



Sicha Summary

Chelek 15 | Toldos | Sichah 1

The Context:

Parshas Chayei Sarah concludes with the genealogy of Yishmael's family. Subsequently, *parshas Toldos* opens with Yitzchak's genealogy: “**And** these are the offspring of Yitzchak... (*Bereishis* 25:19).” The *Midrash* infers from the conjunction “and” that the “offspring of Yitzchak” mentioned here are thematically linked to the offspring of Yishmael mentioned earlier. “Who was this? Eisav and his children,” who, just like Yishmael, were sinful people. (*Shemos Rabbah* 30:3)

The Question:

How can the *Midrash* identify Eisav as the primary descendant of Yitzchak?

The Seed of the Explanation:

As Yitzchak's life story unfolds, it becomes clear that his relationship with Eisav differed significantly from Avraham's relationship with Yishmael. The unique character of Yitzchak and Eisav's relationship is a central theme of Yitzchak's life, as we will see. Therefore, Yitzchak's “offspring,” in the metaphorical sense of his life's work, is Eisav, for it is in Eisav that we see Yitzchak's primary contribution to the development of the Jewish people.

The Explanation:

The fundamental difference between Avraham's and Yitzchak's Divine service was that Avraham influenced others by sharing with them an unfiltered exposure of Divine illumination, while Yitzchak encouraged patient, meticulous work of self-reflection and self-perfection. This is why Avraham travelled widely, pitching his tent for anyone passing through, no matter their spiritual state. He was intent on publicizing the truth of G-d to

even the most unrefined and unprepared soul. Yitzchak, on the other hand, did not leave the land of Israel, and spent his life digging wells. His work was to inspire the people who came to him to dig deep within themselves and to uncover the Divine “water” at their core. Avraham’s inspiration was top-down; Yitzchak’s was bottom-up.

Each approach has an advantage and a disadvantage: A “top-down” approach illuminates even the lowest person, but does not change that person internally. If the inspiration were to depart, he would revert to his previous, unrefined state. A “bottom-up” approach transforms the person himself. But it does so by transforming him from his natural, coarse state to an elevated, enlightened state. It does not leave him in his original, unrefined state — it elevates him out of that state. Conversely, the top-down approach illuminates the person even when he is at his lowest.

We see the effects of these differing approaches in the relationships between Avraham and Yishmael, and between Yitzchak and Eisav.

“Yishmael departed from Avraham (*Pesachim* 56a),” leaving his father’s holy environment for a life of hedonistic and selfish pursuits. But he later repented, returning to the spiritual ideals of Avraham (*Bava Basra* 16b). And yet, when Avraham passed, Yishmael reverted to sin (*Rashi* to *Bereishis* 25:18). Then, the break was complete. Yishmael was not considered a “Jewish child” of Avraham, and did not inherit from him (*Bereishis* 21:10).

Eisav, on the other hand, departed from a life of holiness more definitively than did Yishmael. Eisav turned to a life of sin and never looked back (*Pesachim, ibid*). Yet, he was still considered a Jew who turned to heresy (*Kiddushin* 18a), and after Yitzchak passed away, he received an inheritance (*Devarim* 2:5, and *Rashi* there). Furthermore, Eisav was partially buried with his father: Our Sages teach that Eisav died by decapitation, and that “Esau’s head lies in the bosom of Yitzchak (*Targum Yonasan, Bereishis* 50:13).”

This paradox — that Yishmael displayed more spiritual sensitivity than Eisav, yet his connection to Avraham was severed, while Eisav retained his connection to Yitzchak — can be understood based on the above explanation of the differing approaches of the Patriarchs.

Avraham illuminated even the darkest places, so Yishmael, who was naturally inclined toward negative behavior, was moved by the force of his father's persuasion to repent. However, this illumination did not change Yishmael internally; when Avraham passed away, Yishmael reverted to become the same person he was originally.

Yitzchak did not illuminate; rather, he excavated the goodness from the darkest places. He had a profound effect on Eisav, despite Eisav's natural sinfulness. This effect, though, was limited to Eisav's "head," which was susceptible to illumination. The "body" of Eisav, emblematic of his lowest drives, remained detached and removed from Yitzchak. But because of Yitzchak's persistent, enduring "excavation," Eisav always remained a "Jew" and therefore inherited alongside his twin, Yaakov.

This is also the reason why Yitzchak insisted on blessing Eisav specifically: Yitzchak believed that with his blessing he could elicit a complete transformation of Eisav, elevating every part of him to a higher spiritual consciousness. He wanted to dig a well deep into Eisav and bring his living waters to the surface.

The Lesson:

Yitzchak was connected to Eisav and searched for his essential goodness despite all evidence to the contrary. This was before the Giving of the Torah, when all Jews were chosen and designated as G-d's children. How much more so must we, today, after the Giving of the Torah, never give up searching for the "living waters" within each and every Jew.