

Parshas Toldos – Meir Cooper (reprinted)

ב כסלו תשע"ו – 14th November 2015 – שבת פ' תולדות

In this week's parsha we get our first glimpse of Esov even before he was born. In Chapter 25 verse 22 it is written "And the sons quarreled within her [Rivka]" Rashi quotes from our Sages that when Rivka passed a place of idolatory Esov strived to exit her womb. The Torah in its first reference to his character describes him as "knowledgeable in huntsmanship" [25:27]. Our Rabbis were at pains to understand the use of the word "knowledgeable" and therefore explain it as being knowledgeable in capturing Yitzchok's heart and attention by asking him questions at the cutting edge of halachic discourse such as how to tithe the salt and straw so as to deceive his father into believing how observant he Esov was in the performance of the Mitzvos.

In verse 29 Esov returns "from the field and he was tired" a harmless statement in itself, and yet in the Gemoro in Bovo Basra daf 16a Rabbi Yochanan enumerates no less than five major sins that Esov transgressed that day including murder and rape, in order to justify his being tired! This was the extent of Esov's wickedness at the princely age of just fifteen! It is therefore not surprising that the Malbim [27:1] asks how Yitzchok could have been duped by Esov to the extent that he wanted to give the Blessings to Esov alone and would not even compromise by at least sharing the Blessings between Esov and Yaakov! We may ask further from the verse in [26:5] "...and it was a source of resentment to Yitzchok and Rivka (that Esov married into the Hittite family)" – thus even Yitzchok was keenly aware of Esov's failings!

A suggested explanation may be culled from Midrash Devorim Rabba [1:15] in which Rabbon Shimon ben Gamliel testified about himself that he would wear his working clothes when serving his father but would exchange them for grade "A" clothing when going out to the marketplace whereas Esov would wear special clothing when serving his father.

Further evidence of Esov's remarkable honour of his father is apparent from [27:41] "...and Esov said in his heart the days of mourning for my father are surely closing in and thereafter I shall kill my brother Yaakov". Rashi states in his first explanation "*the verse is to be understood literally that Esov's intention was] that I should not cause distress to my father".

We should take note that Esov's honour of Yitzchok did not go unnoticed even in Heaven. In the Midrash we quoted it is further said that the B'nei Yisroel on their way to the Land of Israel could not pass through the territory of Edom (Esov) since the merit of Esov's honour of Yitzchok would have led to a victory by Esov if they pass through this territory.

The Gemoro in Sota daf 13a recounts that Esov attempted to block the burial of Yaakov in Machpela on the grounds that he had a legitimate right to be buried there as Yaakov had exercised his rights in burying Leah there. In fact Esov had sold his plot to Yaakov but the documents were still in Egypt. It is recounted in the gemoroh that Hushim ben Dan beheaded Esov in order to avoid degradation of the dead during the interim till the sale documents could be retrieved by Naftoli from Egypt. There are some commentaries that Esov's head rolled into Machpela and remained buried there. Esov's head was in the right place-he understood the importance of keeping the mitzvos-it was his lust for all the good things in life which stopped him.

With all his failings Esov performed one mitzva to perfection. Yitzchok considered this as a foundation on which if Esov is provided with all his material needs as a result of the blessing he may yet return to the path of the righteous. It needed Rivka who knew the true soul of the wicked to understand that the path to repentance could not be achieved through material wellbeing. We may at least gain an appreciation of the value and importance attributable to even one mitzvah well performed.