Jewish Tribune – Toldos

**Means and Ends**

Sometimes you come across questions which are so obvious, you wonder why it has taken so long for it to come your way.

The following question (asked by the son of my dear colleague, the esteemed Rabbi Hartman, when his son was a tender 8 years old) is a good example. At the same time as being breathtakingly simple and intriguing, the answer is beautiful and the lesson learnt, most important.

Yaakov Ovinu, pretending to be his brother Eisav, went into his father Yitzchak to receive the brochos. Rashi tells us that the “bigdei chamudos” that he was wearing is none other than Eisav’s special jacket that once belonged to Nimrod. According to Chazal, this jacket had a unique ability to help hunt animals. The prey would be drawn to whoever was wearing the jacket, like metal to a magnet, making the hunt simple.

Where was Eisav at this time? He was out hunting, preparing food for his father.

So why wasn’t Eisav wearing his special hunting jacket?

The answer is this. Eisav is lauded by Chazal for his kibbud av and is a role model of how to honour a parent. When performing the mitzvah of kibbud av by hunting and preparing food for his father, he did not want to take any short cuts. Wearing the special hunting jacket would be too easy. He wanted to do the mitzvah in the best way possible and therefore left the jacket at home.

We often confuse means and ends and what is important and what is trivial. In Eisav’s case, the hunting was not a means to an end but an act of kibbud av and was an end in itself. He was not looking for shortcuts.

The example I often give in school to convey this point is this. Imagine, as I am walking down my street, a neighbour pulls up and winds down his car window (not all cars have electric windows!) and offers me a lift. Should I take the lift? Well it depends. If I am in a hurry to get to the station, then yes. If I am out for a walk with my wife, then no. The girls I teach in the Midrasha definitely understand this; hopefully the boys I teach in Beis get this too!

In other words, why am I walking down my street, is it a means to end (to get to the station) or an end in itself (to spend time with my wife)?

This explains an interesting phenomenon in last week’s parsha. The Ramban notes that when Rivka went to draw water from the well, the water miraculously rose to greet her. Yet, when she performed the remarkable chesed of giving Eliezer and the camels water to drink, the water did not rise to her. Why not?

The Kedushas Levi answers using our principle. Drawing water for Eliezer and the camels was an end in itself. This was the chesed and shortcuts are not appropriate. But otherwise, if it is a matter of going to the makolet and buying a pint of milk, or drawing water for regular use, Hashem can perform a miracle, because here it is a means to an end.

The lesson of not confusing means and ends is important and sometimes it takes an Eisav to remind us not to take shortcuts in life and invest our efforts in what is important and enduring.

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