Jewish Tribune – Toldos

**Eisav, Edom and Marshmallows**

Rav Sholom Schwadron asks three strong questions regarding the well-known opening story in our sedrah.

Yaakov Ovinu is cooking lentils after the death of Avrohom Ovinu. Eisav returns from the field and according to Chazal, from committing the three most serious aveiros. He is famished and asks his brother to let him eat the stew that is being cooked. The possuk says:

וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו אֶל יַעֲקֹב הַלְעִיטֵנִי נָא מִן הָאָדֹם הָאָדֹם הַזֶּה כִּי עָיֵף אָנֹכִי, עַל כֵּן קָרָא שְׁמוֹ אֱדוֹם.

And Eisav said to Yaakov, "Pour into me some of this red, red (stew), for I am famished”; he was therefore named Edom. (Bereishis 25,30)

Question number one. When cooked, lentils are green. Why was Eisav named Edom (red) after lentils which are green when cooked.

Question number two. If the point of calling Eisav “Edom” is to describe his unbridled ta’ava (desires) in this episode, why not call him “הַלְעִיטֵנִי” (pour into me) or some derivative of this word? Surely it is that request that best describes his gluttonous desire?

Question number three. The wording הַלְעִיטֵנִי נָא is most strange. Later in the parsha, when Yaakov (pretending to be Eisav) goes into Yitzchok to receive the brachos, he says:

קוּם **נָא** שְׁבָה וְאָכְלָה מִצֵּידִי בַּעֲבוּר תְּבָרְכַנִּי נַפְשֶׁךָ

Please rise, sit down and eat of my game, so that your soul will bless me (Bereishis 27,19)

Big mistake. Yaakov uses the word “noh” (please) and Yitzchok notes that this seems more like the language of Yaakov than Eisav. This prompts Yitzchok to say the famous words:

הַקֹּל קוֹל יַעֲקֹב, וְהַיָּדַיִם יְדֵי עֵשָׂו

The voice is the voice of Yaakov and the hands are the are the hands of Eisav

How bizarre! In the very moment that is meant to depict him as a ravenous murdering criminal, Eisav becomes very polite, using please and thank you. And the very same polite language that is normally associated with the refined tzaddik, Yaakov Ovinu!

Rav Sholom Schwadron gives one explanation to answer all three questions.

The word Edom and this incident capture Eisav perfectly. The word “noh” used by Eisav does not mean “please” but “raw”. Indeed, this is how we describe the korban pesach.

אַל תֹּאכְלוּ מִמֶּנּוּ נָא

Do not eat it raw (Shemos 12,9)

True, lentils are green when cooked, but they are of a more reddish hue when raw. Eisav does not want to wait. “I want this food now! Pour it down me raw!”

The name Edom depicts Eisav as impulsive and desirous. A person who cannot wait and instant gratification speaks to him more than delayed reward.

A professor of psychology in Stanford university once carried out the following fascinating experiment. One by one, he put a group of four-year children in a room and placed a single marshmallow in front of each child. They could eat it now or, if they waited fifteen minutes before eating it, they would receive two. All of the children thought about it, some gave in straight away, some tried to wait, one after fourteen and a half minutes. Poor kid couldn’t take it anymore!

Two out of three children ate the marshmallow. But one third didn’t. They paced the room, distracted themselves in all types of ways, some even smelled the marshmallow, but they didn’t succumb. At the tender age of four, one third of the children in the experiment understood the most important principle for success – the ability to delay gratification. Self-discipline.

But here comes the fascinating part. Fifteen years later, they did a follow up study. They surveyed these children, now aged nineteen and found that every single one of the children who did not eat the marshmallow and displayed self-discipline were happy. They had achieved good grades in school, got into the university of their choice, had good relationships with their parents and their teachers and were generally deemed successful.

A great percentage of the two thirds who ate the marshmallow were not. They did not have good grades, did not have good relationships and had got into some sort of trouble.

So this is what it boils down to. Demonstrating self-discipline. Delaying gratification for a longer term good. Eisav was not able to do that and the term Edom, referring to the raw lentils, conveys this shortfall and sums up the man.

It is an important principle to understand. Some children are more impatient and impulsive than others but all need to be taught the dangers of these traits and the benefits of delaying gratification for a greater good.

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