

Esav and Yaakov are born and they grow up.

וַיִּגְדְּלוּ הַנְּעָרִים וַיְהִי עֵשָׂו אִישׁ יָדַע צֹד אִישׁ שָׂדֶה וַיַּעֲקֹב אִישׁ תֵּם
יָשֵׁב אֹהֳלִים:

“And the youths grew up. It was that Esav was a Man, he knew hunting, and he was a man of the field (a laborer); and Yaakov was a complete man (of faith); he dwelled in tents.” (Genesis 25:27).

Esav and Yaakov had the same parents and, seemingly, the same upbringing. Their personalities emerged. Esav shirked the family business of shepherding and nomading. Instead, he made his own way by hunting and working the fields. Not only did he hunt he “knew hunting.” He was an inventor. Yaakov, did follow in the family business. He was a complete man—full faith in HaShem—and he dwelled in tents. He was a nomad.

This in it of itself does not make one better than the other. In the very next verse we see how the parents of these twins differed in their opinion of their children. “And Yitzchok loved Esav because of the game in his mouth and Rivkah loved Yaakov.” (Genesis 25:28). Here we see the two parents differ in the children that they love and want to succeed. Surely both parents loved both children. This love, like we discussed last week (in our essay on Genesis 24:67), is a love for the person’s traits, character, virtues, and potential. If so, how can Rivkah and Yitzchok differ so completely in how they viewed their children?

The Torah gives us a reason for the difference. Yitzchak loved Esav because of how Esav took care of him. Rivkah did not see this side of Esav. She also saw something different in Yaakov that Yitzchok did not see. Thus, they each saw their children differently. What was it about their career direction that caused Yizchok to love Esav while Rivkah loved Yaakov?

The Torah tells us that Yaakov dwelled in tents. This refers to his learning under the tents of his father, and of Shem—Malki Tzedek—and Ever. (Bereishis Rabbah 63:10). This verse refers to the long term development. As the Torah often does in its history telling, it gives a general overview of what happened—the youths grew up, they each carved their own paths. (Ibid 25:27). Then the Torah digresses with specific history—Yaakov was boiling a stew... (Ibid 25:29).

The Gemara Bava Basra 123a says, “Rav continues and says that she [Leah] would sit at the crossroads and ask: What are the deeds of the older son? The passersby would answer: He is an evil man, and he robs people. She would ask: What are the deeds of the younger son? They would answer: He is “a moral man, dwelling in tents” (Genesis 25:27). And because she was so distraught at the prospect of marrying the evil brother, she would cry and pray for mercy until her eyelashes fell out. Since the weakness of her eyes was due to this cause, characterizing her eyes as weak constitutes praise. This is Leah’s prayer for mercy to which Rabbi Yonatan referred. The Gemara comments: And her desire not to marry Esav is the basis of that which is written: “And the Lord saw that Leah was hated, and He opened her womb” (Genesis 29:31). What is the meaning of “hated”? If we say that she was literally hated, is it possible? The verse there did not speak to the disparagement of even a non-kosher animal, so did the verse here speak to the disparagement of the righteous? Rather, the Holy One, Blessed be He, saw that the behavior of Esav was hated by her, and therefore: “And He opened her womb.”

The Gemara suggests that our verse was what was told about the youths as they grew up. That Esav was a hunter and a man of the field is indicative, according to the Gemara, that he was a thief. The obvious question on this Gemara—besides how it jumps to the conclusion that Esav was evil simply because he was not a nomad—is why Leah thought she was destined for Yaakov. Yitzchok married his first cousin-once removed. Leah was Esav’s first cousin. She was not the only one eligible in Avraham’s family. Yishmael had eligible children. Keturah had eligible children. These are closer relations—by family ties and by distance—to Esav. Further, if Esav was going to follow in his father’s footsteps and choose an Aramean wife, from Avraham’s family, Lot—Avraham’s nephew—had descendants, and perhaps Haran—Avraham’s brother—had other descendants.

Further refutation that Leah was bound to Esav is that Esav actually took wives from the local Hittim, and then he took a wife from Yishmael’s family. The latter shows that Yishmael’s family was also a viable option. Esav never went looking for Leah. When Esav heard that Yaakov went to Padan Aram to seek out a wife from Lavan’s family, Esav then took a wife from Yishmael’s children. Esav does not go to Padan Aram to seek out Leah and leave Rachel to Yaakov. This Gemara is a *tzoirich iyun*.

