

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Jack Fefer, Yaakov ben Yisroel Yitzchak. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

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2 KISLEV

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS TOLDOS

Conwoman?

And Yitzchak was forty years old when he took Rifkah for a wife, the daughter of Besuel the Aramean of Padan-Aram, the sister to Lavan the Aramean (25:20).

Rashi (ad loc) wonders why the Torah reiterates that Rifkah was the daughter of Besuel the Aramean and the sister of Lavan the Aramean. After all, last week's *parsha* clearly identified Rifkah's lineage and from where she came. Why should the Torah choose to repeat it at the beginning of this *parsha*?

Rashi answers that the Torah is teaching us that even though Rifkah grew up with a wicked father and brother, and came from a place of wicked people, she didn't learn from their evil ways. Yet this explanation requires further clarification. In last week's *parsha* we see that Rifkah was a kind and generous person, as well as one of great modesty. Furthermore, Hashem clearly answered Eliezer's prayer for help and guidance by unmistakably indicating that He intended Rifkah to be Yitzchak's wife. But why is it necessary to once again highlight the difference between Rifkah and her wicked relatives from a wicked place?

Finally, it is odd that the Torah repeats by both Besuel and Lavan that they were Aramean. Why is there a special emphasis on their Aramean nationality?

The Babylonian Talmud is written in

Aramaic, the language of Aram, while the Jerusalem Talmud is written in Hebrew, the language spoken in Eretz Yisroel. Yet the Talmud that is written in a foreign language is the one that enjoys a much wider popularity; it is studied far more than the Jerusalem Talmud and comprises the bulk of the curriculum in *yeshivos* all over the world. The Babylonian Talmud is also the foundation and source of all *halacha*. Why is it that the Babylonian Talmud became more widely accepted than the Jerusalem Talmud, which is written in our native tongue?

The Aramean people were known for being conmen (exactly what Yaakov was worried about when making a deal with his wicked uncle Lavan in next week's *parsha*, and Lavan actually did try to trick him). What is the talent that makes a conman successful? He is able to delve into the reality of his "mark." In other words, a successful conman is able to see how his target will look at a situation; he then tailors the con to the other person's perspective and desires.

The Aramean language is one of understanding another's perspective. As an example, the word *chessed* in Hebrew means kindness, yet Rashi tells us (*Vayikra* 20:17) that in Aramaic it means shame. How can the same



word mean both kindness and shame? It's all a matter of perspective: the giver feels that he is doing a kindness, but the recipient feels shame at having to accept charity. The Arameans focus on the other individual's perspective – hence in Aramaic *chessed* means shame.

The Babylonian Talmud is the most widely accepted authority for this very reason. When we have an argument about law we want each opinion to be sensitive to the other's perspective before we decide on the proper approach. Only in understanding the other sides' perspective can we properly distill our own perspective. This is deeply rooted in the very essence of the Aramean culture.

The reason that Rifkah's lineage is repeated in this week's *parsha* is because it becomes very relevant to the story line. After all, it was her idea that Yaakov enter into Yitzchak's reality and, through a subtle subterfuge, receive the *brachos* that were intended for her wicked son Eisav. Rifkah too, being from Aram, had the quality of insight into another's perspective, but she used it to make sure that her righteous son prevailed over her wicked son.

True *Kibud Av*

And Yaakov went near to Yitzchak his father; and he felt him, and said, the voice is Yaakov's voice, but the hands are the hands of Eisav (27:23).

Rashi (ad loc) directly addresses the source of Yitzchak's confusion; even though he felt that Yaakov's arms were indeed hairy like Eisav's arms (as part of the disguise worn by Yaakov), his voice was dissimilar to Eisav. Rashi goes on to explain that Yaakov had addressed his father with a very respectful statement: "Please get up and sit to eat the food that I have prepared..." (27:19). Eisav, on the other hand, would speak in a combative tone "Get up father!"

The implication is that Eisav's tone was harsh and perhaps even disrespectful, while Yaakov's was more gentle and accommodating. However, we find in the Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 65) that Raban Shimon Ben Gamliel stated: "All of my days I served my father, and I didn't accomplish even 1/100th of the degree to which Eisav honored his father. When Eisav served his father he served him (wearing) royal garments." Even the great and pious Raban Shimon Ben Gamliel's *kibud av* did not compare with that of Eisav's.

Similarly, it is brought down from the Zohar that there was no one in the world who honored his father like Eisav did, and that *zechus* protected Eisav in this world. Thus, it is difficult to imagine that the very paradigm of *kibud av* would err in such a basic area as communicating respectfully with his father. What can Rashi possibly mean?

Certainly, Yaakov addressed his father very respectfully, as we see from the *pesukim*. But Eisav actually

superseded his brother's efforts. Rashi, in next week's *parsha* (see 28:13), says that Hashem associated His name with Yitzchak, even though Hashem does not usually associate His name with the living (for they might sin). But in the case of Yitzchak he was considered as if he was dead because he was blind and homebound and therefore no longer had an evil inclination. The implication in this week's *parsha* is also that Yitzchak was frail and bedridden, as we see that both Yaakov and Eisav have to tell him to get up and go over to eat.

While Yaakov treated his father with great deference, he was also catering to his father's self-image of being old and frail. Yaakov's *kibud av* was all about being deferential and respectful. On the other hand, Eisav was treating his father like a lazy teenager; he wasn't letting his father perceive himself as an old and sickly person. Eisav didn't accept the notion that Yitzchak is old and frail, and didn't let Yitzchak accept it either.

This is similar to people who hire personal trainers; they aren't hiring somebody who will gently ask them to "please do another pushup." Quite the opposite, they are literally paying someone to yell at them and push them past their malaise and perceived physical limits. But it is a very fine line. A personal trainer cannot be derisive or abusive, he must convey that he believes his client is far more capable than the client himself believes and push him in that direction. At the end

of the day, one comes to understand that the personal trainer is making him suffer for his own good.

This was Eisav's approach and it was obviously a much more difficult way of dealing with his father because it required constant pressure and a refusal to allow Yitzchak to deteriorate to the point of actually physically requiring to become bedridden. In fact, Yitzchak goes on to live another sixty plus years. Achieving this with anyone is quite an accomplishment; doing so with one's own father is a seemingly impossible task. Eisav managed to do this, which is why he is known as the quintessential example of *kibud av*.

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 (*Genesis* 36:3) cites this *possuk* as the source for the 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).



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