
פרשת תולדות

פרק כה פסוק כז

וַיִּגְדְּלוּ הַנְּעָרִים וַיְהִי עֵשָׂו אִישׁ יָדַע צִיד אִישׁ שָׂדֵה וַיַּעֲקֹב אִישׁ תָּם יֹשֵׁב אֵהָלִים:

רש"י

תָּם: אִינוֹ בָּקִי בְּכָל אֵלֶּה, כָּלְבוֹ כֵּן פִּיּוֹ. מִי שֶׁאִינוֹ חָרִיף לְרַמּוֹת קְרוּי תָּם:

מושג

כָּלְבוֹ כֵּן פִּיּוֹ.

Translation:

That which was in his heart was also in his mouth.

Explanation:

The Torah, while telling us of Eisav's devious nature, אִישׁ יָדַע צִיד, tells us likewise of Yaakov's simple and pure nature. Yaakov and Eisav were complete opposites; Eisav by nature was a master of the art of deception, while Yaakov, the אִישׁ אִמֵּת, lacked this skill. The Torah tells us this about Yaakov so that we understand that even though Yaakov will be forced to master this skill in order to deal with Eisav and Lavan, it was against his true nature¹.

We also learn from this Pasuk that even though Yaakov's and Eisav's basic nature were so different, no one realized the difference until it was too late to educate Eisav appropriately².

Looking in the Pasuk:

From the fact that the Pasuk contrasted אִישׁ תָּם to אִישׁ יָדַע צִיד, and did not say אִישׁ צִיד, but rather אִישׁ יָדַע צִיד, we learn that the Torah is telling us something about the character traits of Eisav and Yaakov and not their vocations. Rashi therefore explains these terms to be alluding to Eisav's ability to deceive, while Yaakov was not expert in these matters.

¹ See notes #1

² See notes #3

NOTES

1. Rashi comes to explain the meaning of the word תם. The word usually translates as complete³, and should be translated here as meaning that Yaakov was a complete man⁴. Rashi was not satisfied that this was the correct meaning here. Instead, Rashi translates the word here to mean simple⁵, much in the same way we understand the תם בן תם in the הגדה של פסח to be the simple child. The question is: Why did Rashi choose to translate in this manner⁶? Also puzzling is why Rashi chooses the Midrashic translation of the words איש יודע ציד - to be a devious man⁷ – when he could have translated according to the simple meaning of the words: a man who is a skilled hunter.

I believe the two questions answer each other. The Torah juxtaposes Yaakov and Eisav, comparing the יודע ציד of Eisav to the תם איש of Yaakov. Clearly the term תם איש is not a vocation, therefore Rashi understood that the יודע ציד was also not a vocation, but rather something pertaining to Eisav's nature⁸. Rashi, therefore, chose to explain according to the Midrash that Eisav was יודע ציד, meaning that he knew how to 'hunt' others with his deceiving speech. The opposite of one who knows how to deceive would be one who does not know of such matters. Rashi therefore explains that the term תם used here differs from the interpretation by נה and אברהם, where it refers to a perfection of moral character; Rather it should be taken to mean that יעקב had a pure simplicity in his nature that allowed him to freely express all that was in his heart.

It is quite easy to understand why the Torah tells us of Eisav's devious nature. His ability to deceive, יודע ציד, איש יודע ציד, explains how he 'fooled' יצחק into thinking he was מדקדק במצוות, as the Midrash Tanchumah, quoted by Rashi informs us:

ויאהב יצחק את עשו כי ציד בפיו: מהו כי ציד בפיו? היה צד את יצחק הצדיק בפיו. אתה מוצא כל עבירות שהקב"ה שונא כלן היו בעשו...כשהיה בא עשו מן החוץ היה אומר לאביו אבא המלח מהו שתהא חייבת במעשר? והיה תמה יצחק ואומר ראה בני זה כמה דקדק במצוות! והיה אומר לו אביו בני היכן היית היום הזה והוא אומר לו בבית התלמוד לא כך הוא הלכה מן כך וכך, לא כך איסורו לא כך התירו, ומתוך דברים אלו הוה צדו בפיו, על כן אהבו.

But why was it important to tell us of the תמימות of Yaakov?

