



Likkutei Sichos

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The Ascent of Descendants

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1.

YITZCHAK'S DESCENDANTS = EISAV?

The Midrash¹ comments on the verse,² “And these are the descendants {*toldos*} of Yitzchak”:

(**And** these) comes to add on to those previously mentioned — the children of Yishmael who were mentioned earlier.³ To whom does this refer? It refers to Eisav, the son of Yitzchak, and Eisav’s children.

Meaning, by saying “And these are the descendants of Yitzchak,” the Torah refers to Eisav, who like the children of Yishmael, was wicked. (This is why “the word ‘*toldos* – תולדות’ is written lacking {the second letter *vav* – ‘תולדת’ rather than ‘תולדות’}, to allude that Yaakov was not included with the wicked.”)

We need to clarify: Since the Midrash interprets the phrase, “**And these are** the descendants...,” as referring to Eisav, we must say that (according to the interpretation of the Midrash) the primary emphasis of the verse is (not on Yaakov, but) on Eisav — which is puzzling:

- a. Where do we find in this *parshah* a greater emphasis on Eisav over Yaakov?
- b. **More importantly:** In the first place, how can we say that the phrase, “**And these are** the descendants of Yitzchak,” means Eisav (and **not** Yaakov)?!

In general, the explanation is as follows:

The theme of *parshas Toldos* is the affairs of **Yitzchak** (his *avodah*),⁴ the events of his life — his descendants, his journey to Gerar, his digging of wells,

¹ *Shemos Rabbah*, ch. 30, sec. 3.

² {*Bereishis* 25:19.}

³ {*Bereishis* 25:12 ff.}

⁴ {Divine service.}

and his blessings {to his sons}. The **novelty** of Yitzchak's *avodah* over Avraham's *avodah* (described in previous *parshiyos*) was expressed in how Yitzchak's (spiritual) relationship with Eisav was different than Avraham's relationship with Yishmael (as will be explained); therefore, the *parshah* begins with the phrase, "these are the descendants of Yitzchak" (viz., Eisav). That is, the (name and) subject of this *parshah* — *Toldos* {descendants}, which (also) refers to "*toldos*" in the sense of Yitzchak's *avodah* and his actions, etc.,⁵ is discernible in the fact that {Eisav is referred to as the one with whom Yitzchak enjoyed a unique relationship, as it says} "*these are the descendants {of Yitzchak}*— this is Eisav."

2.

BETWEEN YISHMAEL AND EISAV

The difference between Yishmael's relationship with Avraham and Eisav's relationship with Yitzchak is expressed in paradoxical ways:

On one hand, Yishmael was (spiritually) closer to Avraham than Eisav was to Yitzchak — for Yishmael did *teshuvah* "during his father's lifetime"⁶ (plausibly because of Avraham's influence over him). In contrast, we find no indication that Eisav mended his ways. On the contrary, according to the teaching of our Sages⁷ — cited in Rashi in our *parshah*⁸ — just before Eisav died, he hindered Yaakov's burial in the Cave of Machpelah.⁹

On the other hand, however, "Yishmael **came out** of (and '**was detached**¹⁰ from') Avraham,"¹¹ and Yishmael did not enjoy the *halachic* status of a Jew. Therefore, he was not Avraham's heir (even after doing *teshuvah*), as it says, "This

⁵ {Meaning, in addition to the to "*toldos*" denoting (physical) descendants, it also connotes a person's achievements — his *avodah* and actions, as Rashi explains in his commentary on *Bereishis* 6:9 "the main *toldos* of the righteous are good deeds."}

⁶ *Bava Basra* 16b.

⁷ *Sotah* 13a.

⁸ {Rashi on *Bereishis* 27:45.}

⁹ {Meaning, until his last moments, Eisav remained a *rasha*, and never did *teshuvah*.}

¹⁰ *Likkutei Torah*, "*Devarim*," 5a, "*Shir Hashirim*," 9d.

