

Parshat Toldot: Preferential Parenting

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

In Parshat Toldot, the Torah describes how Yitzchak loved Esav and Rivka loved Yaakov. How do we understand this? Does it mean they didn't love their other child? Yitzchak's love is written in the past tense while Rivka's love is written in the present tense. Why the difference? Why did Yitzchak favor Esav over Yaakov?

Rav Shwadron notes that the word *ish* is mentioned twice in connection with Esav and only once when referring to Yaakov. He explains that Esav was like two different people. He was an *ish sadeh*, a wicked, materialistic, person, but when he came before his father he was an *ish tzayid*, a trapper. He pretended to be a *tzadik*. He had tremendous academic prowess, but his Torah learning did not influence him. Yitzchak was fooled by Esav's righteous persona and that is why he loved him.

Torah is not just an intellectual endeavor. It's meant to affect who we are. If it doesn't impact our entire being, then there's something lacking in our Torah study. We often get excited by an idea, but then we leave it and don't allow it to impact our heart. Esav's head, which was filled with Torah, was buried in *Mearat Hamachpeila*. His body didn't merit to be buried with the *avot*, because his head and heart never connected.

The Torah says Yitzchak was fooled by Esav, "*Ki tzayid b'fiv*." He manipulated and bribed his father and that is why Yitzchak loved him. Chazal say bribery is like a stone. When it falls there are repercussions. Yitzchak wasn't even aware how the food Esav brought him and the pious questions Eisav asked blinded Yitzchak from seeing the truth.

We learn from this the power of bribery. We are all judges. We make decisions and rationalize them by claiming that the ends justify the means. We are often blinded by our desires. After realizing that he had been fooled by Eisav, Yitzchak shook when he saw *gehinom* opening up. The feeling was overwhelming. One day, we too might wake up to see we've been bribed by our own lusts and distorted interests. Let us be careful not to fall into the trap of the evil inclination.

The Maayenei Shel Torah explains that Yitzchak was an *oleh temima* (pure sacrifice). He was completely separated from the world. It never dawned on him that Esav could be fooling him. In a simple way, he took him at face value and loved him for his external righteous ways.

The Netivot Shalom writes that Yitzchak saw *chesed* (kindness) in Yaakov and *gevurah* (strength), his own attribute, in Esav. This is why he loved him. The verse says, "*Reishet chachma yirat Hashem*." The beginning of knowledge is fear of Hashem. *Yirah* and strength are interconnected. Yitzchak felt that Esav would be the one to transmit these attributes to the next generation. He saw that Esav's mission would be to elevate this world for Hashem. Therefore, Yitzchak wanted to bless Eisav with the blessings of the physical world. The Malbim notes that ideally Esav and Yaakov could have formed a Yissachar-Zevulun type partnership. But when Esav gave up his firstborn rights, Yaakov took on his role. Chazal say that Hashem desires to live in the lower world. On a mystical level this means he wants to live in the world of *nisyonot* (tests). He desires our struggles and the strength we discover within ourselves when we transcend difficulties. Yitzchak loved Esav because he

saw in him a man of great struggle. He encouraged him to overcome his challenges. Although Esav failed, the message for us is still potent. In the secular world, success is measured by outcomes. In Judaism, it's the process that counts. Hashem values our efforts and it is the struggle itself that brings *nachat ruach* (pleasure) to Hashem.

Rav Belsky notes that Yaakov didn't need overt expressions of love from Yitzchak. It was manifested by their Torah learning together. But Yitzchak knew that Esav wouldn't respond to pressure. He would just run away. So he poured his love on him in the hope it would turn him over to Torah and *mitzvot*. Yitzchak asked Esav for tasty food so he could compliment him for his hunting skills. He wanted to win him over in a positive way. A parent's first instinct is often to be critical of a wayward child. But we learn from the parsha that this isn't the way. Yitzchak was able to contain Esav with his love. He knew his true personality but he wouldn't give up on him. The Torah writes about his love in past tense because he had to work on finding it. It wasn't constant like it was with Yaakov. And Esav responded by showing tremendous respect for his father. Rivka knew through prophecy that Esav was completely formed, that his evil character would remain as it was and no amount of love would change it. Therefore she loved Yaakov. For *chinuch* (child raising) to be potent, a parent has to strip away all the impediments that prevent him from reaching his child. This is what Yitzchak did. We may not always see a happy ending, but we must do our part. May Hashem help us to guide our children on the straight Torah path.

Traveling the Journey of Life Tehilim 14 Part II

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Leah Kohn

In Tehilim, Chapter 15, David Hamelech list eleven steps to achieve closeness to Hashem and merit the World to Come. The Maharal explains, when we try to stick two surfaces together, it needs to be clean so that there are no obstacles preventing the connection. So too, David Hamelech give us the don'ts that would prevent us from achieving *deveikut*.

This is stage one. It's not the ultimate level, which is why it's described as *ohel* and *I'gur*, it's a temporary situation. The next level are the actions -what we can do in a positive sense to grow our relationship with Hashem. This is described as climbing a mountain.

