

# INSIGHTS

## Into The Weekly Parsha

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PARSHAS VAYECHI

## The Powers of Eisav

**Shimon and Levi are brothers; their weapons are stolen tools (Bereishis 49:5).**

A puzzling statement appears in *Parshas Vayeitzei*, in the Torah's account of the births of the *shevatim*: After the birth of Yehuda, the *possuk* states about Leah, "stopped giving birth." This is unusual, for the Torah makes no such statement regarding the other wives of Yaakov. Ostensibly, it is self-evident when the Torah finishes listing the offspring of each wife that they had no further children after that. Moreover, this statement is not even accurate as Leah later had three more children: Yissachar, Zevulun, and Dinah. Why, then, do these words appear in the *possuk*?

There is an interesting pattern in the *brachos* of the first four children of Leah: Each of them is associated in some way with a characteristic of Eisav. Yaakov praises Yehuda for being a powerful warrior, telling him, "Your hands are at the nape of your enemies' neck," even though the ability to fight is a characteristic of Eisav. The Torah states that "the hands are the hands of Eisav," which the Gemara interprets as a reference to warfare; Chazal teach us that anyone who achieves victory in war has some connection to Eisav's powers of combat. Thus, although Yehuda is praised for his might, that seems to be a quality that should be associated with Eisav's offspring, rather than the progeny of Yaakov.

Shimon and Levi, too, are associated with Eisav, for Yaakov states that their "weapons are stolen tools;" as Rashi explains, this means that their acts of violence were appropriate for Eisav, rather than for the family of Yaakov. Likewise, Reuven is criticized for his anger and impetuosity, which the Torah also associates with Eisav; in *Parshas Toldos*, Rivka instructs Yaakov to leave home until Eisav's fury abates. In fact, Chazal state that Reuven's name itself alludes to the contrast between him and Eisav; the name is derived from the words, "see the difference between my son and the son of my father-in-law." It would not be possible to contrast Reuven with Eisav unless there was some basis for comparing them; there is no logic in pointing out a contrast between two people who have no similarities or connection to each other whatsoever. Thus, there must be some link between Reuven and Eisav in order for this statement to be logical.

This can be explained as follows: Leah was created as the *bas zug*, the intended spouse, of Eisav. As the Torah hints, and as Chazal explain, Leah wept bitterly over her fate to the point that her eyes became disfigured, as she prayed fervently to be spared from a marriage to Eisav. Ultimately, her prayers were accepted and she became Yaakov's wife, but this did not



change her fundamental character traits. As Eisav's intended soulmate, she certainly possessed attributes that made her a fitting match for him, and once she married Yaakov, those characteristics were bequeathed to his children instead.

Thus, Leah's first four children had certain character traits that would have been appropriate for the children of Eisav. In a certain sense, they were actually Eisav's offspring. This explains Reuven's rage, Shimon and Levi's use of violence, and Yehuda's strength as a warrior. Unlike Eisav, though, Leah's children made the proper choices in life, and they remained part of the Jewish people. When the Torah states that Leah "stopped giving birth," it means that she stopped bearing children who harbored Eisav-like traits; all of the children who were born subsequently were not considered like Eisav in any way.

In truth, Yaakov's vision was for Eisav to be a part of Klal Yisroel as well; it was only the negative choices he made that prevented him from becoming part of the nation. But Eisav's unique attributes and strengths were also important for the Jewish people. Therefore, those

# King or Servant?

***His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk (49:12)***

This is part of the blessing that Yaakov gives to his son Yehuda, scion of the royal lineage of the Jewish people. Clearly, wine has always been associated with royalty. But what does the color white and milk have to do with the future kings of the Jewish people?

The Gemara (*Kesuvos* 111a) has a fascinating interpretation of this verse; “Better is the one who shows the white of his teeth (i.e. in a smile) to his friend, than the one who gives him milk to drink.” In other words, “white toothed from milk” can be interpreted as “to be white toothed with a smile is better than to give milk.”

This is because one who provides milk to the poor provides a physical gift that sustains the person for a little

while. But the one who smiles at or comforts the forlorn with encouraging words gives that person an everlasting feeling of self worth. This lifts his spirits and sustains the recipient a lot more than any physical gift which is merely a temporary respite.

This concept is also found in the animal kingdom. The Gemara (*Kiddushin* 82b) describes what kind of professions certain animals would assume if they had to enter the workforce; the lion would be a porter and a fox would be a merchant, etc. While it is easily understandable how the cleverness of a fox would make him a successful merchant, why would a lion, king of all the animals, choose the lowly job of a porter?

The answer lies in the Torah’s view of leadership.

Real leadership is about empowering others to actualize their potential. In other words, leadership isn't about the majesty of the position. True leaders take the resources at their disposal to help move others forward. Sometimes, perhaps even often, it means carrying the “baggage” of others so that they can get to where they need to go. Leaders realize that their role is to move the overall mission forward and take responsibility for its execution. A lion becomes a porter because his real desire has nothing to do with his own self-aggrandizement, rather his role is solely to help others.

This is the message that Yaakov wanted to instill in the future kings of the Jewish people. They will have the wine of royalty, but it must be used with the “white teeth” to empower others.

## ***The Powers of Eisav Continued***

characteristics had to be integrated into Klal Yisroel in another way; through Leah’s first four children. Indeed, Chazal state that Dovid Hamelech was “ruddy,” the same term used to describe Eisav, for in a sense, Dovid was just like Eisav. The difference between them, according to Chazal, was that Dovid was “with beautiful eyes;” this refers to the fact that he subjugated himself to the Sanhedrin, who were termed the “eyes of the congregation.” Eisav, on the other hand, did as he pleased; he did not accept the authority of any Torah sages, which rendered him unfit to be part of Klal Yisroel. However, Klal Yisroel still needed Eisav’s strengths, which is why they became part of the contribution made by the four oldest sons of Yaakov Avinu.

## **Did You Know...**

This week’s *parsha* gives us a glimpse into Egyptian culture and religious beliefs.

*“And Yosef commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father; and the physicians embalmed Yisrael. And forty days were fulfilled for him; for so are fulfilled the days of those who are embalmed...” (50:2-3)*

In modern society, the ones who do the embalming are funeral directors. Yet the Torah describes the Egyptian embalmers as physicians. Why did ancient Egyptians use “doctors” to do the embalming? Clearly, it had to do with their belief in the afterlife. To

Egyptians, death was merely a stage for preparing for the birth into the afterlife. In fact, the Torah uses the word “*chanita*” to refer to the embalming. *Chanita*, in the language of the Mishna, means to blossom or bloom. The reason they used “doctors” was to facilitate this birthing process. This would also explain why there was a requirement of forty days for the embalming process. In the Torah, the number forty always represents a rebirth and achievement of the next stage of development (e.g. the world was reborn after the flood, which was forty days and forty nights, B'nei Yisroel had a rebirth after spending forty years in the desert, etc.)



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