¹¹ *Pesachim* 56a; *Vayikra Rabbah*, ch. 36, sec. 5; *Sifri*, "*Devarim*," 6:4, "*Haazinu*," 32:9, "*Berachah*," 33:2.

son of the maidservant shall not inherit together with... Yitzchak.”¹² Conversely, although Eisav also “came out of” and “was detached from” Yitzchak (“Eisav came out of Yitzchak”),¹³ he was still considered **a Jew** (albeit, an apostate),¹⁴ and was also an heir of Yitzchak, as it says, “I have given {it} as an inheritance to Eisav.”¹⁵

We could propose the following straightforward reason for this {paradoxical difference}:

The reason that Yishmael was not considered (a Jew, or) an heir was that he was the “son of **the maidservant**,” and therefore (as the Torah emphasizes) — “(for) the son of this maidservant shall not inherit together with my son (from Sarah).” Eisav, on the other hand, was the son of Rivkah.

However, some of Yaakov’s sons were also “sons of handmaids,”¹⁶ and despite this, Yaakov’s “bed was **complete**”¹⁷ [**unlike** Avraham and Yitzchak, who had Yishmael and Eisav come out from them]. Therefore, it is clear that **prior** to the Giving of the Torah, even a “son of a maidservant” could be (defined as a Jew and) an heir.

Thus, our original difficulty returns: What differentiates Yishmael and Eisav, leading Eisav to be considered a Jew, and not Yishmael (despite the fact that he did *teshuvah*, while Eisav did not)?

This distinction itself proves that Eisav’s relationship with Yitzchak was deeper than Yishmael’s relationship was with Avraham, such that Eisav’s relationship with Yitzchak was not contingent on Eisav doing *teshuvah*.

¹² *Bereishis* 21:10.

¹³ *Pesachim* 56a; *Vayikra Rabbah*, ch. 36, sec. 5; *Sifrei* “*Devarim*,” 6:4, “*Haazinu*,” 32:9, “*Berachah*,” 33:2.

¹⁴ *Kiddushin* 18a.

¹⁵ *Devarim* 2:5 and Rashi’s commentary there.

¹⁶ For they were also called “maidservants” after their marriage, and also after giving birth to a second son to Yaakov (*Bereishis* 30:7, 30:12), to the extent that Scripture emphasizes several times that they did not have the same status as Yaakov’s **wives** (*Bereishis* 32:23, 33:1 ff.)

¹⁷ {“Bed” connotes children, and a “complete bed” means that all his children were righteous. (See *Abudarham*, “*Seder Krias Shema She’al Hamitah*.”)} *Vayikra Rabbah*, ch. 36, sec. 5.

3.

EISAV'S HEAVENLY HEAD

The unique relationship between Yitzchak and Eisav is also alluded to in the teaching of our Sages that the “head of Eisav” was buried “in the bosom of Yitzchak {his father}.”¹⁸

Seemingly, this is quite puzzling: According to *halachah*, “we may not bury a wicked person next to a righteous person.”¹⁹ {This *halachah* was applied} to the extent that (as described in the Prophets)²⁰ when the body of a false prophet was placed into Elisha’s grave, Hashem performed **a miracle** — {not any miracle, but} **the miracle of resurrecting the dead**: The false prophet was brought back to life to prevent him from lying next to Elisha! How, then, was it possible for Eisav’s head to have been buried “in the bosom of Yitzchak”? (This question is accentuated particularly in light of the fact that our Sages²¹ point out that this was “the head of the **wicked** Eisav”!)

The explanation: Eisav was a *rasha*²² {only} owing to his body. From the vantage point of his “head,” however, he was **not** a *rasha*, since his “head” was “severed” from his body (separated from its crassness). On the contrary, he had a {positive} relationship with Yitzchak, which is why his head remained “in the bosom of Yitzchak.”

[This idea above is similar to what is explained about the *Satan*.²³ Regarding its source Above, we say that “Satan and Peninah acted for the sake of Heaven.”²⁴ But when *Satan* descends into this world, he turns into abject evil, to

¹⁸ *Targum Yonason on Bereishis* 50:13. {A brief summary of the story: Eisav was preventing Yaakov’s sons from burying their father in the Cave of Machpelah. Chushim, son of Dan, decapitated Eisav, and his head rolled into Yitzchak’s bosom. *Sotah* 13a records a slightly different version.}

¹⁹ *Tur*, “*Yoreh Deah*,” sec. 362, par. 5.

