

HOW ABOUT THEM APPLES?

by Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

"And these are the offspring of Yitzchak son of Avraham - Avraham gave birth to Yitzchak" (25:19)

Parshas Toldos records the births of Yaakov and Eisav. The introductory verse states "these are the generations of Yitzchak, the son of Avraham - Avraham gave birth to Yitzchak". Citing the Midrash, Rashi explains the necessity of the apparent redundancy regarding Yitzchak's relationship to Avraham; it was in response to cynics of the generation who cast aspersions as to the legitimacy of Yitzchak's lineage. They claimed that since Sarah had not conceived for many years while married to Avraham, yet became pregnant immediately after spending the night in the palace of Avimelech, king of Plishtim, Yitzchak was clearly sired by Avimelech and not Avraham. Consequently, the Torah reiterates that Yitzchak was the son of Avraham. Sarah giving birth to Yitzchak is covered extensively in last week's parsha, Parshas Vayeira. Why is it necessary to refute the cynics in this week's parsha which begins with Yitzchak at the age of sixty?

The verse immediately following the reiteration of Avraham siring Yitzchak relates that Yitzchak fathered Yaakov and Eisav. Eisav's evil ways reinforced the claims of the cynics, for it was difficult to understand how the biologically and genetically endowed bearer of Avraham's legacy could be so malevolent. Therefore, the cynics argued that Yitzchak must have been the child of Avimelech, for if such was the case, it was Avimelech's genetic makeup to which the nature and disposition of Eisav could be attributed. Furthermore, Eisav was the progenitor of Amaleik who is described as having no "yiras Elokim" - "fear of Hashem".[1] This is the same attribute that Avraham Avinu ascribes to the people of Plishtim, further lending credence to the theory of Avimelech being Eisav's grandfather.[2] Therefore, specifically at this juncture the Torah deems it necessary to quell the malicious charges which threatened to undermine the heritage and sanctity of the Jewish people.

- 1.Devarim 25:18
- 2.Bereishis 20:11

All Dressed Up And No One To Owe

"Rivka then took Eisav's clean garments which were with her in the house..."(27:15)

As part of the subterfuge which Rivka created to ensure that Yaakov would receive the blessings from Yitzchak, she dressed him in Eisav's "bigdei chamudos". Rashi explains that these were a set of clean clothes that Eisav kept at his mother's home to change into when serving his father, Yitzchak. In a second interpretation Rashi cites the Midrash which states that these were regal garments that

Eisav had pilfered from Nimrod.[1] The Midrash relates the following concerning Eisav's great filial devotion: Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel commented "All my life I served my father, but I did not attain even one percent of the service performed by Eisav for his father. I was not particular about the cleanliness of my clothes when servicing my father. Only when I went out into the public eye did I take note of the condition of the clothes I was wearing. In contrast, Eisav was particular to serve his father in clean garments, but would not care if he walked into the market wearing rags." [2]

When Yaakov entered Yitzchak's room impersonating Eisav in order to receive the blessings, his father's suspicions were aroused. The verse states that it was Yaakov's voice that betrayed him.[3] The Ramban notes that since Yaakov and Eisav were twins the sound of their voices were identical.[4] Rashi therefore explains that it was the manner in which Yaakov spoke that betrayed him. Whereas Yaakov spoke to his father respectfully, requesting him to please sit up to eat, Eisav spoke brashly and without supplications.[5] Rashi paints a different portrait of Eisav, the paradigm of parental honor. How do we reconcile Rashi's comments with the aforementioned Midrash?

The Torah attests to Eisav marrying women who were a source of great emotional distress to his parents.[6] The smoke produced by the idolatrous service of Eisav's wives contributed to Yitzchak's loss of vision.[7] How could Eisav have exhibited such a lack of sensitivity to his parents' feelings?

Honoring parents is one of the few precepts for which the Torah delineates a reward, longevity.[8] The Talmud teaches that this reward refers to a greater sense of existence in the World to Come.[9] Why is this the appropriate reward for honoring parents?

The Mishna teaches that our parents deserve to be honored because they bring us into this world, i.e. give us existence. We can react to receiving existence from our parents in two very different ways, displaying indebtedness or gratitude. A person who feels a tremendous sense of indebtedness will serve his parents as a means by which to pay off this debt. A person who feels gratitude for his existence will give his parents their existence by showing his subservience and devotion to them.

A person who repays a debt begrudges the fact that he has incurred this debt. As he pays it off, he feels better for repayment offers him liberation. He therefore performs his service with a sense of expansiveness. Giving our parents their existence requires that we minimize ourselves before them, acknowledging their superiority over us. It is clearly easier to perform a service with heightened enthusiasm when we perceive that we are expanding through our actions. If we are required to minimize ourselves the task becomes more arduous. It is this enthusiasm that our sages laud when describing Eisav's actions, not the motivation behind them. Eisav sought his independence and served his father as a form of payment. He did not submit himself to his father's will when it infringed upon his way of life. The ideal method of honoring parents would employ the enthusiasm of Eisav coupled with the motivation to submit ourselves to our parents thereby giving them a greater existence. If we are successful in giving our parents a greater existence, Hashem rewards us with the

ultimate existence, a greater reality in the World to Come.

1.27:15

2.Bereishis Rabbah 65:16

3.27:22

4.Ibid

5.Ibid

6.26:35

7.See Rahi 37:1

8.Shemos 20:12

9.Kiddushin 39b