

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת תולדות

ויגדלו הנערים ויהי עשו איש ידע ציד איש שדה ויעקב איש תם ישב אהלים

“The lads grew up and Esav became one who knows hunting, a man of the field; but Yaakov was a wholesome man, abiding in tents” (25:27)

Rashi says that the description of Esav as a hunter means that laid traps for Yitzchak with his words. If this is the correct understanding, what is the connection between this and his designation as a “man of the field”? The sefer Ohel Torah explains that because Esav was a man who was out in the fields, he was exposed to the deceitful practices of the people whose company he kept. He learned how to act crookedly from his companions in the field. Yaakov, on the other hand, was an honest person because he sat in the tent of Torah. He had never been exposed to the crooked ways of wicked people and was accustomed only to honesty.

It is a tremendous challenge to be surrounded by people who act deviously and still remain steadfast to a life of truth and honesty. Rivkah succeeded in the house of Besuel, but Esav failed this test miserably. Yaakov was to face a similar test in the house of Lavan later on. One should not knowingly place himself into an environment that makes Torah observance difficult. The world around us is full of ideologies antithetical to Torah. While we cannot shelter children completely – and to do so would be counterproductive – it is important not to expose children to such challenges if they are not yet mature enough to deal with the situation. Open-mindedness does not mean that one should place children in a situation which will be too challenging. Children do need to be sheltered from certain difficult situations until they are ready to overcome those challenges.

ויאמר עשו הנה אנכי הולך למות ולמה זה לי בכרה

“And Esav said: Look, I am going to die, so of what use to me is a birthright” (25:32)

What is really going on in this story? How is Yaakov’s purchase of the birthright for a bowl of lentil soup really legitimate? Rabbi Friedman

explains that Esav was not at all interested in retaining the status of firstborn because it came with responsibilities that he did not want. It had nothing to do with the fact that he was hungry at that moment. The sale was merely a way of formalizing Esav's willing abandonment of his duties as the firstborn. Yaakov, for his part, saw that Esav was not fit for the job because of his lifestyle. Once he saw that, he understood that Esav had chosen a different path. Esav clearly felt this way too because he admitted that the responsibilities of being the firstborn would be the death of him and he gladly gave it away. Thus, the lentil soup served a purely symbolic role in this transaction. Esav wanted nothing to do with the birthright and happily allowed Yaakov to have it. Yaakov just wanted to make sure that the deal was binding and so they made a formal sale.

ויחפרו עבדי יצחק בנחל וימצאו שם באר מים חיים

“Yitzchak's servants dug in the valley and found there a well of fresh water” (26:19)

The Ramban writes that the stories of the אבות serve as lessons to us in the form of סימן לבנים, “the actions of the forefathers are a sign for their descendants.” As such, this narrative about the three wells seems to be just another story about Yitzchak until we look at it through the lens of this principle. The Ramban takes this episode as a foreshadowing of the three בתי מקדש. Simply understood, the shepherds of Gerar fought contested Yitzchak's right to the first two wells, just as the first two בתי מקדש were destroyed. The third well went unchallenged, just as the third בית המקדש will stand forever.

The Kli Yakar expands on this idea. In the time of the first בית המקדש, fighting among the Jewish nobility was the cause of its destruction. Similarly, the posuk specifies that the first well was challenged by the shepherds of Gerar. The downfall of the second בית המקדש was because שנאת חנם was rampant among all the Jewish people. Similarly, the posuk regarding the second well just says that “they fought” against that well, without specifying the shepherds. The first well was called עסק, which means a quarrel for a purpose, because the fighting in the time of the first בית המקדש was about positions of leadership. However, the second well was

called שטנה, meaning “hatred,” just as the problem during the second בית המקדש was hatred without any purpose.

ויהי כי זקן יצחק ותכהין עיניו מראת ויקרא את עשו בנו הגדל ויאמר אליו בני ויאמר אליו הנני

“And it came to pass when Yitzchak had become old, and his eyes dimmed from seeing, that he summoned Esav, his older son, and said to him: My son, and he said to him: Here I am” (27:1)

Why did Yitzchak want to give Esav the blessings? Surely, he must have had an inkling about Esav’s true nature. Furthermore, why did Rivkah feel the need to intervene and ensure that Yaakov received the blessings? The Malbim explains that Yitzchak knew that Esav was not cut out to be dedicated to Torah study and, as such, he wanted to establish a system where Yaakov would study Torah and Esav would enable him to do so by financially supporting him. Not only that, but Yitzchak foresaw Esav functioning as the liaison between Yaakov and the other nations, helping spread Yaakov’s Torah to the rest of the world. However, Rivkah recognized that Esav was not the religious Jew who worked in the field that Yitzchak thought he was. She realized that he would not use his material blessings to support Yaakov. In order to make sure that the blessings were in good hands, she wanted Yaakov to get them and then he could divide the responsibility of Torah scholarship and financial support among his own children. This is the thinking that was behind the events that took place in this seemingly strange episode.

ועשה לי מטעמים כאשר אהבתי והביאה לי ואכלה בעבור תברכך נפשי בטרם אמות

“Then make me delicacies such as I love and bring it to me and I will eat, so that my soul may bless you before I die” (27:4)

Why did Yitzchak need Esav to prepare a meal for him before receiving his blessings? Seforno explains that although Yitzchak did not recognize Esav’s wickedness, he did not think that he was so righteous as to deserve the blessings without doing anything to earn them. Yitzchak asked him to bring food so that he would fulfill the mitzvah of כיבוד אב and thereby

merit to be blessed. The proof of this is that when Yitzchak blessed Yaakov before he left to Charan, he gave him a blessing without requiring any prior action because he knew that Yaakov was worthy of the blessings on his own.

Many times in life, doing a mitzvah makes a person worthy of receiving different types of blessings. Mitzvos can be the ticket that entitles us to divine blessings. Therefore, we should seek out as many mitzvos as we can and certainly do a mitzvah when the opportunity presents itself. We also learn from this Seforno how important the mitzvah of **ואם כיבוד אב ואם** really is. This one mitzvah was enough to earn Esav the blessings from his father.

וישלח יצחק את יעקב וילך פדנה ארם אל לבן בן בתואל הארמי אחי רבקה אם יעקב ועשו

“So Yitzchak sent away Yaakov and he went toward Padan Aram, to Lavan the son of Besuel the Aramean, brother of Rivkah, mother of Yaakov and Esav” (28:5)

Why does the posuk refer to Rivkah as the “mother of Yaakov and Esav”? Rashi states that he does not know why the posuk says this. R’ Dovid Kviat, in his sefer Sukkas Dovid, suggests a possible answer. The Torah says that she was the mother of Esav as well as of Yaakov. Her actions were not just for Yaakov, but for Esav’s benefit too. If Esav would have been given the task of supporting Yaakov’s Torah study, he would not have done so and would be held accountable for not fulfilling his role. By letting Yaakov get the blessings, she was really helping Esav not be stuck with a job that he could not do and saved him from the consequences of not living up to his destiny.