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Path

TOLDOT To Follow

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ISAAC'S LOVE FOR ESAU: A WAY OF DRAWING HIM CLOSER TO HASHEM

It is written, "Isaac loved Esau, for game was in his mouth, but Rebecca loved Jacob" (Bereshith 25:28). This is astonishing, for what kind of reason does "for game was in his mouth" constitute? Furthermore, the Midrash states that Isaac loved Esau because "choice meat and choice wine were reserved for his mouth" (Bereshith Rabba 63:10). This too is surprising, for how can we say that our father Isaac, who was sanctified by a tremendous degree of holiness, loved Esau more than Jacob (who studied Torah) because of the delicious meals that he brought him?

If this was how Isaac loved his sons, to the point that he sought Esau in order to bless him with the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth, and that the nations of the earth should bow before him, then why did he want to bless Esau more than Jacob? After all, Jacob was an upright man who lived in tents, and he was even more deserving of a blessing than Esau. Although Isaac did not suspect Esau of unsightly deeds, he still knew that one son studied Torah and the other went out into the fields. Did Jacob, who studied Torah, not deserve a blessing even more than Esau, who spent his entire day in the field and brought his father delicious meals?

We may explain this by saying that Isaac knew that Esau committed vile deeds. As the Sages say in the Midrash, the Shechinah dwelled in Isaac's home, but when Esau took wives for himself from among the daughters of Canaan, they began to burn their idolatrous incense and the Shechinah left Isaac. When he saw that Esau had taken to a bad path, that he had married the daughters of Canaan, and that they had turned his heart away by enticing him to commit evil – as they were accustomed to seeing their fathers doing in Canaan – Isaac was greatly distressed and wanted to bring Esau back to the right path.

Yet Isaac could not openly reprimand Esau and ask him to behave like Jacob and study Torah. If he were to have said to him, "My son, look at how badly you are behaving, at how vile your deeds are! I beg of you, enter the Beit HaMidrash and study Torah like your younger brother Jacob," Esau would not have listened because he

was steeped in evil. As the Midrash states, Esau committed all the sins that Hashem detests. This is why Isaac could not ask Esau to study Torah, for he certainly would not have listened to him. In fact evildoers detest being reprimanded. What did our father Isaac do? He demonstrated his great love for Esau and began to speak with him: "My son, I also love game as you do. Please, make me some delicious meals that I love!" When Esau heard this, he began to listen to what his father was telling him. Once Isaac's words entered Esau's ears, he began to chat with him, saying: "My son, pay close attention not to bring me nevelot or treifot to eat. Slaughter the animals according to the law, and salt the meat according to the law, for I love delicious food." In this way, Isaac wanted to educate and accustom Esau to performing mitzvot, for if he paid attention to this mitzvah, he would eventually pay attention to other mitzvot. And when he would pay attention to the mitzvot, he would eventually study Torah. Isaac began with small things, telling himself: "I will give Esau an easy mitzvah to perform, and in the end he will pay attention to all the mitzvot." As the Sages say, "If you take hold of too large a thing, you may lose your hold. However if you take hold of a smaller thing, you will retain your hold" (Yoma 80a). Hence Isaac told Esau, "If you bring me nevelot or treifot, I will not bless you." He did this in order to infuse Esau's heart with a love for Hashem.

On the other hand, Isaac did not need to demonstrate his love for Jacob, even though he loved him dearly, for Jacob studied Torah all day long. Isaac did not openly demonstrate his great love for him, as he did for Esau, because Jacob studied Torah and followed the ways of Hashem. It was therefore better not to demonstrate his love, as it is written: "One who spares his rod hates his child, but he who loves him disciplines him" (Mishlei 13:24). Since Esau had taken to a bad path and his father wanted to bring him back to the right one, he demonstrated his love for him by pretending to be interested in game. In this way, he would accustom Esau to performing mitzvot.

We should not be surprised by the fact that Isaac commanded Esau to bring him delicious

meals consisting precisely of game. By so doing, Esau was at least practicing (albeit reluctantly) ritual slaughter, as well as verifying and salting meat in order to kasher it so his father Isaac could eat it. In reality, Isaac did not have to send Esau into the field to bring him delicious meals, since Isaac had domesticated and wild animals in his home. Why did he send Esau into the field to bring him game?

Isaac thought: "Since Esau will put an effort into performing mitzvot by going into the field and bringing me game – by slaughtering it and kashering the meat according to the law – he will cleave to Torah and mitzvot." Hence he did not command Esau to wear his beautiful garments, which he had taken from Nimrod, so that all the animals of the field would fall before him. If the animals of the field were to fall before Esau, he would not have needed to put an effort into this mitzvah, and the Torah only endures with a person who puts an effort into it.