²⁰ *Melachim* II 13:21. *Sanhedrin* 47a, and Rashi {s.v. “*vayechi*.”}

²¹ *Targum Yonasan*, loc. cit.

²² {Lit. “a wicked person.”}

²³ *Sefer HaMammariam Eshaleich-Loznia*, p. 155; *Likkutei Torah*, “*Bamidbar*,” 62a. {Perhaps needless to say, that the Jewish conception of *Satan* is radically different than the non-Jewish one.}

²⁴ *Bava Basra* 16a.

the extent that “he set his eyes upon the first Temple... and the second one, and destroyed them”²⁵ (the opposite of acting for the sake of Heaven).

Similarly regarding Eisav: As he was “born” from Yitzchak — that is, from the perspective of his “head” and his {spiritual} source,²⁶ in and of themselves — he was good. However, when his “head” and source {Above} descended and became connected with and invested in Eisav’s body, which was pure evil, the spark of holiness was unable to radiate therein. This dynamic echoes the idea expressed by the verse, “the lamp of the wicked will flicker {and extinguish}.”²⁷

4.

YITZCHAK’S EFFECT

This, then, was Eisav’s advantage over Yishmael:

Since both Yishmael and Eisav were descendants of Avraham and Yitzchak, “the power of the father”²⁸ remained within them (even though they became spiritually estranged and alienated from them, as explained). [This is especially so, for since the righteous “resemble their Creator,”²⁹ there is (everlasting) holiness even in their physical labors, and surely in their descendants.]

This means that the virtues (and sanctity) of Avraham and Yitzchak found expression in Yishmael and Eisav — but only to the degree that the sanctity of Avraham and Yitzchak extends and has an effect outside the parameters of holiness (in the “place” that was separated from them, “**came out** from” them).

²⁵ *Sukkah* 52a (end).

²⁶ {In this context, his “head” connotes his “source”; Eisav’s (spiritual) source was (the spiritual level of) Yitzchak.}

²⁷ *Mishlei* 24:20.

²⁸ Cf. *Zohar*, vol. 2, 87a. {Cf. *Shavuos* 48a. The Rebbe is alluding to the *Gemara* (*Shavuos* 48a, et al) which states that יפה כח הבן מכה האב, and in line with the explanation in *Chassidus* (*Sefer Hamammirim* 5657 p. 269) that a son has the power of his father within him.}

²⁹ *Bamidbar Rabbah*, ch. 10, sec. 5.

The difference {between Yishmael and Eisav} is in how the influence of their fathers was expressed (in them):

In Yishmael's case, Avraham influenced him to do *teshuvah*; yet on the other hand, even after doing *teshuvah*, his status didn't change, in that he {still} had no {intrinsic} relationship with Avraham.

Conversely, although on the level of his body, Eisav was inferior to Yishmael — as evidenced by his **failure** to do *teshuvah* — yet his “head” (as it was **separated** from his body) was “in the bosom of Yitzchak.”

5.

A HALACHIC PARALLEL

We can suggest that the two approaches (or definitions) of *shlichus*³⁰ provide a *halachic* parallel the difference in the relationship between Avraham and Yishmael, and Yitzchak and Eisav:

One approach is that a *shaliach*³¹ remains an independent being, but by force of Torah law, when the *meshalei'ach*³² appoints him as his *shaliach*, the *shaliach*'s actions are attributed to the *meshalei'ach*. {In other words, there is no intrinsic association between the two parties, similar to Avraham's relationship with Yishmael.}

A second approach is that the *shaliach* {himself} becomes like {and representative of} the *meshalei'ach*. (And as such, automatically, his actions are those of the *meshalei'ach*.) {In other words, there is an intrinsic association between the two parties, similar to Yitzchak's relationship with Eisav.}

³⁰ {Lit. agency. The *halachic* principle whereby a person is authorized to act on behalf of someone else.} See *Lekach Tov, klal 1; Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 20, p. 303, et. al.

³¹ {Lit. “agent.”}

³² {Lit. “sender,” or “dispatcher.” The one who appoints a *shaliach* to represent him.}

6.

