WEEKLY DVAR TORAH • TOLDOS

When Being Right Matters More Than Seeing the *Truth*

4G SENIOR MECHANECH

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גַּם־בָּרוּךְ יִהְיֶה

"He, too, shall remain blessed."

BEREISHIS 27:33

וַיֶּאֱהַב יִצְחָק אֶת־עֵשָׂו כִּי־צַיִד בְּפִיו וְרִבְקָה אֹהֶבֶת אֶת־יַעֲקֹב

"And Yitzchak loved Eisav, because there was game in his mouth, while Rivka loved Yaakov."

BEREISHIS 25:28

What does it mean that Yitzchak Avinu loved Eisav because there was game in his mouth?

Rashi explains that Eisav deceived his father with his words, presenting himself as someone who was exceptionally careful about mitzvos.

It goes without saying that we are speaking about Yitzchak Avinu, and we have to be careful about attributing ordinary human failings to one of the Avos. Nevertheless, the Torah is telling us something about Yitzchak's relationship with Eisav. He loved him, believed in him, and intended to give him the brachos.

But let's look at what happened when Yaakov received the brachos instead of Eisav. When Eisav arrived to receive his bracha, Yitzchak realized what had happened.

וַיֶּחֱרַד יִצְחָק חֲרָדָה גְּדֹלָה עַד־מְאֹד

"And Yitzchak trembled with an exceedingly great trembling."

BEREISHIS 27:33

Chazal (Bereishis Rabbah 67:2) describe Yitzchak's trembling as even greater than the fear he experienced at the Akeidah. This is actually an astonishing comparison. At the Akeidah, Yitzchak was facing the possibility of death. Certainly the bracha is a serious matter, but what was so frightening about discovering that Yaakov had received the bracha instead?

And, as always, what lesson are we meant to learn from Yitzchak's trembling? How does it impact our avodas Hashem?

Perhaps, on our level, we can see that Yitzchak was confronting something that can be terribly difficult for any of us. He had believed something for years, acted upon that belief, and now had to consider the possibility that he had misunderstood what was happening in his own family.

There are few things more uncomfortable than discovering that we may have been wrong about something in which we were deeply invested.

Think about a parent whose child tells him that something about the way he was raised was painful. The parent remembers how hard he worked, how much he sacrificed, how desperately he wanted to give his child a good life. He hears the criticism and immediately begins explaining himself. Doesn't his child understand how much he loves him?

But the child wasn't questioning his love. He was trying to tell his father about his pain. The father is so busy defending himself that he cannot hear what his child is saying. Why does this happen?

There is a fundamental difference between guilt and shame. Guilt means that I did something wrong. Shame means that there is something wrong with me. When a person experiences his mistakes as evidence that he is somehow inadequate, admitting that he was wrong becomes frightening.

A husband who has always thought of himself as a devoted spouse may find it almost unbearable when his wife tells him that she feels lonely in their marriage. He begins listing all the things he does for her. And the truth is, he probably does do those things. But she is telling him that she feels alone, and he is trying to prove that he is a good husband.

We do this because our understanding of ourselves can be surprisingly fragile. When our worth depends upon being a good parent, a loving spouse, a successful businessman, anything that challenges that identity feels threatening. We become defensive, sometimes even angry, because we cannot bear what the criticism seems to say about us.

But a person who feels secure in his own worth can listen to something difficult about himself without immediately needing to defend himself. He can admit that he made a mistake without feeling that the mistake defines him.

And perhaps this helps us appreciate something remarkable about Yitzchak Avinu. After he realizes what happened, Yitzchak says: גַּם־בָּרוּךְ יִהְיֶה, *He, too, shall remain blessed.* Rashi explains that Yitzchak willingly affirmed Yaakov's bracha.

Chazal (Bereishis Rabbah 67:1) connect this moment to a pasuk in Mishlei:

> חֶרְדַּת אָדָם יִתֵּן מוֹקֵשׁ וּבוֹטֵחַ בַּה׳ יְשֻׂגָּב
>
> *"Fear of man creates a trap, but one who trusts in Hashem will be elevated."*
> **MISHLEI 29:25**

The Medrash explains that Yitzchak could have cursed Yaakov. Instead, because of his bitachon, he blessed him. What does bitachon have to do with Yitzchak's willingness to affirm the brachos?

The Medrash is teaching us something about what it means to have a secure sense of self. When my worth depends upon being right, I cannot afford to be wrong. Every criticism becomes a threat, every disagreement something I have to win. I may spend years defending a decision that I know, somewhere inside, I would make differently today.

But if I know that my worth comes from Hashem, that I am a neshama whose value is not dependent upon my accomplishments or my mistakes, then I can afford to be wrong. I don't have to protect an image of myself at the expense of the truth.

Yitzchak was shaken by what had happened, but he did not need to insist upon his original understanding simply because it was his. In fact, Yitzchak had such a secure sense of self, rooted in his bitachon, that when he learned that Yaakov had purchased the bechorah, he recognized that he had blessed him appropriately.

There is tremendous strength in being able to say, "I didn't understand this before. I see it differently now."

I think about how much pain we cause ourselves, and the people closest to us, because we are so frightened of admitting that we were wrong. How many conversations become arguments because we feel compelled to defend ourselves? How many opportunities to become better parents, spouses, and friends do we miss because we cannot bear to hear that someone has experienced us differently than we intended?

We should ask ourselves why being wrong feels so threatening.

> *Maybe, somewhere inside, we've confused making a mistake with being a mistake.*

Yitzchak Avinu teaches us that our deepest convictions need not prevent us from reconsidering what we thought we knew. His bitachon allowed him to remain open to the truth, even when that truth was painful.

TAKE IT WITH YOU

Our responsibility is to live in reality as it actually is and not as we need it to be.

This is one of the most important aspects of our avodas Hashem in our generation. We must learn to feel secure enough in our relationship with Hashem that we no longer have to defend ourselves against every uncomfortable truth.

To be able to listen when someone tells us that we've hurt them. To be curious about something we may have misunderstood. To acknowledge that we could have done better, without feeling that we are somehow less worthy because of it.

There is so much we might learn about ourselves if we weren't so afraid of what we might discover.



SOURCES

Bereishis 25:28 (sefaria.org/Genesis.25.28) · Rashi on Bereishis 25:28 (sefaria.org/Rashi_on_Genesis.25.28) · Bereishis 27:33 (sefaria.org/Genesis.27.33) · Bereishis Rabbah 67:1–2 (sefaria.org/Bereshit_Rabbah.67.1) · Mishlei 29:25 (sefaria.org/Proverbs.29.25)