Isaac's sole intention was to infuse a love for Hashem into Esau's heart by making him perform easy mitzvot; he even promised to bless him if he did so. Furthermore, because Esau would perform these easy mitzvot for selfish reasons, he would eventually perform difficult mitzvot for non-selfish reasons. This is how we progress: By doing things with ulterior motives, we come to doing things for their own sake. Isaac believed that by accustoming Esau to performing easy mitzvot, he was readying him for all mitzvot.

From what we have said, we can understand Rashi's comments: "In his mouth – as the Targum renders: In Isaac's mouth. The Midrashic interpretation is: With Esau's mouth, for he would entrap him and deceive him with his words." These two explanations are really one, for why did Isaac demonstrate his great love of Esau? It was because he saw that Esau was taking to a bad path and trying to deceive him by saying, "I would have liked to study Torah today!" Isaac proved to be more cunning by asking Esau to bring him some game. In doing so, he was accustoming Esau to the performance of mitzvot.

CONCERNING THE PARSHA

A PERSON'S NAME BEARS WITNESS TO HIS CHARACTER

It is written, "Esau said to Jacob, 'Please feed me some of that very red stuff, for I am exhausted' " (Bereshith 5:30).

The Sages in the Gemara warn us about the obligation to wash our hands after a meal (mayim acharonim). In fact they are so adamant about it that they have said that failure to do so "killed a person" (Yoma 83b).

The Gemara recounts a terrible incident in this regard:

Three Tannaim among the Sages of the Mishnah – Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Yehudah, and Rabbi Yossi – were on a journey.

Rabbi Meir always paid close attention to people's names, whereas Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Yossi did not. (After this incident, however, they began paying attention to people's names, just as Rabbi Meir did.)

On Friday afternoon, the eve of Shabbat, as the sun was about to set, they proceeded to a local inn. When they arrived, they asked the innkeeper his name.

"Kidor," he said.

Rabbi Meir (who, as we said, would evaluate a person based upon his name) thought, "It is obvious that he is an evildoer, since it is said: 'For they are a generation [ki-dor] of reversals' [Devarim 32:20]."

Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Yossi entrusted their purses to Kidor, along with the money they contained, whereas Rabbi Meir did not entrust his purse to him. Instead, he went to hide it by the grave of the innkeeper's father.

That night, Kidor saw his father in a dream, and he told him: "Go, take the purse lying at my head!" In the morning, when Kidor recounted his dream to the Sages who were staying at the inn, they told him that there is nothing to dreams that take place on the night of Shabbat. However Rabbi Meir was still cautious, and he went to the cemetery to look after the money he had hidden there. At the end of Shabbat, he took his purse and returned to the inn.

The day after Shabbat, both Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Yossi went to get their purses from the innkeeper, with whom they had left them at the start of Shabbat. To their great surprise, however, he arrogantly said to them: "You never left anything with me!"

When Rabbi Meir heard this, he said to them: "Why didn't you pay attention to his name, to see if he was pleasant or crude?" They answered with a question of their own: "Why didn't you tell us to evaluate him according to his name?"

Rabbi Meir replied, "Although I usually evaluate people according to their names, it is simply a hunch. I would not consider it a definite presumption. From the fact that I heard that the innkeeper's name was Kidor, what came to mind was the verse, 'For they are a generation [ki-dor] of reversals.' At that point, I was cautious and paid attention to this man. However I could not confirm that this was that case. I could not tell you that he was someone who is not upright or honest, or warn you not to entrust your money with him!"

As a result, the three Sages left the inn and headed for the city, when suddenly they noticed the innkeeper having fun with his friends. When they saw him, they realized that there were lentils on his mustache from a previous meal.

The three immediately returned to Kidor's home and said to his wife, "Your husband told us that you would return our purses, which we entrusted to him on the eve of Shabbat. The sign that he gave us to certify that it is really him sending us is that you made him a meal of lentils today."

When Kidor's wife heard the request of the Sages and the sign they had given her – that she had prepared some lentils for her husband today – she immediately went to retrieve the purses that her husband had hidden, and she returned them to the Sages.

When Kidor returned home, his wife told him that the three Sages had come to their home and asked for their money. They had even given her a

sign that they had heard from his own mouth, namely that he had eaten a meal of lentils on that day. "What did you do," Kidor asked anxiously. "I returned their money to them," his wife replied. When Kidor heard this, he arose and killed his wife in a fit of rage.

