



5778 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Toldot / פרשת תולדות

## An Unconditional Selection

This week's parsha presents Yaakov and Esav as opposites. Yaakov is the "wholesome man" who dwells in the tents" while Esav is the hairy hunter of the field.<sup>1</sup> The midrashim further dichotomize these two twins by depicting Yaakov as the perfectly righteous individual who spends his time immersed in Torah study while the crude and coarse Esav hunts not only animals but people as well. It would seem, therefore, that God's choice of Yaakov over Esav would be intuitive and easily justifiable. Presumably, Yaakov was chosen based on his character and merits.

One interpretation of our haftorah, however, indicates otherwise. Malachi opens his prophecy with the following statements:<sup>2</sup>

I loved you, said the Lord, and you said, "How have You loved us?" Was not Esav a brother to Yaakov? says the Lord. And I loved Yaakov. And I hated Esav, and I made his mountains desolate and his heritage into [a habitat for] the jackals of the desert.

Here, Yaakov and Esav are described as brothers, underscoring their similarity. There is no mention of Yaakov's merits or Esav's sins. And yet, God chooses Yaakov.

Chabad Hassidism teaches that this is the ultimate expression of God's choice for Yaakov.<sup>3</sup> If God were to choose Yaakov solely based on personal merits, then the connection between God and the Jewish people might depend on the continued existence of these merits. However, if God's choice of Yaakov is despite his seeming similarity to Esav, then God's choice is of Yaakov as a person as opposed to his actions. God is creating a connection with the essence of Yaakov as opposed to his character traits or actions. Such a choice, as irrational and arbitrary as it seems, is eternal and truly expresses God's unique love for the Jewish people.

<sup>1</sup> Bereishit 25:27.

<sup>2</sup> Malachi 1:2-3.

<sup>3</sup> *Likkutei Sihot 4, Hosafot le-Hag ha-Shavu'ot, se'if 2*



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God's choice of Yaakov can serve as a model for his choice of Yerushalayim. There are many superior qualities that Yerushalayim has over cities. It is the "gateway to heaven," a location of immense spirituality. These characteristics would have certainly justified God's choice of Yerushalayim over other cities in the world.

However, the navi Zecharya refers to Hashem as "He who chose (ha-boher) Yerushalayim."<sup>4</sup> This formulation indicates that God's connection with Yerushalayi is similar to his connection with Yaakov and the entirety of the Jewish people. Rather than being based on qualities and characteristics, God chose Yerushalayim in an unconditional manner. This "love that is unconditional" creates the eternal bond between God and his city.

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<sup>4</sup> Zecharyah 3:2.