

פרשת תולדות

This week I will let the reader decide which opening for this week's Parshas Toldos would be more appropriate.

The first choice is:

Shimon comes to the Rabbi and says, 'Rabbi, I want to be a Kohen'. The Rabbi says, 'Impossible'.

But, Rabbi, I really want to be a Kohen and I will pay \$100 for it.

No way.

I will pay \$1000. I am sorry; it is just too hard to do.

I will pay \$50,000.

Ok. We will work it out. But tell me, why do you want to be a Kohen so badly?

It's simple. My father was a Kohen and his father before him and *his* father. I want to be like them.

The second choice is:

Hey, buddy, do you want to buy the Brooklyn Bridge? I will sell it to you for cheap.

Whichever one of these beginnings you choose (or none of the above) they are both directly connected to our Parsha and to an aspect of it that requires understanding on both the Halachic level and the intellectual/emotional level.

We read (Perek 25/P'sukim 29-34):

וַיֵּד יַעֲקֹב נֶזֶד וַיָּבֵא עֵשָׂו מִן הַשָּׂדֶה וְהוּא עֵיף: וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו אֶל יַעֲקֹב הֲלֵעִיטֵנִי נָא מִן הָאָדָם הָאָדָם הַזֶּה כִּי עֵיף אָנֹכִי עַל כֵּן קָרָא שְׁמוֹ אֶדּוֹם: וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב מִכָּרָה כִּיּוֹם אֶת בְּכֹרְתְךָ לִי: וַיֹּאמֶר עֵשָׂו הֲנִי אָנֹכִי הוֹלֵךְ לָמוֹת וְלָמָּה זֶה לִי בְכֹרָה: וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב הַשְּׂבָעָה לִי כִּיּוֹם וַיִּשְׂבַּע לוֹ וַיִּמְכַר אֶת בְּכֹרְתוֹ לְיַעֲקֹב: וַיַּעֲקֹב נָתַן לְעֵשָׂו לֶחֶם וּנְזִיד עֲדָשִׁים וַיֹּאכַל וַיִּשְׂתַּ וַיִּקֶּם וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיִּבֶז עֵשָׂו אֶת הַבְּכֹרָה:

Yaakov cooked lentils and Eisav came from the field and he was tired. Eisav said to Yaakov, 'Stuff¹ me from this red, red stuff because I am tired; therefore he called his name Edom – red. Yaakov said, 'Sell your birthright to me, as the day.' Eisav said, 'Behold I am going to die, why do I need a birthright?' Yaakov said, 'Swear to me as the day' and he swore to him and he sold his birthright to Yaakov. Yaakov gave Eisav bread and lentil porridge and he ate and he drank and he got up and he went; and Eisav derided the birthright.

There is much to understand in this section.

- Why didn't Eisav refer to the food by its name?
- Why did Yaakov think to mention the birthright at that moment?
- What does Yaakov mean when he twice says כיום, 'like the day'?
- What did Eisav drink – the porridge? One eats porridge.

And, finally the two questions that will be at the heart of our study:

- What was the reason that Yaakov wanted the birthright and why didn't Eisav mind selling it?
- Is the birthright an object that can be sold? Is it the Brooklyn Bridge? Can a *Kohen* sell his *Kehuna*?

Let us divide our discussion into two major sections: Why and How?

'Why' did Yaakov want the birthright and why was Eisav willing to sell it?

'How' was the sale of the birthright effective? Could it be sold and what is the Halachic means necessary to make such a sale, if possible, valid?

Regarding Eisav's lack of regard for the birthright we do not need to go beyond the simple translation of the words to see that the *bechora* was totally unimportant to him.

He said:

וְלָמָּה זֶה לִי בְכֹרָה:

Why do I need the birthright?

¹ Rashi explains that הלעיטני is the act of feeding an animal when you wish to stuff it.

And the narrative in the Torah leaves no room for doubt when it writes:

וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיְבִז עֵשָׂו אֶת הַבְּכֹרָה

Eisav went and Eisav derided the birthright.