THE PATHS OF AVRAHAM AND YITZCHAK

The aforementioned difference between the “descendants” of Avraham (Yishmael) and Yitzchak (Eisav) dovetails with the differences in the manner of their *avodah*:

One of the differences between the *avodah* of Avraham and that of Yitzchak, was that Avraham’s *avodah* was characterized by the path of “above to below” (drawing down and revealing G-dliness in the lower realm). In contrast, the *avodah* of Yitzchak was characterized by {the path of} “from below to above,” (to refine the world and “elevate” it to the higher realm).

The difference is clearly discernible in their *avodah*: Avraham was occupied with bringing the knowledge and recognition of Hashem to even the lowliest of people, even to the Arabs who prostrated themselves to the dust on their feet.³³ His aim was that they, too, should recognize Hashem’s greatness. Yitzchak was occupied with digging wells³⁴ — removing the earth, stones, and bush that covered the living waters found within the earth. In spiritual terms, this is the *avodah* of refining Creation (the lower realm), ridding it of its “earthiness” and coarseness, doing so to the extent that its G-dly source and energy should be expressed in it.

Each one of these approaches (“from above to below,” and “from below to above”) has an advantage over the other:

In the case of “from above to below,” the lower realm is affected and enlightened by the **higher**, but without the lower realm changing anything about itself. We see this regarding the matter under discussion — the *avodah* of Avraham: The fact that the Arabs, etc., declared {Hashem to be} “G-d of the world”³⁵ was not **their** accomplishment; it was not because they had reached a

³³ *Bava Metziah* 86b.

³⁴ {*Bereishis* 26:18 ff.}

³⁵ *Bereishis* 21:33; *Sotah* 10a, ff.

level of their own making. Rather, it was because “**He caused them to call**”³⁶ — **Avraham inspired them** to “call out.” This was his doing; it is attributed to Avraham.

Therefore, although Avraham influenced the Arabs to “recognize His greatness,” this did not elevate them out of their crassness; inherently, **they** remained lowly — the same Arabs as they were prior to their encounter with Avraham.

However, Yitzchak’s *avodah* — elevating the lower realm — developed the relationship between the lower realm (the world) and G-dliness (the higher realm) as a result of {the elevation of} the lower realm itself. The lower realm was transformed and uplifted, achieving a connection with G-dliness. This is similar to the digging of wells: to make a well consists (not of bringing in “living water” from **elsewhere** [and pouring it into a **pit**], but) of digging and discovering the living waters hidden within the earth, in **this well itself**.

7.

THE BETTER WAY

On the other hand, because of this very point, channeling from the higher realm to the lower realm has an advantage over elevating the lower realm to the higher realm:

In the former, Divine *light* radiates into the lower realm as it exists in its lowly state — **as the lower is** {without any refinement}, analogous to how Avraham caused the Arabs to become aware of Hashem’s greatness, as they were in **their** {uncultivated} condition.

In contrast, the elevation of the lower realm to the higher realm, connecting the lower realm to G-dliness (the higher realm) hinges upon it **transcending** its baseness, such that the place of the lower realm itself remains unilluminated.

³⁶ {Ibid.}

This also accounts for the difference between the *avodah* and conduct of Avraham and Yitzchak: Avraham left the land of Israel and “descended” to Egypt {מצרים} — into (the limitations and boundaries {גבולים וגבולים} of) the land outside Israel;³⁷ he illuminated that {nether} region as well. Conversely, Yitzchak was not permitted to leave Israel (since he was an “unblemished *olah*”).³⁸ He was able to engage with, and be in, the part of the world that stands “higher” (i.e., the land of Israel), but not with the baseness of the area outside Israel. (Within the context of his *avodah*, the land outside of Israel has no connection to the light of holiness).

8.

SPIRITUAL GENETICS

This difference between Avraham and Yitzchak’s *avodah* was also the cause for the difference between (their descendants) Yishmael and Eisav:

The outcome of Avraham’s approach — drawing from the higher realm to the lower — is that even should a descendant of his become disreputable — a “son of a maidservant,” who ultimately “adopted evil behavior,”³⁹ Avraham’s influence extends and reaches even there, and motivates the miscreant to do *teshuvah*.