The Gemara (Yoma 83b) ends its account by saying that failure to use the mayim acharonim "killed a person." This is because, had Kidor fulfilled the mitzvah of washing his hands after a meal, as stipulated by the Sages, he would have washed his moustache. In that case, the three Sages would not have seen that he had eaten lentils on that day, meaning that Kidor would not have killed his wife. Yet since Kidor did not heed the words of the Sages, he neglected this mitzvah and ended up killing his wife.

A Clever Ruse

In his book *Sha'arei Yehoshua*, the gaon and tzaddik Rabbi Yehoshua Attiya Zatzal uses this story to explain why Esau told Jacob, "Please feed me some of that very red stuff." After all, why did Jacob have to pour this food into his mouth? Although he was exhausted at the time, could Esau have not used his own hands to eat?

The answer is that our father Isaac did not allow lentils into his home, for he realized and was afraid that something bad could happen as a result of eating them. In fact the wicked Esau certainly paid no attention to the mitzvah of mayim acharonim (and the holy Patriarchs, as we know, observed the entire Torah). This is why the wicked Esau had a tremendous desire to taste some lentils, and it is why these lentils seemed so appetizing that he agreed to sell his birthright for them. It happened that people were mourning the passing of Abraham on that day, and lentils are usually eaten in a house of mourning (since lentils are a meal for mourners). The wicked Esau was afraid that Jacob would not allow him to taste it, for Jacob obeyed the orders of his father. Hence Esau schemed and cleverly asked Jacob, "Please feed me some of that very red stuff." In other words, "I cannot eat lentils with my own hands because I don't want to dirty my hands and mouth. But you can take the pot of lentils and pour it directly into my mouth, and there will be no reason to worry that I will not properly wash my mouth after eating, so nothing bad can happen." Esau added that even if he were to dirty his face when Jacob poured the lentils – "that red stuff" – into his mouth, because of the fact that Esau was exhausted at that point, and because a tired person often has a red face, nobody would notice that he had eaten them.

GUARD YOUR TONGUE

Not Even Death Can Atone For It

If a person transgresses by speaking Lashon Harah about someone, and he wants to repent, his repentance depends on whether or not his listeners have believed his words, and on whether the individual he has disparaged has become lowered in their eyes. If this has not happened, his words constitute a sin between G-d and man, meaning that he has transgressed Hashem's will.

Rectifying this sin consists of regretting what he has done, confessing it, and wholeheartedly committing himself to never doing it again, as is the case for all sins between G-d and man. However if the person he has disparaged becomes lowered in the eyes of his listeners, and if that person experiences either physical or financial harm, it then becomes a sin between man and man, which not even Yom Kippur and the day of death can atone for unless the wronged party forgives him. – Chafetz Chaim

AT THE SOURCE

Three Kinds

It is written, “These are the generations of Isaac the son of Abraham. Abraham begot Isaac” (Bereshith 25:19).

To explain this double expression, Rabbi Neiman Zatzal, the Rosh Yeshiva of Ohr Israel in Petah Tikva, wrote:

“There are three kinds of sons: There are sons who have turned away from the path of their fathers, but continue to take pride in them and in their wisdom. There are also sons who have so strayed so much, they are ashamed of their fathers who observe Torah. Among the first kind, it is not their parents who are proud of them, but they who are proud of their parents. As for the second kind, their parents are not proud of them and they are not proud of their parents. Our father Abraham had both kinds of sons. He had the sons of his concubines, to whom he gave gifts and sent away, the result being that they no longer had any connection with him, nor him with them. Abraham also had Ishmael, whom he was certainly not proud of, although Ishmael was proud of him. In fact the Torah calls him ‘Ishmael the son of Abraham,’ and even until today, the children of Ishmael consider themselves to be the descendants of Abraham.

“The third kind are the best of all, these being sons who are attached to their fathers and to the Torah. In such a case, the fathers are proud of their sons, and the sons are proud of their fathers. Hence the verse states, ‘These are the generations of Isaac the son of Abraham. Abraham begot Isaac.’ Isaac cleaved to Abraham, and likewise Abraham cleaved to Isaac. We can now understand why the Midrash [Bereshith Rabba 63:2] cites the verse: ‘Grandchildren are the crown of old men, and the glory of children are their fathers’ [Mishlei 17:6].”

Not a Useless Prayer

It is written, “Isaac entreated Hashem before his wife, for she was barren” (Bereshith 25:21).

Why did Abraham not pray for his wife, since she was barren as well?