The Maharal explains the symbolism of

numbers. Numbers one through ten are the basis of counting. From there on, it's combinations. The Maharal says number ten is *reshut hatachton*- the domain of the lower, physical world. Eleven symbolizes going beyond the limitations of nature and physical reality. The spiritual world is endless. We can always get closer to Hashem. Chapter 15 gives us the 11

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rungs of the ladder we can climb to reach that goal.

The *Ohel Moed* and *Bet Hamikdash* are stages in achieving closeness to Hashem, but they are temporary. Ultimately the third *Bet Hamikdash* will enable us to achieve the complete goal. The Zohar tells us that the rungs mentioned here correspond to the Ten Commandments. The Ibn Ezra shows how all the *mitzvot* are included in the Ten Commandments. Still the question remains, why were 10 singled out of 613? What does it mean that, "David came and established for us 11

statutes?" The verb used is *v'hemedo*- he made them stand on 11; he made the 613 *mitzvot* lean on the foundation of 11. He told us that if we would do these 11 *mitzvot* they would be gateways that would bring us to the rest of Torah. So too, the Ten Commandments have the power to open the gates to the 613 *mitzvot*. The Maharal explains that the Ten Commandments create a closeness to Hashem that helps us grow in our relationship. Each of the 11 points David Hamelech mentions in this chapter correspond to one of the Ten Commandments.

R' Yosef ibn Shuet, a 13th century *Torah* sage who lived in Spain, adds a dimension here. The consolation in this chapter is that it's still possible for us to dwell in the spiritual reality of the *Bet Hamikdash*. Even in exile when we don't have the ability to perform all the *mitzvot*, we can still reach perfection by learning and internalizing the essence of the *mitzvot*. We are light years away from the generation that received the *Torah*, but we have before us the same ladder with the identical ten rungs that we can climb. And if we do it with the proper intention and in the right way, we can get there.

Parshat Toldot: Approaches to Evil

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Hershel Reichman

The intriguing story of the blessings of Yitzchak plays a paramount role in this *parsha*. As the Torah writes, Yitzchak wanted to give the *brachot* to his firstborn Esav, but Rivka intervened and Yaakov received them instead. At the time, a firstborn was meant to carry on the leadership of the family. Avraham passed the *bechora* on to Yitzchak and Yitzchak planned to do the same for Esav. Firstborn status meant not only financial responsibility but setting the tone and direction of the spiritual development of the family. In this case, the *bechor* would also define the path upon which the eventual Jewish nation would embark.

We know from the detailed description of our Sages, that Esav was a very wicked person. This was obvious to Rivka. Why did Yitzchak not know his own son? How could he entertain the thought that Esav would build the holy nation of Israel?

The Shem MiShmuel explains that Yitzchak had deeper considerations. He knew that Yaakov was more spiritually developed, but he could not battle evil because he had never come in contact with it. Esav, on the other hand, was a fighter and a hunter, he would know how to overcome evil, and would be able to develop the Jewish nation and conquer the land of Israel.

There are two ways of battling the evil inclination. Chassidut teaches that all evil energies can be turned around for the good. There's a potential within evil for elevation. However, there is a constant battle between good and bad to find the point of rectification and then to channel it positively. A second path is to completely subordinate the evil, so that it becomes one's servant, to the point that one does not need to struggle with it anymore.

This was the difference between Esav and Yaakov. When Esav came to his father, he presented himself as a *talmid chacham*. Therefore, Yitzchak thought Esav was one who fought evil constantly and was able to conquer it and get rid of it. This would make him a natural leader as he would be familiar with the passions and temptations of the common masses. On the other hand, Yaakov had already converted his evil side to goodness. He would not be able to relate to the daily struggles of the Jewish nation.

During the six days of the week there is a constant spiritual battle between our good and evil temptations. On Shabbat, according to the Zohar, the *yetzer hara* turns sweet and is converted to good. There is no evil inclination on this day. The Torah says, "*Vayivarech Elokim et yom hashivi*. Hashem blessed the seventh

day." Chassidut teaches that Shabbat itself, which is completely good, is the source of blessing for the week. A blessing is applicable when there is a possibility for evil. The *bracha* affirms that evil will not have power and will be defeated.

Yitzchak thought that Esav needed the *brachot* so that his good side could vanquish his evil side. On the other hand, Yaakov was like *Shabbat*, he had no evil side, and therefore the *brachot* were unnecessary for him. Esav was being defeated by evil, it was conquering him. He showed Yitzchak a facade and his father did not know he was being deceived. Rivka symbolically put Esav's clothing on Yaakov so that the ideal part of Esav, the one conquering evil, should become Yaakov. In turn, Yaakov acquired a new personality. He had to leave the ivory tower of Torah to confront evil head on.

The Torah says that when Yaakov came to Yitzchak, "*Vayarach et reach b'gadav*. And he smelled the scent of his garments." Chazal teach us that "*b'gadav*" can be read as "*bogdov*," meaning traitors. Some of Yaakov's descendants would be apostates and rebellious blasphemers. Yaakov was not really perfect and needed the blessings to overcome evil. Indeed after he received them, his life took on the life Yitzchak thought Esav would live, struggling with evil, vanquishing it, and elevating it for the good.