



Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Toldot / פרשת תולדות 5779

## Fear and Peace

One of the mysteries of this week's parsha is why Yitzhak favored Esav to the extent that he wanted to give his eldest son the blessings and birthright. Was he so naïve that he did not see through Esav's façade of piety to the cruel and ruthless killer that the rest of society knew that he was?

Rabbi Dovid Hofstедter<sup>1</sup> attacks this vexing issue through a piercing analysis of Yitzhak's personality and role. Yitzhak knew that each of the Avot had a specific role to play in the development of the Jewish people which was in consonance with a character trait and value that they emphasized. Avraham represented "chessed" or loving kindness. This trait led him to spread his teachings with the world at large, engaging both kings and poor travelers with food and talk of God.

Yitzhak, however, has the opposite personality. As a person who embodied "gevurah" or inner strength and resolve, his mission lay in an internal battle. This is in line with the Mishna which states, "who is a strong person ("gibbor")? He who conquers his evil inclination."<sup>2</sup> As such we do not see Yitzhak actively traveling and engaging the world, but rather preferred to stay at home and deepen his own inner world.

Yitzhak realized, though, that while this trait was important for the second generation of the Jewish people in order to ensure continuity, the next generation would have to partially shift back towards Avraham's approach. A large family, let alone a nation, cannot be led by a person who primarily remains within the confines of their own inner world, as important as that might be.

With this in mind, Yitzhak saw Esav, the gregarious and outgoing hunter and natural leader as his most likely heir. Ya'akov, on the other hand, while pious, was too narrowly focused on his own Torah studies to carry the torch of the Jewish people onwards. In the end, Yitzhak made a nearly

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<sup>1</sup> Dorash Dovid on the parsha.

<sup>2</sup> Avot, 4:1.



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fatal error. He overlooked evilness due to overly focusing on Esav's outgoingness and wrongly mistook Ya'akov's studiousness for an inability to connect with others.

Yitzhak's ideal vision, though not realized in Esav, is embodied in the name Yerushalayim. The first part of the name – "yirah" – means "fear." This emotion is closely connected with Yitzhak's trait of "gevurah." Fear causes a person to recoil and be constrained as opposed to expanding outwards and reaching new heights. On a religious level, fear of heaven is a lofty value, but, as Rav Kook taught, too much emphasis on fear can lead to a stifling lack of creativity.

Therefore, the "yirah" of Yerushalayim is balanced with "shalom," or peace. True peace can only occur when one reaches beyond their comfort zone to another person who seems like the "other." After one has amassed proper fear of heaven within the safe confines of the Beit Midrash or their own inner world, they then should have the confidence to engage the world around them. Yerushalayim is both the most sanctified and therefore constricting city of the world, but is also the world capital in the sense that it reaches out to and influences every other city and person, no matter where they are located.

May we merit to see the true confluence of fear and peace in our holy city!