

CHIZUK AND IDUD

*Divrei Torah from the weekly sedra
with a focus on living in Eretz Yisrael -
Chizuk for Olim & Idud for not-yet-Olim*

This week's Parsha continues with the Torah's exploration of the theme of B'chora vs B'racha: From the very beginning of Sefer B'reishit we have seen that the first-born is not always the most qualified candidate to carry on the family's mission (e.g. Kayin and Hevel). Does the fact that one was born first (b'chora) ever serve as a guarantee that they will be chosen as the recipient of the Father's primary blessing?

The past Parshiyot have described how Yitzchak is chosen to be the next patriarch even though Yishmael was Avraham's first-born. In this week's Parsha, this already familiar theme plays itself out once again. Yitzchak's twin sons compete for their father's blessing, and again it is the younger of two who will be chosen. Here the story takes an unexpected twist for Yitzchak prepares himself to bestow the blessing upon Eisav - his B'chor. Yaakov Avinu successfully executes his mother's plan, and masquerading as his older brother he is granted the B'racha. As a result of Yaakov's trickery, Eisav is consumed by a burning desire to exact revenge, which he temporarily puts on hold: "And Eisav hated Yaakov because their Father had given Yaakov a blessing and he said, in his heart, 'Let the days of mourning for my Father be at hand, then will I slay my Brother, Yaakov' (B'reishit 27:41).

Out of respect for his father, Eisav was willing to temporarily postpone his plans for revenge, thinking as the Radak writes, that Yitzchak's "end is approaching. I will wait for him to die and then

kill my brother so as not to cause my father grief!"

Towards the end of the Parsha we find that the two spurned siblings - Eisav and Yishmael - join forces: "And Eisav went to Yishmael, and took unto the wives that he had, Machalat the daughter of Yishmael... to be his wife" (B'reishit 28:9). A joint dynasty is formed uniting the house of Eisav with the house of Yishmael - their mutual grievances surely reinforcing one another...

Eisav's plans for revenge are further thwarted by Rivka Imeinu's sagacious move sending her beloved son far away, and thus physically separating the two. Fearing Eisav's sense of rage and animosity, she convinces Yitzchak that he should direct Yaakov to travel to her own family in order to find an appropriate, non-Canaanite bride.

Interestingly, it was this blessing that motivated Eisav to search out a potential partner from amongst Yishmael's daughters. Eisav heard how Yitzchak blessed Yaakov, sending him to Padan-Aram, to find a wife with the stipulation that: 'Thou shalt not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan (B'reishit 28:6). As the Rashbam explains, the blessing in question was the blessing of inheriting Eretz Yisrael, and Eisav realizes that his present Hittite wives rob him of the opportunity to receive a share of the land. This propelled him towards Yishmael's family, with the hope that this union would enable him to gain a foothold in Eretz Yisrael!

As the Pasuk stresses, however, Eisav's move was made half-heartedly. He was unwilling to distance himself from the negative influence of his existent Canaanite wives, and was only ready to

add on an additional wife [‘Al Nashav’].

Although Eisav’s simmering hatred was temporarily put on hold, it has reverberated throughout the generations, sprouting countless outbursts of senseless violence - sadly, still with no end yet in sight...

A well-known, and oft quoted, rabbinic adage says that it is a “halacha” that Eisav hates Yaakov. As Rav Moshe Feinstein writes (Igros Moshe, Choshen Mishpat 2:77), this means that - just as the Halacha, the Torah itself, never changes so too the hatred of the nations of the world towards the people of Israel is of an eternal, and permanent nature as well - Sin’at Olam l’am Olam!

This saying has become deeply ingrained within the Jewish mentality, seeing as it has been repeatedly reinforced by horrific events which seemingly prove it to be true.

Rashi quotes this phrase in his comments on the Torah’s description of the encounter of Yaakov and Eisav after their separation of 20 years. The verse in question B’reishit 33:4 reads: “And Eisav ran to meet him and embraced him, fell upon his neck and kissed him and they wept.” Rashi notes that on the word “kissed” there are dots which indicate that Eisav did not kiss with a full heart.

As opposed to Rashi, others have seen this very same verse as one which provides us with hope that things can be different. Rav S.R. Hirsch writes that: "Humane feelings overcame Eisav as is evident in the words ‘they wept’. A kiss can be false but not tears that flow at such moments. Tears are drops from one’s innermost soul. This kiss and these tears show us that Eisav was also a descendant of Avraham. In Eisav there must be something more than the wild hunter. Gradually, more and more, will

he lay down the sword and turn more and more towards humaneness." Halevai

Be this as it may, in the interim we would do well to learn that which we can from Eisav’s behavior. As mentioned earlier, although Eisav understands that the blessing of the land was given to his brother - he does not give up and tries anything he can in order to achieve a share in the land.

If this is how Eisav behaves - it behooves us to do no less! To do all in our power to make our love for Eretz Yisrael manifest in our behavior as well (Did anyone mention Aliyah... ??)

Rabbi Yerachmiel Roness, Ramat Shiloh, Beit Shemesh