To answer this question, we shall cite the Brisker Rav Zatzal in regards to what the Mishnah in Berachot says: “To cry over the past is to utter a useless prayer. If a man’s wife is pregnant and he says, ‘[G-d] grant that my wife bear a male child,’ this is a useless prayer” (Berachot 54a). This means that to pray for a change in nature is not a valid prayer. In the Gemara we read, “Our mother Sarah was incapable of procreation, for it is said, ‘Sarai was barren; she had no child’ [Bereshith 11:30]. She did not even have a womb” (Yebamot 64b). Therefore according to nature, it was impossible for her to have any children whatsoever. Hence Abraham refrained from praying for her to have children, since that would have constituted a prayer to change nature. Such was not the case for Rebecca, who was simply childless. Praying for her to have children did not constitute a request for a change in nature, which is why Isaac prayed for her.

Shortened Even More

It is written, “Isaac entreated Hashem before his wife, for she was barren. Hashem was entreated of him, and Rebecca his wife conceived” (Bereshith 25:21).

Rashi states, “He did much praying and entreating. He [G-d] allowed Himself to be entreated and placated and swayed by him.”

This is difficult to understand. Children had been promised to Isaac even before he was born, since the Holy One, blessed be He, had promised them to Abraham. If Hashem delayed because He desired to hear the prayer of the righteous, a few prayers would have sufficed. That said, why did Isaac have to implore Him to such an extent? Furthermore, why did the Holy One, blessed be He, have so much difficulty accepting his prayer, such that Rashi states: “He allowed Himself to be entreated and placated and swayed by him”? Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld Zatzal answers these questions in the following way: We know that Abraham merited to live for 180 years. Yet in order to prevent him from seeing what his grandson Esau would become, his life was shortened by five years, meaning that he died at the age of 175. Since the life of our father Abraham was certainly very precious to Hashem, we learn that it was very difficult for Him, so to speak, to allow Himself to be easily swayed by the prayers of Isaac and Rebecca, for if Esau were to have been born right away, Abraham’s life would have been shortened to an even greater extent.

All Three

It is written, “Only obey me and go take for me” (Bereshith 27:13).

Since Jacob was afraid of being caught in this ruse, Rebecca advised him not to think of benefiting from the blessings, nor of defeating Esau, but simply to fulfill the mitzvah of obeying his mother. In that case, she promised that nothing bad would happen to him, for those who perform a mitzvah suffer no harm.

This is why the verse praises Jacob, explains Rabbi Moshe Alsheich, for although Rebecca only said “go take for me” – take only – Jacob did three things: He went, he took, and he brought. Hence we read, “He went and took and brought to his mother” (v.14). He did all three things solely to obey his mother.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE PARSHA

The Voice of Torah and the Shira of the Angels

It is written, “The voice is the voice of Jacob” (Bereshith 27:22).

By way of allusion, we may explain the double expression (“the voice is the voice”) according to what the book Mishpat Tzedek says on the statement, “If Israel only knew why G-d visits their sins upon them more than those of the other nations, they would realize that He does not collect even a hundredth of His due” (Zohar III:66a).

The Mishpat Tzedek states that according to our holy books (see Be’er Mayim Chaim, Bereshith 1:1, note 6), all the upper and lower worlds are given over to man. If a Jew studies Torah and serves Hashem, He will shower man with abundance that he can pass on to the worlds that depend on him, giving the angels strength to recite the shira. Yet when Jews neglect Torah study and the service of Hashem, the angels cannot recite the shira, and the worlds do not receive the outpouring of abundance that they need. If the Jewish people sin, this damages all the worlds, which is why it is so grave.

Thus from here we learn that when the voice of Jacob is heard, the angels can recite the shira. This allows us to understand the double expression, “The voice is the voice of Jacob.” This refers to “the voice of Jacob” in the Torah that we study in this world, and “the voice of Jacob” on high, for the voice of Jacob is what gives the angels strength to recite the shira.

YOUR EYES SHALL BEHOLD YOUR TEACHER

RABBI SHEMUEL ELIEZER EIDELS – THE MAHARSHA

The Torah commentaries of the Maharsha, Rabbi Shemuel Eliezer Eidels Zatzal, appear in all editions of the Talmud published after his death. All who study Torah, both great and small, consider his commentaries as the foundation for understanding the words of the Gemara and the explanations of Rashi and Tosafot. One of the Torah giants of his generation wrote: “All his words are based upon the pillars of wisdom and solid foundations, and all the winds in the world cannot move him in the slightest way. Whoever opposes him, it is as if he opposes the Shechinah.”

