

A WIFE FOR YITZCHAK

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

I will adjure you by God, the God of the heaven and the God of the earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites . . . (Bereishis 23:3)

BEFORE GETTING STARTED, I want to mention that in 1996, the OU, together with ArtScroll, published one year's worth of Perceptions in book form. The sefer was well-received, b"H, some people even saying that reading it at the Shabbos table had become an integral part of their Shabbos experience.

For years I have wanted to publish a second volume, but it always seemed too big an undertaking to do on my own. I am pleased to say, b"H, that it is finally done, and PERCEPTIONS, Volume 2 is now available in three formats: Softcover and Kindle through Amazon, and PDF in my online bookstore. The investment benefits both you and me. Now back to this week's parsha.

WE KNOW HOW Adam HaRishon found his wife. Process of elimination. She was the only human female in the world at the time, so his choice was limited. No shadchan needed. Fortunately for the first man, she was custom made just for him.

We DON'T know how Noach met his wife, or even how Avraham and Sarah decided they were soul mates and married. It is only in this week's parsha with the selection of Yitzchak's wife, that we are privy to the process that brought these two righteous soul mates together, the future parents of Ya'akov AND Eisav.

That's right, AND Eisav.

Avraham was very specific about who Eliezer brought back home to marry Yitzchak. He made Eliezer vow not to deviate from his instructions, as they later did with the Kohen Gadol in the Second Temple period. It wasn't just about finding a future daughter-in-law with whom Avraham could be comfortable. It was about finding someone who could give birth to the foundation of the future Jewish people.

And Eisav too?

The truth is, yes. Apparently, Eisav the "Rasha" was supposed to have been Eisav the "Tzaddik," the fourth of four Forefathers. It was true, the older one, Leah, was meant for the older one, Eisav, and the younger one, Rachel, was destined for the younger one, Ya'akov. It's just that something went horribly wrong, and though Leah remained worthy, Eisav did not.

It is amazing to think about how the Jewish people have always been their own WORST enemy, and this case, quite inadvertently. Two of our biggest enemies have historically been Yishmael, now the Arabs, and Eisav, eventually all the Christians. Ironically, their origins are the same as ours.

Was it something Yitzchak and Rivkah did, or didn't do? What about Yishmael? How did he become so dangerous? True, his mother was Hagar, an Egyptian princess. His father was Avraham, and he grew up in a house of righteousness and prophecy. Why did it not rub off more than it did?

And what happened to Menashe? His father, Chizkiah HaMelech, was almost Moshiach. Chizkiah turned the entire country back to Torah, cleaning up the spiritual mess left behind by his father. Menashe's mother was the daughter of Yeshayahu the prophet. You don't get a much more of an Aishes Chayil than that!

Yet, Menashe became a rasha. He undid all the good his father had accomplished, and returned the nation BACK to the evil ways of his grandfather. What had been missing from his chinuch? After all, Chizkiah even knew through prophecy what his son COULD become, and he must have tried with all his might to avoid it.

As if to make matters even more confusing, what works with some children does not always work with others. Some children can grow up in a house where everything seems to be on track, and still go against the spiritual grain. Others grow up in the most unfitting spiritual environments, and yet find their ways in Torah. There are a lot of surprises in both directions.

Of course this is not only true with respect to raising children. It also has to do with making money as well. Some people seem to make money even without trying, while others who try so hard to get ahead do not succeed.

We have no questions regarding those who work hard and succeed, or those who do not and fail. We expect that. Nevertheless, it was part of Moshe Rabbeinu's question to God. He didn't only ask God why some righteous people experience bad, and some evil people receive good. Once that was a question, he also wanted to know why some righteous people DO receive good and some evil people DO experience bad, since it was no longer an absolute. By what criteria are such outcomes decided?

It's not clear from the Talmud if Moshe Rabbeinu was answered. If he was, he did not pass on the information to us, at least not on a Pshat level. There IS no Pshat level for this answer. It is ONLY on the level of Sod, Kabbalah, that a person can even begin to approach an understanding of how God runs this world. On the level of Sod, there is at least a hint to the philosophical undercurrent of history.

Think about it for a moment. God is infinite. Do we even know what that means? His thoughts and plans incorporate much more than we'll ever know or relate to. His Essence is so beyond us that we can't even talk about it without becoming guilty of idol worship on some level. His perfection is

beyond any concept of perfection that even the greatest human kind can comprehend. And we think we have the wherewithal to understand history?

Kabbalah has names for the intellectual abyss that separates our perception from God's, but they all mean the same thing. As much as we DO understand life and history, Divine mysteries abound and always will. There are things going on, that impact our lives that are rooted in levels so sublime that we can't even sense them. We're not even aware of them, for the most part, until they leave their mark through some event that just does not make sense to us.

This is why Torah is so essential. There is so much we cannot control in history. Such things are too far beyond us. So, God gave us the Torah and said, "Here, follow this. If you stick to the plan, at least you will stay out of My way and not interfere with the good I am arranging for you. I may even make it look as if you are a partner in the process."

So, yeah, Eisav was born from Yitzchak and Rivkah. Sure, he became one of the most evil people in history. But, at least Avraham went to his grave knowing that he had done all he HAD to do, to assure a positive outcome when choosing a wife for Yitzchak. The rest, he knew, was up to God and part of a Master Plan that was FAR beyond his ability to know.