

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

בס"ד

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Leibish ben Shimon.

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"May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

5 KISLEV

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS TOLDOS

Evil Acts or Evil Person?

And the boys grew up and Eisav became a man who knows trapping... (Bereishis 25:27)

Rashi (ad loc) comments "all the while they were small they were indistinguishable in their behavior [...] Once they turned thirteen years old, one went to the house of study (Yaakov) and one went to do idol worship (Eisav)."

Maharal (Gur Aryeh ad loc) asks, Rashi (25:29) explains that Avraham's life was shortened by five years so that he wouldn't see Eisav go out to do evil things. Yet, if Eisav went out to do idol worship when he was thirteen, Avraham should have died when he was 173 (because Avraham was 160 when his grandsons were born); why then did he die when he was 175?

In *Pirkei Avos* (5:25) the Mishnah states that when a child reaches the age of fifteen he should begin studying Gemara. The reason for this is that to really appreciate Gemara one needs a certain level of maturity which comes with critical thinking. This process of thinking for oneself doesn't completely develop until the age of fifteen.

Although Eisav may have done terrible things at the age of thirteen it could have been attributed to him being susceptible to outside influence

and immaturity. That would not have been so devastating to Avraham, because there was always the hope that as he matured he would grow out of those evil actions. However, once he reached the age of fifteen it became clear that these were decisions he was making through his own thought processes and he was fully engaged with evil behavior. That would have devastated Avraham to see so Hashem shortened his life to spare him the pain.

Did You Know...

The last *possuk* in this week's *parsha*, "Eisav went to Yishmael and took Machalas [...] as a wife" is, quite remarkably, the source for a well known teaching from Chazal. Rashi (Gen. 36:3) cites this *possuk* as the source for the well known maxim that on the day of their wedding a bride and groom are forgiven of their sins. This is why the name of one of Eisav's wives is originally given as "Machalas" while later she was called Basemath (Machalas is related to the word *mehilah*, forgiveness).



Did Yitzchak know the true person that Eisav was? On one hand, Rashi says (26:27) that Eisav knew how to deceive his father and that his father was under the impression that Eisav was meticulous with keeping the *mitzvos*. This explains why in the next verse the Torah (25:28) professes the love that Yitzchak had for Eisav. Yet, when Yitzchak asked him to prepare a special meal (27:3-4) Rashi (ad loc) comments that Yitzchak warned Eisav not to bring him something that wasn't kosher or something that was stolen. This seems to imply that he knew exactly who Eisav was. Yet if this is true why does he wish to bestow upon Eisav his blessings?

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Praying for an Answer

Yitzchak prayed to Hashem opposite his wife, for she was barren, and Hashem responded to him (Bereishis 25:21).

“Hashem responded to him” – To him but not to her. For the prayer of a tzaddik who is the son of a rasha does not compare to the prayer of a tzaddik who is the son of a tzaddik (Rashi ad loc.).

There seems to be an internal contradiction within these *pesukim*. The Torah first stresses that Rivka was “the daughter of Besuel the Arami of Padan Aram, the sister of Lavan the Arami” (25: 21). Rashi comments that this reflects positively on Rivka, for she grew up surrounded by wicked people but was not influenced by their misdeeds. **Yet in the very next *possuk***, the Torah stresses that Yitzchak’s prayer was answered, while hers was rejected. This is difficult to understand. Even if Yitzchak’s prayers were more powerful, was there any reason that Rivka couldn’t have been granted at least a partial answer to her entreaties? Why does the Torah emphasize that she was not answered at all? Moreover, this seems to be an affront to Rivka. What reason is there for the Torah to stress that her prayers were *not* answered?

The Gemara states (*Brachos* 26b) that the daily organization of our prayers was established by our forefathers: Avraham instituted *Shacharis*, Yitzchak instituted *Mincha* and Yaakov instituted *Ma’ariv*. Why is it that prayers were established by our forefathers? As a prayer is essentially a set appointment with Hashem, a very powerful

relationship is required to establish one. The kind of relationship only held by our forefathers. Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov prevailed upon Hashem to be “available” at set times during the day to hear their children’s entreaties and thus instituted the *Shacharis*, *Mincha*, and *Ma’ariv* we still use today.

Imagine for a moment that a college freshman wants to see the dean of the school; who is he more likely to grant an audience to: the child of a former roommate and much decorated alumnus of the school or the overachieving child of a former student that was expelled from the school?

Clearly the one who he will be scheduling an appointment with is the child of someone with whom he already has a close relationship. We too needed our forefather’s relationships to establish an “appointment” for a set prayer. That is why Hashem immediately turned to Yitzchak’s prayers and not Rivka’s. In addition, the prayers described in these *pesukim* were for a very specific subject: the birth of a child. In that context, Rivka’s unfavorable pedigree took on an entirely new significance. A child is more than merely an addition to a family; when a person prays for a child, he is praying for someone to carry on his

genetic code, to absorb his own traits and serve as a reflection of himself. Every human being inherits his parents’ genetic makeup, both physical and spiritual, which shapes a good deal of his life and nature.

Therefore, when Rivka davened for a child, she was praying for offspring with her own genetic makeup. This explains why, as Rashi tells us, Rivka later (25:22) questioned why she had prayed for a child: When she sensed Eisav’s eagerness to visit the temples of idolatry, she was certain that it was a result of her own genetic influence and the wicked traits of her family.

Question of the Week

The common appellation for Yaakov Avinu is that of “*ish emes*.” That is, Yaakov is the very definition of truth and honesty. If this is so, why does Yaakov agree to deceive his father into thinking that he was Eisav and thereby “stealing” the *brachos* that were intended for Eisav?



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