[By the same token, for Avraham to marry a maidservant did not conflict with **his** *avodah*. On the contrary, it exemplified the accomplishment of his *avodah* — a lower realm **exists**, and Avraham was able to draw the light down **there**. Similarly, regarding his descendants: Even from **Avraham’s** perspective, Yishmael was in a “lower” state; and Avraham’s *avodah* was aimed

³⁷ {In comparison to the G-dly *light* in the land of Israel, the G-dly *light* in the diaspora is concealed and limited.}

³⁸ {Commonly translated as “an elevation offering,” it was consumed completely on the altar. The *Midrash* portrays Yitzchak’s wholesomeness as being akin to an *olah*.} *Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 64, sec. 3.

³⁹ Rashi to *Bereishis* 21:11.

at changing Yishmael as well, to the extent that Avraham implored Hashem,⁴⁰ “If only Yishmael would live before You!”]

However, since any change in Yishmael was entirely **Avraham’s** doing and due to Avraham’s influence (and “when Avraham passed away, Yishmael **fell**”),⁴¹ **Yishmael** was never elevated to Avraham’s level. Vis-a-vis **his** identity, he “departed” and was “detached” from Avraham. Therefore, **he** could not be Avraham’s **heir**, especially according to the explanation that an heir adopts the identity of his predecessor.⁴²

However, Yitzchak’s characteristic— to elevate the lower realm itself — was a disposition possessed by his “descendants”; as soon as they were fathered by him, they shared a connection (also by dint of their own existence) with **his** level.

[By the same token, from the perspective of Yitzchak’s *avodah*, marrying a maidservant was out of the question;⁴³ her descendants would be (inherently) incompatible with **his** level.]

— So even Eisav was considered a (apostate) Jew, and an heir.

Yet, this is only regarding “Eisav’s head” — the higher element in him, and as his head was untethered, meaning, in the context of his {spiritual} origin, as explained above. However, as his head was attached to his body, i.e., in the lower realm itself, he was estranged and alienated from Yitzchak to a degree that any association to the light of holiness was severed — he did not do *teshuvah*. (This is why the *kelipah*⁴⁴ of Eisav was more pernicious than that of Yishmael.)⁴⁵

⁴⁰ *Bereishis* 17:18. See Rashi there.

⁴¹ *Bereishis Rabbah*, end of *Chayei Sarah*.

⁴² Responsa of *Tzafnas Paneiach* (Dvinsk ed.), vol. 1, responsum 118.

⁴³ See Rashi’s commentary on *Bereishis* 25:26.

⁴⁴ {*Kelipah* translates literally as “a shell” or “a peel.” The term refers to anything that conceals, and thus opposes G-dliness, just as a shell or a peel conceals the fruit within. *Kelipah* is often used to refer to evil or impurity.}

⁴⁵ See *Or Hatorah, parshas Vayeira*, p. 93b, et al.

[These two paths of *avodah* of Avraham and Yitzchak set the stage for (the *avodah* of) Yaakov, who incorporated “both aspects”⁴⁶ — that of Avraham and of Yitzchak.

Yaakov also lived (and carried out his *avodah*) outside of Israel — he “descended” into the place of the lower realm. Nonetheless, not only did he illuminate the lower realm (as did Avraham), but he fathered the *shevatim* {twelve tribes} such that “his bed was **complete**.”

(For the same reason, Yaakov was able to marry maidservants, for Yaakov’s *avodah* also allows for the descendants of maidservants to become *shevatim*⁴⁷ — tree branches — and even loftier — “tribes of G-d.”⁴⁸)]

9.

YITZCHAK’S BLESSINGS

Based on the aforementioned explanations, the reason that a large portion of *parshas Toldos* (“*toldos*” referring to Eisav, based on the *Midrash* cited earlier) speaks about the blessings of Yitzchak and the preparations for those blessing, will become clear: For Yitzchak’s *avodah*, and its relationship to Eisav, is also expressed therein.

Yitzchak wanted to bless Eisav, although he understood and knew his nature and character, because “there was game in his mouth.”⁴⁹ “Eisav’s head” (as he existed in his spiritual origin) had very lofty sparks of holiness (such as the souls of Onkelos the Convert, Rabbi Meir, and others).⁵⁰

⁴⁶ *Torah Or, Toras Chaim*, beg. of our *parshah*.