Rashi emphasizes the point of the latter phrase when he writes:

העיד הכתוב על רשעו שביזה עבודתו של מקום:

The Torah testifies about the wickedness of Eisav that he derided the service of G-d.

Regarding Yaakov's motivation and Eisav's total disinterest, Rashi writes:

בכרתך - לפי שהעבודה בבכורות, אמר יעקב אין רשע זה כדאי שיקריב להקדוש ברוך הוא:

Your birthright – Since the service [of Korbonos] is performed by the first-born, Yaakov said, 'This wicked person is not worthy to offer korbonos to Hashem.

הנה אנכי הולך למות - אמר עשו מה טיבה של עבודה זו, אמר לו כמה אזהרות ועונשין ומיתות תלוין בה, כאותה ששנינו אלו הן שבמיתה שתויי יין, ופרועי ראש. אמר אני הולך למות על ידה, אם כן מה חפץ לי בה:

[Eisav said] Behold I am going to die -What type of work is this? Yaakov said to him, 'This service has many prohibitions and punishments and death penalties dependent upon it, like the B'raisa that we learned: the following have a death penalty: [one who serves in the Beis HaMikdosh and] drinks wine, or whose hair has not been cut [for 30 days].' Eisav said, 'I will die because of it so why would I want it?'

Thus we learn of Eisav's wickedness and that becomes a justification for Yaakov to purchase Eisav's birthright, as Mizrachi writes here in his commentary to Rashi:

דאם לא כן איך הותר לו ליעקב לעשות כן

If it would not be so that Eisav was wicked, how was Yaakov allowed to do so [to purchase the birthright from Eisav?

Rav Chaim Kanievsky Shlita in his remarkable טעמא דקרא offers the following reason for the disqualification of Eisav to assume the role of the B'chor and its attendant responsibilities.

Rav Chaim Shlita cites the Midrash HaGodol which provides us with an alternative way of interpreting Eisav's words. Eisav infamously said:

הִלְעִיטְנִי נָא מִן הָאָדָם הָאָדָם הַזֶּה:

Stuff me from this red, red stuff.

Unlike that which we have understood until now, the Midrash writes:

אָדָם הָאָדָם גַּם יֵין אָדוּם בִּקֵּשׁ...כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתוּב וַיֹּאכֵל וַיִּשְׂתֵּי...אִם אַתָּה רוֹצֵה יֵין אַתָּה
מוֹכֵר לְמִכּוֹר בְּכוֹרְתְךָ

This red, red stuff - Eisav asked for red wine as well [as for the lentils] as it is written 'he ate and *he drank*'. Yaakov told him, 'If you wish to drink wine you must sell your birthright.

Rav Chaim Shlita reminds us of the Gemara that says that when the Beis HaMikdosh is not yet rebuilt and thus any day a Kohen may be called upon to serve in the Beis HaMikdosh because we are always, daily anticipating that it will be rebuilt immediately, he can never drink wine because a Kohen who drinks wine may not perform the *avodah*.

The prohibition of a Kohen performing the *avodah* if he has had a *revi'is* of wine is written in the Torah in Parshas Sh'mini, following the death of two of the sons of Aharon. We read there (Vayikro Perek 10/Posuk 9):

יֵין וְשֵׁכָר אֶל תִּשְׂתֵּי אֶתְּךָ וּבְנֵיךָ אֶתְּךָ בְּבֹאֲכֶם אֶל אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְלֹא תָמִיתוּ חֻקַּת עוֹלָם
לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם:

Do not drink wine and intoxicants, neither you nor your sons when you enter the Ohel Moed and then you won't die; this is an eternal statute for your generations².

Thus, Eisav's unwillingness to part with his drink disqualified him completely.

² The Halachah forbids Kohanim from drinking wine when performing their *avoda*. However, the Halachah is not like the opinion that Kohanim are always forbidden to drink alcoholic beverages.

