בס״ד

INSIGHTS
Into The Weekly Parsha

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Leib ben Reuven HaCohen, Louis Cohen. Sponsored by the Edelstein Family.
"May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

4 KISLEV | Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig | PARSHAS TOLDOS

Failing Forward

Because Avraham obeyed My voice and observed my safeguards, my commandments, my statutes, and my Torahs (26:5).

In this week's *parsha*, Hashem appears to Yitzchak, reaffirms the promises that He made to Avraham, and assures Yitzchak that they will come to pass. Interestingly, Hashem also tells Yitzchak the reason for this commitment to Avraham; "*Because Avraham obeyed My voice and observed my safeguards, my commandments, my statutes, and my Torahs.*"

The Gemara (*Nedarim* 32a) uses this verse to teach us a remarkable piece of information about Avraham Avinu's life. "Said R' Ami son of Abba – 'Avraham was three years old when he recognized his creator, as the verse says: Because (*eikev*) obeyed my voice […] The numerical value of the word "*eikev*" is 172. Avraham lived until the age of 175; subtract 172 from 175 and you're left with three. The verse is therefore teaching us that at the age of three Avraham first recognized Hashem.'"

Raavad uses this Gemara to ask a devastating question on Rambam. In *Hilchos Avodah Zara* Maimonides gives a lengthy introduction as to the history of idol worship. He explains how idol worship came to be and how the earlier generations erred and came to literally worship the stars and constellations (with some minor but notable exceptions such as Mesushelach, Noach, Shem, Ever, etc). This continued until the birth of the "pillar of the world" – Avraham Avinu.

Rambam explains that in his youth Avraham actually worshipped idols with his family; yet he always wondered who was really causing the earth to continuously revolve, and his heart was exploring and gaining understanding. Ultimately, he realized that there was one God who created everything, and that there is no other God among all the other entities. He also knew that the entire world was making a mistake: "Avraham was forty years old when he became aware of his Creator. When he recognized and knew Him, he began to debate with others, telling them that they were not following a proper path […]" (*Hilchos Avodah Zara* 1:3).

Rambam states outright that Avraham was forty when he became aware of his creator. So, asks Ravaad (ad loc), how can Rambam write that Avraham was forty when the Gemara so clearly states that he was three?

The answer is that at the age of three Avraham began his quest to find the real truth. In reality, it took many years and many missteps to arrive at the truth. Avraham was forty when he finally crystallized the proper philosophical theology and began to preach it to the world. Rambam fully agrees that this process began when Avraham was three.

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According to Rambam, the Talmud is making a remarkable statement; even though in his teens he may have worshipped idols and made other mistakes, since these were all part of his honest process to arrive at the truth it is considered as if he followed Hashem from the age of three. In other words, when at the age of forty he began his mission to bring God into this world, he was bringing forward all his experiences and everything he learned from his youth. Since he had experienced the enlightenment process himself, he could now show others the true and proper path.

Often, *ba'alei teshuvah* (and others who have made a significant turnaround in their lives) try to suppress their prior life and actions and pretend like they never happened. We see from here that this is not the right approach. Rather, Hashem wants us to utilize those experiences to help others and in that way one elevates the entire process of one's earlier life. We must remember that this is the reason given to Yitzchak as to why Hashem will fulfill the promises made to Avraham – this process of growth to enlightenment **and** sharing it with others.

Familial Ambivalence

It was told to Rifkah the words of her older son, Eisav. She sent for her younger son Yaakov and said to him, 'Behold your brother Eisav is consoling himself with thoughts of killing you' (27:42).

The end of this week's *parsha* recounts the episode of Yaakov taking Eisav's *bracha,* which caused Eisav to feel hatred toward Yaakov. Their concerned mother, Rifkah, warns Yaakov of Eisav's murderous thoughts and counsels him to escape the country and take refuge with her brother Lavan in Charan.

Rashi (ad loc) quotes the Midrash Rabbah's interpretation of the word *misnachem*: "You are already dead in his eyes, and he has drunk a cup of consolation over you."

This Midrash seems a little difficult to understand; if Eisav has murderous intentions and wants to kill Yaakov why does he need to drink a cup of consolation; what is there to be consoled about? We find a similarly strange incident recounted by Rashi in next week's *parsha* (29:11). Elifaz was ordered by his father Eisav to pursue Yaakov and kill him. Upon finding Yaakov, Elifaz – who had grown up in the "close embrace of his grandfather Yitzchak" – was hesitant to follow his father's command. On the other hand, he was also very reluctant to disobey his father. This was quite a quandary.

Thereupon, Yaakov suggested that Elifaz confiscate all of his wealth as, Chazal teach, a poor man is considered like a dead person. Elifaz was able to fulfill both of his conflicting desires by following Yaakov's suggestion; thus Yaakov arrived at Lavan's house utterly destitute, and Elifaz returned home feeling that he had honored his father's wishes.

But in reality this seems to be an untenable solution. After all, the truth that Yaakov was alive and well would eventually come out. At some point Eisav would find out that his son Elifaz disobeyed him and let Yaakov live. How does Chazal's dictum of a poor man being considered like a dead person fulfill Eisav's intention?

Sigmund Freud, father of the field of psychoanalysis, once said, "An intimate friend and a hated enemy have always been indispensable requirements for my emotional life; I have always been able to create them anew, and not infrequently my childish ideal has been so closely approached that friend and enemy coincided in the same person."

Notwithstanding the obviously complicated mind and seemingly confused emotional state of Freud, he was articulating the phenomena of a love-hate relationship. We often find this ambivalence of feelings in situations where there are emotional ties that are complicated by personal commitments that are frustrating to fulfill – inevitably leading to resentment.

Fascinatingly, in Hebrew the word for lover, "*oheiv,*" and the word for enemy, "*oyeiv,*" are almost identical. The reason is obvious: they are really one and the same emotion. In both instances one desires to become "one" with the other. In love one wants to merge together, while in hate one desires to swallow the other and incorporate the enemy into himself.

Eisav has very conflicting emotions about Yaakov, after all they are not only brothers, but twins who share almost exactly the same DNA. In essence, they are forever tied together (interestingly enough, Chazal point out that they were both buried together on the same day). Eisav has expectations of Yaakov and feels betrayed by him; therefore he both hates and loves him. This is the conflict that rages within Eisav. We see this most clearly when they actually meet in *Parshas Vayishlach*; Eisav hugs and kisses and then, according to Chazal, tries to bite the neck of Yaakov.

Elifaz senses this conflict within his father. He knows that while Eisav wants Yaakov hunted down he still loves his brother. Elifaz hopes that eliminating Yaakov as a threat by taking away his money but not killing him, will satisfy **both** feelings within Eisav – that of love and that of hate.



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