

Parsha Ponders

Toldos | Nov 28, 2024 | 28 Marcheshvan 5785

Evading enslavement, harboring heresy¹

ויזד יעקב נזיד ויבא עשו מן-השדה והוא עיף

Yaakov stewed a stew, and Eisav came from the fields, exhausted²

When Avraham died, Yaakov made a lentil stew to comfort his father Yitzchak³. Our Sages tell us⁴ that when Eisav, Yaakov's brother, came from the field, he inquired to the nature of this lentil stew. Yaakov informed him that Avraham had died. Eisav asked that Hashem's attribute of judgment even had its way with Avraham? Yaakov replied that yes, that was the case. Eisav responded that if so, there's no Judge, there's no Justice⁵. Meaning, Eisav at that moment denied the reality of Hashem. This is a very difficult teaching. Why did Eisav choose now, of all times, to become a heretic? Did he really think that Avraham would live forever? Hashem made a covenant with Avraham that, "You will come to your forefathers in peace and be buried at a ripe old age"⁶. What then was so surprising⁷?

Perhaps we can interpret Hashem's covenant with Avraham in a different manner. The rest of the covenant was that Avraham's descendants would be strangers in a land not their own, and that they would be enslaved and tortured⁸. Our Sages tell us⁹ that Avraham inquired if he himself would also be enslaved and tortured. Hashem responded that no, rather he would, "come to his forefathers in peace". We see then that so long as Avraham is alive, his descendants were assured that the subjugation would not commence. However, once he died, from that moment the subjugation could occur at any moment.

For this reason, Eisav was afraid upon hearing the death of Avraham. He didn't want to become enslaved. And yet, it was known that not all of Avraham's descendants would be destined for slavery and exile. The verse says that "your legacy will be in Yitzchak"¹⁰, implying some of Yitzchak but not all of him¹¹. Meaning, Yitzchak had two sons, and only one of them would continue his legacy, thus needing to endure the destined exile and subjugation. Which one would that be? Only the one who followed in Yitzchak's footsteps.

Therefore, when Eisav heard that Avraham died, he came up with a plan. The only way to ensure he not be the destined child to endure enslavement was to abandon the ways of Avraham his grandfather. Due to his fear of subjugation, he became a heretic and denied Hashem. He removed himself from the family tradition of monotheism.

However, Yaakov subsequently asked Eisav to sell his firstborn rights for this pot of stew¹². Why was this the moment to ask Eisav for the firstborn rights? Yaakov was on to Eisav's whole plan. Yaakov was trying to inform Eisav that his plan was unnecessary. It would make sense that the one child of Yitzchak who

¹ Based on [Beis HaLevi](#) to [Genesis](#) 25:29

² [Genesis](#) *loc. cit.*

³ [Rashi](#) *ad. loc.*

⁴ [Bereishis Rabbah](#) 63:11

⁵ The text as we have it says "there is no reward and punishment, there is no revival of the dead"

⁶ [Genesis](#) 15:15

⁷ See [Yefeh Toar](#) and [Anaf Yosef](#) *ad. loc.* for other approaches than the following one

⁸ [Genesis](#) 15:13

⁹ [Bereishis Rabbah](#) 44:20

¹⁰ [Genesis](#) 21:12

¹¹ [Nedarim](#) 31a

¹² This part of the piece the [Beis HaLevi](#) credits to the [sefer Zera Berach](#)

should be chosen as the continuation of his legacy would be the firstborn. For this reason, Yaakov asked Eisav to sell the birthright. Yaakov wanted to be the representative of Yitzchak's legacy, and this way Eisav wouldn't have to endure the enslavement. There was thus no need for Eisav to become a heretic.

Good Shabbos