Seforno's understanding of Eisav's willingness to sell has far less condemnation of Eisav than Rashi's approach. Seforno writes:

מכרה כיום - כי בהיות היום כל מגמת פניך אל מלאכתך באופן שאתה כל כך עיף
שאינך מכיר הנזיד אין ספק שלא תוכל להתעסק בעניני הבכורה לשרת לקל יתברך
ולעשות את הראוי לבכור:

Sell like today – [Yaakov said to Eisav], Because since today your entire focus is on your work in a way that makes you so tired to such an extent that you don't even recognize the porridge [by name], there is no doubt that you will not be able to be involved in all of the matters of the birthright to serve Hashem and to do all that is appropriate for the first born to do.

In consonance with this approach which is less critical than most other commentators, Seforno had already written a different appreciation of the description that the Torah gives earlier in our Parsha regarding Eisav. The Posuk reads (Posuk 27):

וַיִּגְדְּלוּ הַנְּעָרִים וַיְהִי עֵשָׂו אִישׁ יָדַע צִיד אִישׁ שָׂדֵה וַיַּעֲקֵב אִישׁ תָּם יָשֵׁב אֹהֲלִים:
The lads grew and Eisav was a person who knew how to hunt, a man of the field and Yaakov was a simple person; he dwelled in tents.

Rashi wrote there:

יודע ציד - לצוד ולרמות את אביו בפיו, ושואלו אבא היאך מעשרין את המלח ואת
התבן, כסבור אביו שהוא מדקדק במצות:

Who knew how to hunt – To hunt and trap, to deceive his father with his mouth. He would ask Yitzchak, 'Father, how does one tithe salt and straw?' His father thought that he was particularly careful in Mitzvah observance.

איש שדה - כמשמעו אדם בטל וצודה בקשתו חיות ועופות:
A man of the field – As it implies. An idle person who hunts animals and fowl with his bow.

תם - אינו בקי בכל אלה, אלא כלבו כן פיו. מי שאינו חריף לרמות קרוי תם:
Tam-simple – Yaakov was not expert in all of these matters; his heart and mouth were the same. One who is not sharp to deceive is called a 'tam'.

Thus, according to Rashi we have a picture of the righteous Yaakov and wicked Eisav and the justification for Yaakov to take the birthright from him.³

Seforno learns *p'shat* differently. He is much less negative in his understanding of the description of Esav. He writes:

איש שדה - יודע בעבודת האדמה:

A man of the field – He knows how to work the land.

Seforno presents us with a somewhat different understanding of Eisav based on this Posuk. At this point, the responsibilities of doing the *avodah* do not seem appropriate for him because his respectable pursuits are elsewhere.

³ Beis HaLevy shares a very different explanation of that which disqualified Eisav from the birthright. He writes:

והנה הכתוב אמר (בראשית כא/יב) כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע ודרשו ביצחק ולא כל יצחק, וזה האוחז מעשיו יהיה מיוחס להקרא בנו. ואחרי כי עשו יצא לתרבות רעה באותו יום ואם כן אין שום נפקא מינא לעשו בבכורה כי איך יקרא בכור אחרי שאינו נקרא גם בן... וזהו שביקש יעקב ממנו שימכור אותה לו דהרי הוא זה נהנה וזה לא חסר, וזהו ג"כ שהשיב לו עשו ולמה זה לי בכורה... וזהו שאמר הכתוב במעלות ישראל (שמות ד/כב) בני בכורי ישראל, ולכאורה במלת בכורי הרי כלול גם כן שהוא בנו, רק בא לשלול לעשו ואמר דלישראל יש שני המעלות דהם בני וגם בכורי, ובא לשלול לעשו דלא די שאינו בכור רק אינו גם בן כלל:

The Torah writes that Hashem said to Avraham, 'In Yitzchak you will be called as having children. Chazal interpret 'in Yitzchak' as meaning 'not all of Yitzchak's children. The child who will follow his father's path will be considered his son. Since Eisav left his father's path to a life of bad behavior on that day, therefore there is no difference to Eisav whether he will have the birthright. How could he be called Yitzchak's first born when he isn't even called his son? That is why Yaakov sought to have Eisav sell the birthright to him because Eisav had nothing to lose from the sale and that is what Eisav replied to Yaakov, 'What is the birthright for me?'