³ The word תם meaning complete or finished appears many times in the Torah as in: מִזֵּיהַּ וְתָמָם הַשָּׁנָה. הָהוּא וַיָּבֵאוּ אֵלָיו בַּשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁנִיָּת וַיֹּאמְרוּ לוֹ לֹא־נִכְחַד מֵאֲדָנִי כִּי אִם־תָּם הַכֶּסֶף וּמִקְנֵה הַבְּהֵמָה אֶל־אֲדָנִי לֹא נִשְׂאָר לִפְנֵי אֲדָנִי בְּלִתי אִם־גִּוְוַתְנוּ וְאֲדַמְתֶּנוּ:

⁴ The תרגום here indeed translates the word תם as שלים, as he does by Noach (איש צדיק תמים) and by Avrohom (והיה תמים). Rashi himself in (יז:א) translates the words תמים תמים as היה שלם. This 'complete' man refers to a state of moral perfection.

⁵ Rashi does not write that Yaakov did not want to deceive but rather that אינו חריף, and אינו בקי. Rashi thus understands that the term תם here was not a reflection of Yaakov's moral character but instead a comment on his nature. That is to say that he simply did not know how to deceive others. It is possible that this is why Rashi writes כן פיו, כלבו כן פיו, and not the usual בפה בפה. The latter refers to a conscious decision not to lie, while the former refers to one to whom it does not occur to lie. The Malbim concurs with this and writes: תם: בלתי יודע לרמאות. This in no way should be taken to be an evaluation of Yaakov's intellectual ability. The term simple here is meant as someone who was a pure soul, almost naïve; who said what he thought – and in that sense he was actually שלם, making the use of the term תם fully appropriate.

⁶ It is possible that Rashi felt that the Torah would not call such a young boy תמים, as having reached moral perfection at the age of 13 is improbable.

⁷ ויהי עשו איש יודע ציד צד את הבריות בפיו (מדרש רבה)

⁸ There is an important distinction to be made here between describing Eisav's nature or his moral character. The Pasuk is clearly not telling me only how Eisav acted, for if so it should read איש ציד. The fact that it says איש יודע ציד, teaches me that this was part of his very nature. So too, תם איש, is therefore to be understood as one who by nature was not given to the art of deception.

Perhaps the Torah is coming to inform us that the future actions of יעקב were not only not part of his true nature, but were in fact, the opposite of his true nature. As the story of יעקב unfolds over the next few chapters, we find יעקב to be quite the רמאי. He too fools his father, and seems to openly lie about his identity. He has an ongoing battle of wits with Lavan, and even goes so far as to say אחיו (מגליה יג): אנה ברמאות. In פרשת וישלח he misleads עשיו regarding his intentions to travel with him, and even his children seem to have learned the art of deception to perfection as the story of אנשי שכם attests. One could read these events and possibly gain the impression that this was always a hidden part of יעקב's nature, a nature his descendants inherited from him. To counter this the Torah stresses: ויעקב איש תם, his true nature knew nothing of such trickery.

The real יעקב is a man of ultimate truth, כלבו כן פיו, as we say in our Tefilah: תתן אמת ליעקב. Every act of רמאות went against his pure nature and had to be learned as he assumed his new role⁹. This nature is that which he bequeathed to כלל ישראל. The stereotype of the Jew as the 'Shylock' of history, were traits that were learned so that they could survive among the 'Lavan's' throughout history who sought, and continue to seek, to destroy them. Thus, יעקב איש תם, teaches us, בני יעקב, about our true nature and the levels of truth to which we should aspire.

1. Questions for Further Thought:

- a. We have learned that Yaakov, although a man of truth, had to learn the art of deception in order to survive. This seems to be a case of the end justifying the means. Do you think this is always the case?
- b. Is Yaakov called a man of truth, תתן אמת ליעקב, only because of his nature, or also because of his actions? What actions of Yaakov would justify this title?

3. While not related to the Musag we have learned, it is impossible to learn this Pasuk without reading the commentary of R.S.R. Hirsch¹⁰ who writes:

Our sages, who never objected to draw attention to the small and great mistakes and weaknesses in the history of our great forefathers, and thereby make them just the more instructive for us, here too on ויגדלו make a remark which is indeed a 'signpost' for us all. They point out that the striking contrast in the grandchildren of Abraham may have been due, not so much to a difference in their temperaments, as to the mistakes in the way they were brought up. As long as they were little, no attention was paid to the slumbering differences in their natures, both had exactly the same teaching and educational treatment, and the great law of education חנוך לנער על פי דרכו was forgotten....