The Midrash says “So long as they were young they could not be distinguished by what they did and no one paid much attention to their characters, but when they reached the age of

thirteen, one went his way to the houses of learning and the other went his way to the idolatrous temples.” (Bereishis Rabbah 63:10). The Midrash continues that Esav *knew hunting*. “He was a clever trapper. He would ask his father questions to make Yitzchok think that he was learning the tradition. It was all a ruse.” (Ibid).

Bartanura questions this Midrash. “So long as they were young they were indistinguishable. But we saw before that from the time they were in the womb they were already fighting and they were destined for two different paths. Thus, it must be that while they were younger they did not exhibit their differences. Only when they were older—fifteen years old—did such difference start to emerge.”

Rashi says, “Esav was a man of the field. He had no regular occupation. That is how it is derived that he was a thief and evil.” Not having a regular occupation would lead Esav to gain food and income in unlawful and evil ways. Rashi says that “תם refers to one who is simple. Not an expert in all things. He is not ingenious to deceive people.”

Ibin Ezra points out the difference. Esav was an expert huntsman. He knew hunting well. “To know hunting you must be a deceiver. You practice tricking the prey. Yaakov, on the other hand, was of moral character, תם, and his occupation was straight.” Now we can see how the suggestion is that Esav’s character was not righteous. Either his occupation made him crooked or his cunning mind helped him be a better hunter.

Chizkuni says the same, “his vocation was to use trickery to achieve his ends. Trapping and hunting wild beasts cannot be done successfully without first deceiving those beasts, as man is physically weaker than they are. The expression is also used by the Torah as Yitzchok, in due course, would ask Esau: הביאה לי ציד, “bring me some game.” The Torah therefore had to tell us first that Esau had become a hunter of game by profession. Yaakov’s occupation is also explained. According to the plain meaning this means that Yaakov tended sheep i.e. slept in tents as the sheep graze where they find meadows. Compare Genesis 4:20, “the founder of nomads tending sheep and cattle.” Another reason for describing Yaakov in such terms is that he was going to make his livelihood as a shepherd while at Lavan for 20 years.” According to the second explanation, we are only told that he was a hunter so that we know why Yitzchok loved his game so much and why he asked for it later. It was not about his character.

Radak also talks about their divergent occupations and their choices in how to spend their lives. “As soon as they grew up their activities diverged completely from one another, one

concentrating on mundane activities, activities which showed immediate profitable results, the other concentrating on the acquisition of knowledge, wisdom, i.e. abstract matters. One was an extrovert, at home in the fields, mountains, etc, whereas the other was an introvert as reflected in the term. It says ‘tents’ in the plural because Yaakov studied with any wise man he came across. He was indiscriminating in this regard, only trying to obtain knowledge.” This, still, does not make one evil and one saintly.

Sforno says that “*man of the field*, Esav was an expert farmer. יושב אהלים, the plural mode indicates that the Torah speaks of two distinctly different kinds of tents; one is the tent used by shepherds, the other the tent described as בל - יצען described in Isaiah 33:20, (a reference to Yerushalayim or the Beis Hamikdash). The function of that “tent” is to help people come closer to HaShem and to gain insight into His ways and as a result to become holy, inspired by His glory.” While Yaakov may have been into bringing others closer to HaShem, ala Avraham, Esav was a farmer. It was an honest occupation. Yaakov was saintly, but was Esav evil?

Birkat Asher points out that if the Torah’s chronology is taken literally, so then Yaakov dwelling in tents—that of Shem and Ever—the 14 years that are missing in Yaakov’s timeline, happened before the sale of the primogeniture. The missing 14 years need not be from when Yaakov ran because we do not know the age Yaakov was when he ran. The 14 years could have been prior to this sale. It would make more sense for this to have happened this way, for then the sale of the primogeniture was between adults, and not fifteen year old children. (While over 13 is an adult, such an important sale done by teens would not carry the same weight). Another result of having the 14 years counted from this point is that then Yaakov was able to dwell in Shem’s tent and in Ever’s tent. Shem would have been alive still and when he died Yaakov moved on to Ever. Thus, he dwelled in ‘tents’ plural. If the 14 years happen later then he would have missed dwelling in Shem’s tent. Rashi above, Genesis 25:17, says that Yaakov only dwelled in Ever’s tent because Shem had died.

According to Birkat Asher we can understand how a parents love may diverge. These are not children. These are adults now and the parents see the paths they are taking, the careers they choose, and their judgments on wives and how to spend their time.