That then is the meaning of the verse in Parshas Sh'mos when Hashem says, 'My son, My first-born, Israel. It would have seemed that the word *bechori* would include *b'ni*, My son. [Why then does the verse write 'first born' and 'son?'] This verse comes to deny the birthright from Eisav when it says that Israel has two points in its favor, also 'My son' and also 'My first-born'. The verse negates Eisav – not only is he not considered first-born, he isn't even considered a son.

Thus there seems to be nothing innately wrong in Eisav's inability to properly fulfil the duties of the first-born. How, then, does Seforno explain the narrative of the Torah that talks about Eisav's rejection in such a pejorative manner?

Seforno writes:

ויבז עשו את הבכורה - גם אחר מעשה היתה הבכורה בעיניו בלתי ראויה לאותו המחיר שפסקו ובכך התבאר שלא נתאנה המוכר כי לא היה הממכר שוה אצלו כל כך:

Eisav despised the birthright – Even after the event [when Eisav was no longer distressed by his hunger] the birthright was still not significant to him for it to be sold for its appropriate price. And thus it is explained why there was no dishonesty on Yaakov's part in the purchase price because the item was not worth so much in Eisav's eyes.

In these commentaries, Seforno touches upon many important points: what is the meaning of כיום, 'like this day' and the validity of a sale that was vastly under-priced.

We will see how other commentaries understand כיום but by the way that Seforno understands it his commentary serves as a status report in real time of Eisav's attitude. 'I see how you are today', Yaakov tells his brother. 'Your focus is on your work. If so, you cannot possibly undertake the role of the B'chor.

According to Seforno, Eisav was given a second chance and could have reconsidered the sale. After all, he was under duress, exhausted and famished and he was possibly not using good judgment by selling the birthright. In fact, the suspected poor judgment was indicated by the price for which he sold his birthright. Certainly it was worth far more than a bowl of lentils.

Being the case that the sale of the birthright was vastly under-priced, I might think that the Halachos of אונאה, improper pricing, would be relevant here.

We read in Parshas B'har (Vayikro Perek 25/Posuk 14):

וְכִי תִמְכְּרוּ מִמְכָּר לְעַמִּיתְךָ אוֹ קָנָה מִיַּד עַמִּיתְךָ אֶל תִּוְנוּ אִישׁ אֶת אָחִיו:

When you sell something to your fellow or purchase from the hand of your fellow, neither one shall cheat the other.

Whether it is an act of price-gouging or vastly under-pricing the sale, the Torah forbids improper pricing. Exorbitant differences between the fair market value and the actual sale can invalidate the sale.

Why here, Seforno asks, isn't the sale invalidated? The birthright is certainly worth more than some cooked legumes!

The answer is given when Eisav chooses not to reconsider the sale. He is *a priori* satisfied with the price because to Eisav the birthright is practically worthless.

This is what we see in the very last verse of this segment:

וַיִּקָּם וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיִּבֶז עֵשָׂו אֶת הַבְּכֹרָה:

He arose and he went; Eisav despised the birthright.

Once he arose and left, once the acute hunger pains subsided and he was able to come back to himself, his mind didn't change one iota. That is how we know, Seforno explains, that Eisav treated the birthright with ultimate disregard.

As we have seen, Seforno has sent us to consider whether or not the sale of the *bechorah* was valid or not. He raised the issue of incorrect pricing.

Ramban was also concerned about the issue of אונאה and cites the opinion of Radak that the latter said in the name of *his* father:

כי אין מחיר הבכורה הנזיד רק הכתוב יספר כי בבקשו לאכול והוא עיף אמר לו יעקב מכור לי בכורתך בכסף, ואחר כך אכול, וענה לו בפחזותו על האכילה למה זה לי בכורה, הרי היא מכורה לך, ונשבע עליה וישבו לאכול ולשתות, והכתוב לא פירש המחיר.

