

Do Not Step On the Lion's Tail

Parshath Tholdoth

"And Yitzchak loved Eisav because he hunted with his mouth, and Rivkah loved Yaakov. (Bereishith 24, 28)

The Torah explains to us that after they were born, "Eisav was a man that knew hunting, a man of the field, and Yaakov was an Ish Tam, sitting in the tents" (Bereishith 24, 27) Ish Tam is usually translated as a 'Simple Man' .

The pasuk makes us wonder why it was that Yitzchak loved Eisav over Yaakov. The fact that Eisav was a man of the field and Yaakov was a man that sat in the tents, which connotes that he sat and learned Torah, would make us think that just the opposite should be true. Yitzchak and Yaakov are more alike and therefore there should be a greater affinity between them.

In fact, The pasuk's wording makes it seem that the very reason why Yitzchak loved Eisav was because he "hunted with his mouth ", which means that he was a huckster and a con artist. As Rashi on the pasuk states "that he (Eisav) would hunt him (Yitzchak) , and would deceive him with his words". As the Chachamim further explain- he would ask him how to take Maaser on salt, knowing that, in fact, you don't, just to ingratiate himself to his father.

Later on in the parshah, it explains that Yitzchak decided it was time to bless his first born, calls Eisav and asks him to prepare Kabob for him, Rivkah gets wind of it, and directs Yaakov to put on a whole show, in order to get the Beracha before Eisav does. (Bereishith, chapter 27).

Later still , when Yaakov comes, posing as Eisav, earlier than Yitzchak expected Eisav to return, Yaakov uses terminology that Yitzchak doesn't expect from Eisav in explaining why he returned early. "Because HaShem, your G-d, made it available to me "(see Oonkolus there) . Mentioning HaShem's providence was something unexpected from Eisav. So Yitzchak asks Yaakov to come close so he can feel him- being that Eisav was very hairy, he could feel the difference between his two sons.

At that point Yitzchak makes an interesting declaration –"The voice is the voice of Yaakov and the hands are the hands of Eisav "(Bereishith 27, 22). Notwithstanding the next pasuk- it seems that at this point, Yitzchak is expressing his understanding that this is in fact Yaakov, dressed as Eisav, and putting on a show.

Later, when Eisav returns and it becomes obvious to Eisav, what Yaakov had done, Yitzchak seems to 'pour salt on Eisav's wounds 'and tells him "Your brother came in a masquerade and took your Berrachah." (Bereishith 27, 35). It seems like it would have been better for Yitzchak to downplay Yaakov's rouse, and not stoke Eisav's anger by making such a statement. Why did Yitzchak say such a thing?

To get an understanding as to what was going on here, and why Yitzchak acted the way he did, one should first analyze Yitzchak's actions and reflect on what that shows us about his own nature, and how he sees himself in life.

At the Akeida, Yitzchak realizes that he is going to be the sacrifice, when he points out to Avraham that they brought no Seh for a burnt offering, and Avraham answers him in the indirect way that he does (Bereishith 22, 7) .

Yitzchak doesn't run away then. In fact, our Chachamim teach us that, at the altar, it was Yitzchak himself that advises Avraham to bind his hands and his feet, so that he won't move and possibly cause the shechitah to go awry and make himself posul as a korban.

Our Chachamim teach us that Yitzchak has the Midah of Gevurah as evidenced by his self control at the akeidah. As it says in Pirkei Avoth "Who is a brave man? One who subdues his inclinations".

In fact, when the servants of Yitzchak, dig again, the wells that had been dug by Avraham's servants, the shepherds of Gerar fight with him over the wells, and each time, Yitzchak retreats, and does not fight back (Bereishith 26, 19-22) .

HaShem had told Avraham that his seed would inherit Eretz Yisrael, and that his offspring, would inherit him (Bereishith 6, 7, and 15, 4) . And yet Avraham does not give Yitzchak his berachah, and Yitzchak sees that his direct progeny don't inherit the land and become Am Yisrael.

The chachamim compare Bnei Yisrael's place in the world as that of a sheep among 70 wolves. Numerically and by the virtue of relative strength, this sheep has no hope to fend off the 70 wolves. Rather, the sheep must rely on cunning, diplomacy, strategy etc to fight for his life. He will be eaten up alive, if it acts as a push over who constantly exercises self control.

Yitzchak throughout his life, exercised self control, and did not seem to stand up for himself or fight back. You could say that he was an "Ish Tam" – 'a Simple Man'. He sees the same character traits in Yaakov. The problem is that such character traits, could lead to one being bullied and won over. How could the Jewish people defend themselves if they acted like this all of their lives?

In order to persevere among the 70 wolves and to strive, in order to fulfill their mission to lead the world in the service of HaShem, they have to be cunning, know how to "win friends and influence people ", and how stand up for themselves in ways that don't depend on sheer number or brute force.

Yitzchak sees this ability in Eisav who "hunted with his mouth ", and was "a man of the field" (see above). Yaakov would make an excellent advisor, but the nation's leader and progenitor needed to be a person that could stand up for himself verbally, physically, strategically, with cunning and guile if need be.

Therefore, when Rivkah realizes that Yitzchak would be giving over the reins of nationhood to Eisav by way of the Blessing of the First Born, she prods Yaakov into action.

Yaakov has to now show his cunning, in the way he answers Yitzchak's questions, without giving himself away. He has to put on a Hollywood show, with costumes, a script etc. And he has to do all of this quickly, before Eisav comes back from his hunt.

And when Yaakov pulls it off, Yitzchak realizes that he had underestimated his right full heir and gladly gives him the reins of the nations by bestowing on him the blessings of the First Born.

In fact, he even warns Eisav not to underestimate Yaakov anymore by pointing out to him how Yaakov had used guile and showmanship to out maneuver him to gain his rightful place in history as the rightful heir to Avraham Aveinu's blessings, as bestowed onto him by HaShem.