According to those that explain that Yaakov was not cunning, our next verses dissuade us of that notion. “And Esav said to Yaakov, “Give me some of that red stuff to gulp down, for I am famished... Yaakov said, “First sell me your birthright.” (Ibid 25:30-31). Yaakov is one to seek

out an opportunity. He sees his brother's weakness, a time of vulnerability. He chooses that moment to wrestle the birthright from Esav. Yaakov was indeed a man of cunning. Even if it was his mother who schemed in regards to the disguise to attain the Blessing for Yaakov (ibid 27:8 – 13), this was Yaakov's opportunistic bargaining. It may be that Yaakov felt in order to get the birthright it had to be at a time when he can negotiate for it. This was still a clever play and Yaakov is cunning. We also see how cunning he was in his bargains with Lavan (in regards to the striped and speckled lambs, and how he used colored sticks to outwit the clever Lavan).

It is more sensible to think our verse is telling us about their occupations and the way the two chose to spend their lives. Esav was one for hard work, but working smarter not harder. He was cerebral, he liked working with his hands, and solving the puzzle of hunting and farming. His knowledge was of the outdoors, nature, and the ways of people. Yaakov was a nomad and shepherd. He acquired his father's knowledge of the business and followed it.

We see from a verse further that Esav was a forthright person. When he learned that his father gave away the Blessing, he does not seek to blame anyone, to be quick to anger, or seek revenge. Instead, he begs his father for a second blessing. Instead of coming out and exposing Yaakov for his chicanery, and blaming others, Esav simply wants a Blessing. It is not until after Yitzchok himself exposes Yaakov "your brother came with *guile* and *took* the Blessing" (ibid 27:35) that Esav says "Was he, then, named Yaakov that he might supplant me these two times? First he took away my birthright and now he has taken away my blessing!" (ibid 27:36). Even so, instead of immediate revenge he asks, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?" (ibid).

It is this Blessing that is the clue as to why Yitzchok loved Esav and Rivkah loved Yaakov. From this, too, we learn an important lesson about honesty and marriage. It is not enough to tell your spouse the truth, but you should *tell your spouse the truth*.

Earlier, Rivkah is told "and HaShem answered her, "Two nations are in your womb, two separate peoples shall issue from your body; one people shall be mightier than the other, And the older shall serve the younger." (Ibid 25:23). Rivkah received the prophecy that out of two nations issuing from her one will rise over the other. The older one—first born—would serve the younger. At this point she does not know she is having twins. "Her days of gestation were full, and lo! Behold! There were twins inside her." (Ibid 25:24). When the Torah says 'lo behold' it means there was something that was unknown previously. Rivkah did not know it was twins. She knew it would be two children. Or that one child would have two children.

Upon birthing the twins she now knows that the prophecy is true. Two nations were inside her and the older will serve the younger. From their birth Rivkah knew Yaakov was the heir apparent. It is surprising then that she did not share this news with Yitzchok. Yitzchok did not know Yaakov was to be mightier. If he did, he would have given Yaakov the Blessing. Rivkah kept it secret from him. After the lads grew up and she saw how much Esav served Yitzchok, perhaps she hadn't the heart to tell Yitzchok that his favorite or his eldest would not be the dominant nation.

Yitzchok loved Esav for Esav's care and labors of love. Rivkah loved Yaakov because he was the one that would be served. Undoubtedly, she conveyed this—implied or otherwise—to Yaakov. Yaakov thus pounced on the opportunity to officially take the birthright. However, it is also ostensible that Yaakov never told Yitzchok about his purchasing it. If he had, there would be no reason to *take* the Blessing with *guile*. Rivkah had good reason to love Yaakov. She saw his dwelling in tents as being the heir apparent to the Holy Land. Yitzchok saw Esav's earthly ways, might, and wits, as signs of a future great people.

HaShem tells Yitzchok that a great nation will come from him. "I will make your heirs as numerous as the stars of heaven, and assign to your heirs all these lands, so that all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your heirs." (ibid 26:4). Unlike by Avraham, HaShem does not tell Yitzchok which son would father that great nation or who would inherit the Land. Yitzchok believes it is Esav. This may have been assuaged if Rivkah told Yitzchok about the prophesy and if Yaakov told his parents about purchasing the primogeniture.

It is not enough to be honest with a spouse, loved one, parent, or child. Telling the truth is always important. It is also important to *tell* the truth. That is to say to actually tell the people that matter most the information that matters most. Do not hold information back. A shared life means shared information. Parents can only make uniformed decisions if they have access to the same information.