

Parashat Toldot 5781, 2020:

Hakol Kol Ya'akov v'Hayadayim Yedei Eisav

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, Shmuel Yosef ben Reuven, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Moshe ben Itta Golda, Yocheved Dafneh bat Dinah Zehavah, Reuven Shmuel ben Leah, and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Our *parasha* contains Yitzchak's celebrated phrase: "*Hakol kol Ya'akov v'hayadayim yedei Eisav* — The voice is the voice of Ya'akov, but the hands are the hands of Eisav." (27:22, this and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) In his *Commentary on the Torah*, Rashi (1040-1105), basing himself upon *Midrash Tanchuma Buber*, asserts "the voice is the voice of Ya'akov" denotes "the voice of Ya'akov who speaks with respect and dignity: 'Please rise,' whereas Eisav spoke harshly: 'Let my father arise!'" In addition, the Torah teaches us that Yitzchak proclaimed, "The hands are the hands of Eisav" in a literal sense, since Isaac had minimal body hair, whereas Eisav was particularly hirsute. As such, Ya'akov was able to present himself to his blind father, Yitzchak, in the guise of Eisav with the successful subterfuge contrived by his mother, Rivka.

Midrash Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer takes a decidedly different approach in its explication of our *pasuk* and suggests that *kol Ya'akov* refers to a profound grasp of the logical underpinnings of the Torah. In stark contrast, *v'hayadayim yedei Eisav* is representative "in every instance, of murder and all manner of innocent deaths." (Chapter 32, translations and brackets my own) Our *midrash* continues its analysis of our verse and maintains:

Moreover, when it is declared in the Heavens that “the voice is the voice of Ya’akov,” they [i.e. the Ministering Angels] bestir themselves in a riotous cacophony of sounds [of joy.] And when “the voice is the voice of Ya’akov” is proclaimed on earth, all who hear and comprehend [its singular meaning] are inextricably joined to the phrase. [Unfortunately, however,] all those who do not hear and comprehend these words are counted among those whose “hands are the hands of Eisav.”

Prior to encountering this exposition of our verse, we would have thought that Yitzchak’s statement, “the voice is the voice of Ya’akov,” was said but once in history, namely, prior to the bestowal of his *bracha* upon Ya’akov. Our midrash informs us, however, that it continues to be declared both in Heaven and on earth. By extension, whoever on earth joins the Ministering Angels in their jubilant acceptance of the Torah will be *zocheh* (merit) to be connected to its holiness forevermore, and they, too, will have the voice of Torah in their hearts, minds and souls.

Midrash Bereishit Rabbah (Vilna) complements *Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer* on several levels:

Rav Abba bar Kahana said: “There have never been philosophers in the world like Bilam ben Beor and Avnomous HaGardi. [Representatives] of all the nations of the world came to Avnomous and said to him, ‘Tell us how we can join this nation [Israel so that they will become completely assimilated and lose their unique identity].’ He responded: ‘Go and visit their houses of prayer and houses of study. If you find young children proclaiming [Torah verses], you will not be able to join with them [to destroy them]. For this is what their forefather [Yitzchak] promised them and said, ‘*hakol kol Ya’akov*;’ [this means that] at the time the voice of Ya’akov is found in the synagogues [and proclaimed by young children], then the hands will not be the hands of Eisav [that is, Eisav will be powerless against Ya’akov]. If [the voice of young children is not heard in the houses of prayer, however,] then *v’hayadayim yedei Eisav* and you will be able to overpower them.” (Parashat Toldot 65:20, translation and brackets my own)

Rav Abba bar Kahana was a late third century Talmudic sage, yet his words are as relevant today as when they were originally spoken. His thoughts reveal to us the constitutive elements necessary for the continuity of the Jewish people, namely, Torah study by young children accompanied by their innocent voices raised in *tefilot* to the Almighty. These two *mitzvot* emerge as the authentic *kol Ya’akov* that has echoed since the time of the *Avot* and *Emahot* until our own historical moment. When we have this kind of *kol Ya’akov* we are invincible and stand as one against the Eisav’s of the world, whose hands will surely be weak and unsteady against us. As *David HaMelech* declared

so long ago: “These trust in chariots and these in horses, but we mention the name of the L-rd our G-d. They kneel and fall, but we rise and gain strength. *Hashem hoshiya HaMelech ya'aneinu b'yom koreinu* — O L-rd, save [us]; may the King answer us on the day we call.” (*Sefer Tehillim* 20:8-10) May this time come soon and in our days, *v'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom and may Hashem in His infinite mercy remove the *magafah* from *klal Yisrael* and from all the nations of the world.

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The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

*** My audio *shiurim* on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd>

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