To try and bring up a Jacob and an Esau in the same college, make them have the same habits and hobbies, want to teach and educate them in the same way for some studious, sedate, meditative life is the surest way to court disaster. A Jacob will, with ever increasing zeal and zest, imbibe knowledge from the well of wisdom and truth, while an Esau can hardly wait for the time when he can throw the old books, but at the same time, a whole purpose of life, behind his back, a life of which he has only learnt to know from one angle, in a manner for which he can find no disposition in his whole nature.

Had Issac and Rebecca studied Esau's nature and character early enough, and asked themselves how can even an Esau, how can all the strength and energy, agility and courage that lies slumbering in this child, be won over to be used in the service of G-d, and the future

⁹ It is very worthwhile to read my article 'Yaakov and Eisav. Climbing the Stairway to Heaven', which explains the entire life of Yaakov.

¹⁰ While some have criticized his writings on this topic, I believe his comments are actually the words of Rashi and ultimately of the Midrash itself. It is my opinion that those who read Rashi differently never learned the Midrash that Rashi uses as his source, and therefore misunderstood Rashi's intent.

be trained to become, not a גבור ציד, but in truth a 'גבור לפני ה', then Jacob and Esau, with their totally different natures could still have remained twin-brothers in spirit and life; quite early in life Esau's 'sword' and Jacob's 'spirit' could have worked hand in hand, and who can say what a different aspect of the whole history of the ages might have presented. But, as it was, ויגדלו הנערים, only when the boys had grown into men, one was surprised to see that, out of one and the selfsame womb, having had exactly the same care, training and schooling, two such contrasting persons emerge.

While some criticize Hirsch's words as having no source in Rabbinic literature, in truth he is only echoing the opinion of the Midrash Rabba:

ויגדלו הנערים רבי לוי אמר משל להדס ועצבונית שהיו גדילים זה על גבי זה וכיון שהגדילו והפריחו זה נותן ריחו וזה חוחו (קוציו), כך כל י"ג שנה שניהם הולכים לבית הספר ושניהם באים מבית הספר לאחר י"ג שנה זה היה הולך לבתי מדרשות וזה היה הולך לבתי עבודת כוכבים. א"ר אלעזר צריך אדם להטפל בבנו עד י"ג שנה מיכן ואילך צריך שיאמר ברוך שפטרני מעונשו של זה.

The Midrash compares Eisav and Yaakov to two different types of plants that grow without anyone paying attention to their apparent differences until they grow and one gives off a scent and the other grows thorns. So too, Yaakov and Eisav are brought up and sent to the same school, go and come, without anyone taking note of the differences about them. The words of the Midrash, שניהם הולכים לבית הספר, convey the sentiment that as long as they 'went to school' all thought that they both were internalizing all that was taught in the same fashion. When they turned 13 the overt behavior of both made all realize what a terrible error had been made; but by then it was too late. Rov Elazar concludes the Midrash with the lesson that was missed: that we must be involved with our children before the age of 13, for afterwards we can only hope for the best. Clearly the Midrash is criticizing the parents of Yaakov and Eisav for not being cognizant of this.

It is my contention that this is exactly what Rashi wrote:

ויגדלו הנערים ויהי עשו. כל זמן שהיו קטנים לא היו נכרים במעשיהם ואין אדם מדקדק בהם מה טיבם, כיון שנעשו בני שלש עשרה שנה, זה פרש לבתי מדרשות וזה פרש לעבודת אלילים (ב"ר סג:):

Rashi quotes the Midrash which teaches that when they were young their overt actions did not display the differences between them, and no one checked closely to clarify their nature¹¹; once they turned 13 the difference between them became clear.

The educational lessons to be learned from this Pasuk are indeed monumental. It is painful to realize how many of us follow this same path of disaster when we fail to account for the nature of our children in their educational careers. 'Cookie-Cutter' education did not work then and does not work now. Children may be exposed to the exact same environment in every way and yet be very, very different; we ignore this universal truth at our peril.

¹¹ The words אין אדם מדקדק בהם מה טיבם are to be understood as 'no man checked closely in them to ascertain their nature'. Those (see ArtScroll) who translate as 'no man could discern what was their nature', are in my opinion, incorrect. Since Yaakov and Eisav were indeed so different it is not at all likely that the differences between them were indiscernible until they turned 13. Much in the same way the הדס and עצבונית mentioned in the Midrash, while similar to the untrained eye, can certainly be distinguished from each other by anyone who is familiar with plants.