Rabbi Shemuel Eliezer HaLevi was born in the Polish town of Krakow in 5315 to a famous line of rabbis. His family name became “Eidels” in recognition of his mother-in-law, the Rebbetzin Eidel Lipschitz, who supported both him and his numerous disciples who gathered under his roof.

The Maharsha was known far and wide as a Torah genius and leading figure among his generation. All the great men of Israel were in contact with him, corresponding with him in regards to Halachah and Aggadah. He was also appointed as the leader of the Vaad Arba Aratzot (Council of the Four Lands), which guided the Jews of Poland at the time. In this role, the Maharsha enacted numerous decrees.

Besides his tremendous intelligence, the Maharsha was also known for his righteousness, the purity of his heart, and the aid that offered to others. It is said that during all the time that he served as the Rav of Ostrova, nobody ever suffered from hunger. Indeed, engraved upon the door of his home were the words: “A stranger shall not spend the night outside. My door is open to guests.”

The Terrestrial Court

It happened one morning, immediately after sunrise, that panic-stricken cries were heard coming from outside the Rav’s home.

“Let him in!” ordered the Rav. A local Jew entered, gasping and trembling from head to toe.

“Please sit down, my son. Sit and calm down. How can I help you?” said the Rav.

“I have a problem that began a few years ago,” began the Jew. “At the time, I and a childhood friend made a tremendous amount of money on a business deal. Unfortunately, I behaved badly, committing the worst sins possible: I drank forbidden wine and ate non-kosher food, which I did in a drunken haze, for I drank too much. When I became sober, I was depressed and dejected, finding no rest for my soul.

“Since my friend couldn’t bear to see my pain, he said to me: ‘I see that you’re very upset. That’s why I’m prepared to purchase your sins in exchange for your part of the profits that we made in doing business together.’

“Without hesitation, I agreed to this ‘deal.’ Therefore all my money went to him, and by a tekiat kaf between us, he took upon himself all the grave sins that I had committed.

“My friend died not long afterwards, and now for several nights he has been coming to me in my dreams, demanding that I appear with him in a din Torah before the Celestial Court. He says that it’s because he is being accused of sins that he never committed. He claims that he only agreed to ‘purchase’ them from me in order to ease my mind. Last night, my friend appeared to me in another dream and violently threatened me. I’m a complete wreck! What should I do?!”

The Rav thought about the problem, and then he said: “When he returns to you, tell him that you’re prepared to be judged alongside him, but only before a terrestrial court.”

Sure enough, his dead friend appeared to him in a dream on that very night, and after numerous assurances and supplications, he agreed to appear at the Maharsha’s beit din.

Strike His Grave with My Cane

The set day arrived, and the residents of the community, even strangers, gathered at the great synagogue where the beit din was scheduled to take place. The synagogue was completely packed, and crowds even surrounded the building. A curtain hung in one corner of the synagogue, behind which a place for the deceased had been assigned. Trembling and fear could be seen on the faces of everyone present, as they waited with dread for what was about to happen.

When the Rav arrived, he told the shamash: “Take my cane, go to the cemetery, and strike the grave of the deceased with it three times. Tell him that the Maharsha is summoning him to a din Torah.”

When the shamash left the synagogue, dead silence fell upon the crowd. Seated at the mizrach were members of the court, headed by the Rav, who was dressed in white and radiated sanctity.

Time passed. The shamash returned, struck the bimah three times, and proclaimed: “The din Torah has begun.”

“Let the prosecution speak first,” said the Maharsha in a loud voice.

The Jew arose, trembling from head to toe, and recounted his story.

Once the turn of the accused had come, the Rav arose and spoke once again, his words resounding through the hall: “Let the accused express his grievances.”

At that point, an unintelligible voice was heard coming from the other side of the curtain.

The hearts of those in the synagogue raced, and their faces turned pale.

The deceased finished speaking, and then there was silence. When the Rav realized that people had not understood the deceased’s words, he said: “The deceased believes that he acted solely in order to ease the fears of his friend. He had absolutely no intention of taking responsibility for his sins. He also said, ‘My friend is still alive, and he can repent of his sins. As for myself, I can no longer do this.’”

The members of the beit din then discussed the case among themselves, and the Maharsha arose and said: “The beit din finds the Jew among us innocent, for the accused purchased his sins with full knowledge of the facts. However since a good intention is connected to his deed – trying to ease the fears of his friend – I promise to pray for the atonement of the deceased’s soul.”

The din Torah ended, at which point the deceased no longer tormented his friend.

The soul of the Maharsha ascended to Heaven on Kislev 5, 5392. Since that time, his lips have not ceased to move in the grave due to his teachings, which people learn in every place of study and Beit HaMidrash around the world.