The price of the birthright was not the porridge; it is just that the Torah was telling us Eisav's request to eat and that he was tired and at that time Yaakov said, 'Sell me your birthright for money and then you will eat.' Eisav responded to Yaakov with his impulsiveness regarding the food and said, 'who needs the birthright? I am selling it to you and he took an oath to validate the sale and they sat down to eat and to drink. It is just that the Torah did not tell us the price.

This explanation now raises the question of why the oath was necessary and Radak answers that the oath shows that the sale was done in all seriousness. It

was not a result of a momentary distraction. It was done wholeheartedly. Eisav could not retract.

This need to show that the sale was not done in error seems to be the need for the word כיום, as the day, in the opinion of many commentators.

Rashi has already written:

מכרה כיום -...כיום שהוא ברור, כך מכור לי מכירה ברורה:
Sell like the day – just like the day is clear, so make the sale with clarity so that there can be no objections to it.

Baalei Tosfos see in the word מכיום mechanism by which the laws of אונאה do not apply.

They write:

מכרה כיום - כמה שהיא שוה היום דהיינו בטובת הנאה דבר מועט שהרי אם תמות בחיי אבא לא תירשנו ולא תועיל לך הבכורה כלום:
Sell like the day – Sell it for its worth as of today. [It has no inherent worth today, only] the good feeling⁴ of knowing that one has in his possession that which may be collectible one day. Because if you, Eisav, will die while our father is still living you won't inherit from him⁵ and the birthright will be meaningless for you.

⁴ טובת הנאה is a halachic term which is borrowed for our section. When a person separates *t'rumos and ma'asros* to give to the Kohen and Levi, respectively, he may choose which Kohen or Levi to be the recipients. The right to make such a choice is called טובת הנאה and whether or not that right is considered to have some type of real value is a dispute in the Gemara.

Rambam (Hilchos I'shus Perek 5/Halachah 6) writes:

טובת הנאה אינה ממון

Tovas hana'ah has no real monetary value.

⁵ The value of that which *may* have potential value is discussed in Masseches Makkos (Perek 1/Mishnah 1). There is a discussion there regarding a woman who is married and needs cash and looks for a buyer for her Kesuva. The value of that Kesuva, while she is married, is far less than it would be if and when it would be collectible.

The reason for that lesser value is first we do not know if it will ever be collectible. Perhaps she will die before her husband.

There is certainly an issue that we must confront here. Did we ever see Yaakov exercise the birthright? Does the Torah make the birthright a prominent part of Yaakov's behavior? We certainly don't see that in the Torah.

In fact, explain the Baalei Tosfos, the birthright had very little inherent value at the time of the sale.

Yitzchak Ovinu was *the* Bechor. During his lifetime, it was Yitzchak's task to do all that was expected of the first-born.

However, birthright is only a potential while the father is living, not an actuality. The birthright is the 'right to succession' but no guarantee that there will be a succession. Thus, the low price for the birthright was wholly justified.

A similar point is made by Targum Yonoson if we will read his words with care. He writes:

וַאֲמַר יַעֲקֹב זָבִין יוֹמָנָא קִיּוֹם דְּאַנְתָּ עֵתִיד לְמִיחָסֵן יַת בְּכִירוּתָךְ לִי:
Yaakov said, Sell to me today for [the amount] like *on the day in the future* that you will inherit the birthright.

But, in this explanation a new issue is raised. Since Eisav had not yet received the birthright to be his, since it was still the office that his father held, what type of sale was possible to be executed. Can you sell something that isn't yours?

Not so many weeks ago we criticized Lot for claiming rights in the Land of Canaan for property that belonged to someone else, the inhabitants of the land, with the claim that it was promised to Avraham and they were Avraham's heirs. How, now, can Yaakov presume to make a purchase from someone who does not own the object that is purportedly being sold? It is the Brooklyn Bridge exactly.

