

## Parshas Toldos

This week's parsha is Toldos. In it, we learn about the birth of Yakov and Esav and Yitzchak's travels, which are chapters that cover crucial points in his life. These culminate in the Berachos Yitzchak was supposed to give to Esav, which Yakov received at Rivka's command. This caused Yakov to have to escape to Lavan.

Yitzchak was 40 years old when he took Rivka as a wife, and Esav was 40 when he married. In Pirkei Avos 5:21, we know that 40 years is the age when someone achieves "Binah" (wisdom), which is a more profound understanding (of themselves and the world around them). Yitzchak and Esav waited until a certain level of "wisdom" to move into the part of their lives that was the continuation of the next generation.

For Yitzchak, this makes sense, as he was the second forefather, i.e. if Avraham were Chochma, Yitzchak would be Binah. But of Esav, why did he wait? And Yakov, who got married much later?

At the beginning of the Parsha, Rashi explains that the chronology of Yitzchak's lifetime was that at 37, he was bound, his mother (Sarah) passed away, and Rivka was born. He had to wait three years until Rivka was able to be wed to Yitzchak (not bearing children) so he could (according to the Gemara in Yevamos 12b, and Kiddushin 29b-as quoted by Mizrahi in Chayeinu) marry her and remove any impure thoughts, i.e. be steadfast in serving Hashem and steeped in righteousness.

On the other hand, Rashi points out that Esav was like a pig, stretching out its split hooves to exclaim that it is a pure animal when it is a pig- completely treif. Esav's descendants externally acted like pigs and would pretend to be reputable (26:34), just as Esav tried to make himself look reputable to follow in his father's ways of getting married at 40 ("my father married when he was forty, I will do the same...") And the Torah is clear that Esav, even after this milestone age was rebellious, so we aren't confused to conflate Esav with righteousness.

On the other hand, Yakov is Tiferes, and Daas waited until much later (77) to get married. In Tehillim (90:10), David Hamelech says, "The number of years in our lives is usually seventy, and if we have great strength we may live to eighty years, most of the years of our lives are filled with hard work and uselessness, and they pass by quickly and fly away..." then in posuk 12 David Hamelech says, "teach us how to count and appreciate the short number of days, and this will bring us to have a wise heart..."

Rashi in 28:9 explains how many years Yakov was in yeshiva, learning and serving Hashem. So Yakov, unlike Esav, worked to achieve his place of continuity and ensure he was best prepared to be the forefather. As David Hamelech says, many lives are often filled with uselessness, yet some, like Yakov, fill it with so much effort for good and righteousness that even later in life, they can begin the next journey. There is an expression, "putting lipstick on a pig," which means dressing something up nice to look good on the outside, but it is still a pig (or junk underneath). Esav was precisely that—a callous evildoer

who tricked his father with his cunning. Even his reaction to not getting his Berachos—he seemed to care deeply—could portray him as something other than what he was—evil. This evil is less about his actions and more of a commentary on human psychology- paralleled by the earlier interaction between Avimelech and Yitzchak.

Earlier in the Parsha, there is a lengthy back and forth in the pesukim, highlighting a portion of Yitzchak's life and the successes that Hashem blessed him with. The pesukim highlights that the people were jealous of Yitzchak, and they kept making it so uncomfortable for Yitzchak that he moved until he ended up in Rechovos, where he prospered further; the story culminates with Avimelech coming to Yitzchak to form a pact in Beer Sheva. When Avimelech and his posse spoke with Yitzchak, they said, "We did not harm you" (26:29), which would be a gaslighting statement in modern times. They tried to gaslight Yitzchak into a pact because of something they should have done regardless and made it seem like Yitzchak was the problem. In regular interactions, they come and apologize and say, we caused you harm; now we apologize and want to ask for a pact. Instead, they suggested that Yitzchak would have done evil to them (as the posuk says), so they tried to bring Yitzchak to their level and said, we didn't cause harm to you, so don't cause harm to us. Was it ever contemplated that Yitzchak would cause harm (when, in fact, the posuk tells us that the local shepherds were fighting with Yitzchak)? This is also an antisemitic gaslighting tactic of our times. The haters will try to paint Israel, and by extension Jews, as the

evildoers that they are to appease their evil (it's a "*whataboutism*", known as *tu quoque*- "look who's talking"). Without self-awareness, this type of human expression can make one seem like lipstick on a pig- which is what Esav was. He seemed like a good guy on paper, but underneath the surface, he was a pig.

The Torah and Chassidus guide us to inform ourselves to do better and work on our core so that the raw, animalistic elements of our lives are refined into our spiritual selves. This work takes a lifetime, and like Yakov, it is accomplished through the Torah and learning. As it says in 26:5, Yitzchak, like Avraham, kept all the edicts like his father. But the word Eikev was used, hinting that Yakov, like Avraham, heeded Hashem's voice and kept all the Mitzvos.

As mentioned in the past, the Torah is not a story or book, so the choice of specific historical recounting may play a very specific role. In this case, teaching us how to live as Yidden.

Good Shabbos