⁴⁷ {“*Shevet*” which is commonly used to mean “tribe,” also connotes a branch of a tree. In the context of this *sichah*, this term is used to emphasize that all the tribes extended from their source (“trunk”), Yaakov. and their spiritual standing reflected this relationship. See *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 18, p. 382.}

⁴⁸ *Tehillim* 122:4.

⁴⁹ *Bereishis* 25:28.

⁵⁰ {*Onkelos* and Rabbi Meir, who both descended from converts (see *Gittin* 56a), were Eisav's descendants. Both were of Roman origin, and Rome was a descendant of Eisav.} *Torah Or*, pg. 20c.

Since Yitzchak's *avodah* was {characterized by} digging wells (as described earlier in the *parshah*) — to excavate {the earth} and discover the “living waters” hidden within the depths of the earth — he wanted to uncover and **reveal** the “living waters” (sparks of holiness) that were latent in “Eisav's head” by blessing him.

[As **Yitzchak** viewed Eisav, he was worthy of these blessings. However, as Eisav was “**detached** from Yitzchak,” he was unworthy of these blessings. Therefore, the blessings were granted to Yaakov, for **he** specifically had the power to refine Eisav.⁵¹]

10.

REACH EVERY JEW!

The lesson from all this to us, simply put: Eisav the Wicked, who lived **prior** to the giving of the Torah, had the title “Jew” because he was Yitzchak's son (despite the fact that he was an apostate). And even for **Eisav**, Yitzchak labored to excavate {the obstructions} and reveal Eisav's hidden inner qualities.

How much more so {does the above apply} for Jews who live after the giving of the Torah, when the strength and vitality of **every** Jew, regardless of his standing, comes from {the sublime level of} “I am Hashem.”⁵² This is especially true since those Jews, too, who are not behaving appropriately are incomparably superior to the level of Eisav, also in their external appearance and character. (In addition, **nowadays**, they are all, by and large, considered to have the status of “a child who was captured {and raised by gentiles}.”⁵³

So without question, we certainly must dedicate ourselves to draw **every** Jew closer, including those who are very distant from Judaism, to dig, unearth, and reveal the “living waters” that are found within every Jew.

⁵¹ *Torah Ohr*, pg. 20c. We can suggest that this is because Yaakov comprised both elements of Avraham and Yitzchak (see above, sec. 8), enabling him to **refine** the “lower realm” in its **place**. See also Likkutei Sichos, vol. 10, pg. 88ff.

⁵² {*Shemos* 20:2.}

⁵³ {Cf. *Shabbos* 68b, et. al.}

11.

ATTRACTING JEWS TO THE WHOLE TORAH WITHOUT COMPROMISES

At the same time, we must ensure that the manner of outreach is in line with the teaching of the *mishnah*,⁵⁴ “Love your fellows, **and draw them closer to the Torah.**” We must **draw** them **closer** and **elevate** them to the Torah, and not lower the Torah to their level, G-d forbid. We may not compromise any aspect of Torah and *mitzvos*, even if we believe that by doing so, we will draw Jews closer to Torah and *mitzvos*. Torah “stands forever and ever, without any change, diminishment, or addition,”⁵⁵ and therefore, no compromises may be made.

[This is alluded to by Rashi’s comment at the beginning of our *parshah*: “*These are the descendants* — Yaakov and Eisav who are mentioned in the *parshah*.” {Implied:} Which Eisav is descended from Yitzchak? The Eisav who is mentioned in the *parshah*, in the **Torah** — the one whom Yaakov refines in accordance with the approach and guidelines of Torah.]

The recommended approach to achieve this is by looking at the fellow from the perspective of “his head.” Then a person does not see the baseness of a fellow’s external state but rather the exaltedness of his internal and essential state. In this respect, he is connected with the entire Torah and “**wants to**”⁵⁶ observe it. Consequently, a person will do all he can to uplift his fellow Jew and draw him closer to Hashem, and to His Torah and its *mitzvos* — an **uncompromised** Torah.⁵⁷

Based on a talk delivered on Shabbos *parshas Toldos*, 5728 (1967)

⁵⁴ *Avos* 1:12.

⁵⁵ *Rambam*, “*Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah*,” beg. of ch. 9.

⁵⁶ *Rambam*, “*Hilchos Geirushin*,” end of ch. 2.

⁵⁷ {In the Hebrew original, “*Torah temimah*.”}