The Halachah that forbids this type of sale is referred to as (Bava Metzia 33 b):

אֵין אָדָם מְקַנָּה דְּבַר שְׁלֵא בָּא לְעוֹלָם.
One cannot transfer property rights of that which doesn't exist.

And, even if it becomes collectible, it may be many years before that collection will be a reality. Thus, the price of the Kesuva today, while the woman is married, will be discounted greatly.

Eisav's birthright did not yet exist. There was a birthright but it was not *Eisav's* and we have way of knowing, as we read above, whether *Eisav* will ever receive it.

In his commentary on Rashi, '*Amar Nako*', Bartenura raises the question and explains. He writes:

בכורתך לי - לפי שהעבודה בבכורות וכו'. נראה לי דלכך פירש שרצה לקנות הבכורה מפני העבודה ולא מפני ירושת ארץ כנען מפני שבשביל הירושה לא היה קניינו מועיל כלום דהוה ליה דבר שלא בא לעולם כדאמרינן בעלמא (בבא מציעא טז א) מה שאירש מאבא מכור לך לא אמר כלום דאין אדם מקנה דבר שלא בא לעולם לכך פירש שרצה לקנותה בשביל העבודה:

*Your birthright to me 'Because the service of korbonos was done by the first born - I think that the reason that Rashi explained that Yaakov wanted to acquire the birthright for the service of Korbonos and did not write for the purpose of inheriting the Land of Israel is because if Yaakov wanted to acquire the inheritance of the land, the acquisition would not have been valid whatsoever because it would be the acquisition of that which had not yet come to the world. And this lack of validity is like what is said in Chazal that if one person will say to another person, 'That which I will inherit from my father I am selling to you'- his words are nothing because one cannot sell an object that had not yet come to the world. It is for that reason that Rashi explained that Yaakov wished to make the acquisition for the avodah [and did not mention the inheritance of the land]*⁶.

Finally, as we peruse this selection of the commentators we come to our opening lines, as expressed by Mizrachi.

...יש לתמוה, מה הועילה לו מכירה זו וכי ישראל שקנה כהונתו של כהן יכול לשמש
בכהונה...

It is a question: What effectiveness is there for Yaakov in this sale? If a non-Kohen would purchase *kehunah* from a Kohen, would he be able to serve as a Kohen?

⁶ See Or HaChaim HaKodosh here for a variation on this theme.

And this leads us to the approach of Rabbenu Bachye.

Rabbenu Bachye says that we can avoid the question of

אין אדם מקנה דבר שלא בא לעולם.

One cannot transfer property rights of that which doesn't exist.

He adopts the approach that we read in Bartenura and he adapts it:

אין מעלת הבכורה שבאותו זמן להיות לו פי שנים בנכסי אביו כמו שנצטוינו בתורה אחר כן, אלא מעלת שררה וכבוד אחרי האב שיהיה הוא במקום האב לנהוג שררה על יתר אחיו והם יכבדוהו...

The high level of significance of the first-born in that time was not that the first born would receive a double portion of the inheritance from his father as we were commanded in the Torah later on. Rather, the honor is that the first born was considered as holding high office and respect following [the death] of his father when he would be in his father's place to hold office over his siblings and they would offer him respect.

If so, why would Eisav be willing to part with such a significant appointment? Rabbenu Bachye continues:

וזה דבר עשו: למה זה לי בכורה, ואומנתי שהוא הציד קרוב שאמות בו בחיי אבי בלכתי לצוד החיות בשדות ובמדברות, וא"כ מה התועלת המגיע לי מן הבכורה, וזה שאמר: ויאכל וישת ויקם וילך, להורות כי אחר שאכל ושתה חזר לאומנותו והלך אל השדה לצידו, וזה היה דרכו ומשפטו כל הימים: לאכול ולשתות ולצוד ולהמשך אחר התאוות, וזה לו סבת בזוי הבכורה.

