and Esau were born to the same mother, Rebecca, each came from a different spiritual source. Jacob's source is in his grandfather from Isaac's side, namely Abraham. Esau's source was in his grandfather from Rebecca's side, namely Bethu'el. Thus, as far as Rebecca was concerned, Esau reminded her of her father's home, the home she suffered from immensely because of its wickedness and was quick to leave in order to marry Isaac. Rebecca was a righteous woman, who was also a ba'alat teshuvah who was able to escape the evil of her parents life. When she saw

Esau and his behavior, she saw the very evil that she had escaped from.

But, when Isaac saw Esau, he saw in Esau's nature something that reminded him of his wife. What caused Isaac to love Rebecca in the first place? It was the wonder of seeing how she was able to abandon and come out of her father's household. He saw, "behold, Rebecca came out." Isaac was struck with the wonder of how the pure could be separated out of the impure, that from the depths of the evil of Haran it was possible to bring out the good, as found in Rebecca. Seeing Esau's nature, this is what Isaac meditated about, sure that Esau too would exhibit this wondrous ability to abandon the impure and emerge a righteous individual. Isaac's contemplation and belief in Esau's potential resting deep within him caused him to feel the same feeling of essential love he had felt towards Rebecca, even though in practice he had already given all of his essential love to her.

Similarly, Jacob reminded Rebecca of her beloved husband, and therefore she transferred the essential love she had been given by Isaac to him!

(Based upon the Daily Dvar Torah for Ha'azinu, 5768)

Notes:

¹ Genesis 25:27.

² Ibid. 25:28.

³ Ibid. 22:2. This verse has 25 words. The midpoint of 25 is 13, the value of "love" (אַהֲבָה). There are an abundance of words whose value is a multiple of "love," 13, אָחֵר (13), יְחִידָה (52 = 4 · 13), יְצִחָק (208 = 16 · 13), הַמְרִיָּה (260 = 20 · 13), הַהֲרִים (260 = 20 · 13),

⁴ Ibid. 2:4.

⁵ Ibid. 24:67.

⁶ Avot 1:1.

THE REDEMPTION GROWS NEARER...

The end of the previous week's haftarah is enwedged in the beginning of the current week's Torah reading.

Last week's haftarah ended with the proclamation "may my master, king David, live forever!" – referring to the eternal kingdom of David that continued with the kingdom of Solomon and will be completed by the Mashiach, who will be "from the house of David and the pedigree of Solomon." Thus the ultimate subject of this proclamation is the revelation of the Mashiach.

Our Torah reading this week begins with, "These are the generations of Isaac." The word "generations" (תּוֹלְדוֹת) stems from the word for birth (לִידָה) and so the birth of the Mashiach, i.e., his revelation before all, will be connected with Isaac, to the extent that when Isaac was born, everyone who heard, laughed. So when the Mashiach is revealed, everyone will laugh. Additionally, as the sages say, in the future, we will point to Isaac and say "You are our father."

(From the farbrengen of Rosh Chodesh Kislev 5752)