

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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*This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Yaffa Shandel Tzirel.
"May her Neshama have an Aliya!"*

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2 KISLEV

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS TOLDOS

Dead Tired

And Yaakov boiled a stew and Eisav came in from the field and he was exhausted (25:29).

This week's *parsha* relates the events that led to Eisav selling the birthright of the eldest son to his younger brother Yaakov. As Rashi explains (25:30), Hashem cut short the life of Avraham Avinu in order that he should not see his grandson Eisav develop into a wicked person and follow an evil path. On the day that he died, Yaakov was preparing a meal for his father Yitzchak (who was mourning the loss of his father), as is the custom today to prepare a *seudas havrahah* (the first meal eaten by mourners after the funeral).

Rashi (25:29), quoting the Midrash (*Bereishis Rabbah* 63:12), explains that when the Torah describes Eisav as exhausted it means that he was exhausted from murdering people. Chazal's interpretation of the *possuk* needs to be explained; what does exhaustion have to do with murdering people? Even though Rashi quotes a *possuk* that seems to show some correlation, it still requires clarification.

Even more perplexing: Why do we have to say that Eisav was exhausted from killing people? Perhaps he was just really tired from a hard day of hunting or working in the field. What forced our sages to reject the simple

meaning of the verse and define his exhaustion as a result of murder?

Chazal are bothered by the storyline. When a person is totally exhausted, what does he really want? He wants to collapse into a bed and go to sleep. Yet that isn't what happened in this *parsha*: The Torah relates that Eisav was exhausted and then Eisav tells Yaakov that he wants to eat but that he is so wiped out he can't even feed himself. The fact that the Torah first explains that Eisav came home fatigued indicates that he was tired from something other than pure physical exhaustion.

If a person spends a day working really hard and earns a substantial sum of money, unless he is totally bored at work, no matter how hard he worked he isn't tired – he comes home energized. Similarly, a person who is in an exciting new relationship isn't tired even if he stays out late and doesn't sleep much, because he is emotionally charged.

By contrast, when a person is emotionally drained or feeling unfulfilled, then he wants to eat because he is trying to fill an emotional void. There are several interrelated reasons why eating is a



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temporarily effective way of dealing with this emotional collapse. Experiencing one's physicality through eating provides some pleasure, which in turn gives some measure of comfort and is simultaneously distracting. In this way a person can superficially deal with the emptiness they are experiencing. However, when a person is truly physically tired they just want to sleep – eating is a secondary concern.

Rashi quotes a *possuk* from *Navi* that shows that this feeling of exhaustion from an internal emptiness can come from murder. A human being is the highest level of existence in the world; thus killing a person is essentially the most destructive act one can perform. Behaving in this way leaves a gaping hole in one's psyche. Since Avraham Avinu's life was shortened so that he wouldn't see Eisav's evil ways and the Torah describes Eisav as coming home emotionally drained, Chazal interpret his evil acts to be that of murder.

For the Love of God

And to him Hashem appeared and said, "Do not go down to Egypt, dwell in the land that I shall tell you" (26:2).

In this week's *parsha* we find that Hashem once again brings a famine to Eretz Yisroel, just as He did in the time of Avraham. Hashem tells Yitzchak not to descend to Egypt like his father Avraham had done during the famine of his time. Rather, Hashem tells Yitzchak that he may only travel to the place Hashem tells him to go.

Rashi (ad loc) explains the reasoning behind Yitzchak's travel restriction: "Yitzchak intended to descend to Egypt as his father had done during the famine of his time. Therefore, Hashem said to him that he may not go down there because he was a blemish-free offering and that the lands outside of Eretz Yisroel were not worthy of him."

In other words, since Yitzchak had ascended the altar as the purported offering by his father Avraham during the test of the *akeida* ("binding"), his physical body had achieved a very high level of holiness, one that is reserved for sacrifices on the altar of the Beis Hamikdosh. As the commentators (Mizrachi ad loc and others) explain, an *olah* offering cannot be taken out of the

grounds of the Beis Hamikdosh and in the time of Yitzchak Avinu all of Eretz Yisroel had the status of the grounds of the Beis Hamikdosh. Therefore, Yitzchak was not to leave Eretz Yisroel.

But this interpretation of Rashi seems a little incomplete. If Rashi had solely meant to convey that there was a technical reason that he wasn't permitted to travel outside of Eretz Yisroel, he should have just stated that point. Why does Rashi add on at the end of his statement that the lands outside of Eretz Yisroel aren't worthy of Yitzchak? What's bothering Rashi in the verse that compels him to provide another aspect as to what Hashem was telling Yitzchak?

Rashi is bothered by the odd construct of the verse. Usually, when Hashem comes to speak prophetically to one of the forefathers the Torah will write, "And Hashem appeared to him," yet here the Torah writes it differently, "To him Hashem appeared." What's the difference?

The difference is who is the true subject

of the interaction. In general, Hashem is the focal point of every exchange and the message that He gives over is the point of verse. But here Hashem is clearly coming for the sake of Yitzchak – "To him Hashem appeared." Yitzchak is given the primacy as the focal point of why Hashem is appearing to him.

Rashi is teaching us how to read the verses so carefully. If it was merely a technical reason that Yitzchak couldn't leave Eretz Yisroel (because he had the holy status of an *olah* sacrifice), Hashem would have just told him that he was therefore forbidden to leave the land of Israel just like an *olah* offering cannot be taken out of Israel.

But Hashem was making the exchange with Yitzchak all about Yitzchak himself. Therefore Rashi is compelled to explain that Hashem was telling Yitzchak that it isn't only that Yitzchak is forbidden to leave because of his status, but that more importantly leaving Eretz Yisroel isn't good for him because the lands outside of Eretz Yisroel are not worthy for him.

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