This is what Eisav said: Why do I need the birthright? My livelihood is a hunter. It is likely that I will die before my father when I go hunting wild animals in the fields and in the wilderness. Thus, what advantage will I have from the birthright?

That is the message of the verse, 'He ate, he drank, he arose and he went'. This teaches that after he ate and drank he returned to his livelihood and went back to the field to hunt. And this was his practice and habit all the time: to eat and drink and hunt and to pursue his desires and that is his reason for showing disregard for the *bechorah*.

For many years now, when talking about the historical events that we learn in the Torah, I do my best to refrain from referring to those events as a 'story'. I make

special efforts to find other terms, 'episode' is one in particular, so as not to use the word 'story'.

My reasoning is simple. 'Story' can have the connotation of fiction and that of course is enough of a motive to avoid that term when talking about the Torah's content.

However, there is another reason, no less significant and perhaps even more so.

'Story' connotes something light and easy going. This happened and that happened and I have no need to consider the events in depth. We can associate those episodes that we call 'stories' with our own lives that unfortunately are not marked by significance in everything that we do.

This week we took an episode that most of us probably learned as a story. Evil Eisav sells his birthright to his brother and the contempt for it that he showed.

If this is a 'story' than I take it as is and forget about it until I will read about it again next year.

But, what we learned here, culling the words of the Meforshim, in a far from exhaustive manner, is that nothing should be taken for granted. If the Torah chose to share with us the dialogue between Yaakov and Eisav, then that dialogue is important.

If the Torah, Written and Oral, interprets events in a certain manner, I have to justify their interpretation.

If the commentators strive to understand unusual wording or sentence structure, I don't ignore it because the story-teller was 'just talking'.

When I read our Parshas Toldos and the rest of Sefer B'reishis, I am confronted with 'stories'. But if I don't want to propagate them as mere stories, then I have to investigate their meaning as deeply as possible.

That is what we learned here. For Rabbenu Bachye and Rashi and Targum Yonoson and Beis HaLevi and Rav Chaim Shlita, nothing is to be taken for granted.

Who knows, perhaps due to our fealty of respect for the Torah we may uncover *chiddushim* that have not previously existed. As we read in Masseches Chulin (7 a):

מקום הניחו לו אבותיו להתגדר בו

His ancestors left him a place for personal unique accomplishment.

That is to say, that in the realm of Torah every individual has the opportunity to make a new and original contribution, a true *chiddush*.

That is, as we read Rashi's commentary in the beginning of Sefer Koheles (Perek 1/Posuk 3):

מה יתרון לאדם בכל עמלו שיעמל תחת השמש:

What benefit is there for man from all of his toil instead⁷ of the sun?

Rashi writes:

תחת השמש - תמורת התורה שהיא קרויה אור שנאמר (משלי ו/כג⁸) ותורה אור כל עמל שהוא מחליף בו את עסק התורה מה שכר בו:

Tachas hashemesh – in exchange for the Torah which is called *light* as it is written 'and Torah is light'.

[The meaning of this verse is] All the toil that is in place of the Torah – what reward is there in it?

The Torah can have *chiddush* and thus each of its parts must be investigated for that *chiddush*. Nothing is written for naught.

If we walk away from a segment of the Torah without giving it thought, aren't we doing what Eisav did?

וַיִּלֶךְ וַיִּבֶז עֵשָׂו אֶת הַבְּכֹרָה:

⁷ This translation is in consonance with Rashi who follows immediately.

⁸ The entire verse reads:

כִּי נֵר מִצְוָה וְתוֹרָה אֹר וְדֶרֶךְ חַיִּים תּוֹכָחוֹת מוֹסֵר:

The candelabrum represents Mitzvah and Torah is light; the way of life is the rebuke of ethical teaching.

He walked away; Eisav derided the birthright.

Hashem told us we are His son; we are His firstborn. Let us make sure that we preserve that relationship, treasuring the birthright of Torah that He has given us and not deserting our quest for Torah understanding to its fullest possible measure.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Pollock