



MACHSHAVOT

Parashat Toldot

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Moving Forward but Looking Back

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It will end on Sunday.

After two months, we have finally finished cleaning out my parent's flat. The furniture has gone to different homes who needed it, the clothes have been given to charity and a lot has gone to the rubbish dump.

However, there is one category of things that we have kept.

They don't have a specific name; they are not a specific thing. They are a mix of records, documents, albums, games, books and a myriad of other things.

They are memories.

Pictures of our family photo from the 1970's. A record whose cover is so worn from the amount of times I took it out and played it on our record player. A board game, that my brother and I played over and over again during our childhood.

Yet there was one discovery that meant more than all the others.

While sorting through the rooms, I discovered a box, I opened it and couldn't believe my eyes. There were our primary school projects on Kings and Queens, the Planets, London Transport and Queen Elizabeth the first. I hadn't seen these for almost 40 years. I could still remember the pictures I had drawn and the information I had written – but that wasn't my biggest joy. That was the realisation that my mother had kept them for all this time – that she took pride in our work, that she wanted to have them. My brother and I would never have known if she had chucked them all away, we didn't know she had them – until this week.

As I flicked through the pages of my projects that my mother had kept for all these years, I felt a sense of gratitude and a realisation of what the love of a parent for a child means. And also how that love moulds and shapes the child.

It also shed light for me on a puzzling opening verse in this week's Parsha:

'And these are the generations of Yitzchak the son of Avraham; Avraham begot Yitzchak.'

The question is obvious, why repeat the last three words? We know that Avraham was Yitzchak's father, the first part of the verse tells us – so why repeat?

Rashi famously answers: *Since the Torah wrote: "Yitzchak the son of Avraham," it had to say: "Avraham begot Yitzchak," because the scorners of the generation were saying that Sarah had conceived from Avimelech, for she had lived with Avraham for many years and had not conceived from him. What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do? He shaped the features of Yitzchak's face to resemble Avraham's, and everyone attested that Avraham had begotten Yitzchak.*

However, I want to take the idea in a different direction.

This is the first time we read this in the Torah. First time we read about a 'Tolda' in details. We have had the Toldot of Adam and Noach, but we never focussed on the lives of their children. Yes, we know some details, ages of death and the occasional story – but nowhere near the details and the importance we are going to learn about Yitzchak and his family.

It is as if at this crucial junction of the Torah – the segue from Avraham to Yitzchak, the Torah teaches us a crucial message about parents and children.

Yes, the focus of the story now shifts to Yitzchak and his family, Avraham and Sarah are dead, life moves on '*And these are the generations of Yitzchak son of Avraham*' – we are moving on, moving forward. There are now new generations, new stories, new journeys.

However, don't ever forget '*Avraham begot Yitzchak*', where do you think Yitzchak gets his values, his vision, his drive from? Avraham and Sarah – his parents. Yes, time moves on, but never forget where you came from, how you became you.

That verse that I have read and learnt for 40+ years suddenly had brand new meaning - my parents are no longer here, I must forge ahead with my life, my children, my family – but I will never forget how much of me is because of them, their love for me, their care for me, their pride in me. Finding those memories, realising the dedication, devotion and love they gave to my brother and I, the nurturing and loving home that they built for both of us.

Yes, these are the generations of Andrew, son of Sonia and Richard, but never ever forget that Sonia and Richard created Andrew.

I am who I am, because of them.

Shabbat Shalom

P.S. The Shabbaton Quiz has been rescheduled to Motzei Shabbat 28th November. Looking forward to seeing you there. [Sign up here!](#)

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The stories of *Parshat Toldot* somehow manage to be both familiar and foreign. Concepts which are such common features in our lives - parenting, childhood, sibling rivalry - are all intertwined into a narrative which clouds our ability to understand the character and conduct of all four of its participants. One small detail of this complex picture which I will attempt to explain in this short piece is Yitzchak's relationship with Eisav.

Yitzchak loved Eisav, that shouldn't come as a surprise. Parents love their children. What is surprising is the reason the Torah gives for Yitzchak's love of Eisav (Bereishit 25:28):

בְּקָעֵי־יִתְּאֶתְּבָהָא הָקֵבֶר וַיִּפְּיֹבֶד יִצְחָק כֹּן שֶׁ־עֵתָא קָחַצִּי בְּהָאֲלִין

Yitzchak loved Eisav because he would eat from his hunting, and Rivka loves Yaakov.

Why was Yitzchak's love for Eisav predicated on the fact that he hunted well? A mundane, if not improper quality for someone of Yitzchak's virtuousness to admire. This only becomes more perplexing when contrasted with Rivka's love of Yaakov, a contrast that the Torah itself makes. Her love is described without conditions and in a different grammatical tense: the present as opposed to the past.

There is an interesting argument between Ramban and Ibn Ezra regarding how wealthy Yitzchak was. Ibn Ezra argues that he was poverty-stricken and only became wealthy later in life. Ramban dismisses this approach, and says that Yitzchak must have been wealthy as he inherited Avraham's estate. Avraham's wealth is testified to a number of times throughout his life. Ibn Ezra puts forward a number of proofs for his argument, for example: Yaakov at the beginning of the *parasha* is cooking a lentil soup, an unlikely chore for the scion of the wealthy family. Eisav easily trades his birthright – Ibn Ezra explains that he didn't think that he had much to inherit. Within this argument Ibn Ezra explains why Yitzchak loved Eisav for his hunting. They were a poverty-stricken family who didn't have food. Eisav's hunting is what fed them. Yitzchak loved Eisav because of this.

A compromise can be found between these two approaches of Ibn Ezra and Ramban. Immediately after these *pesukim* which describe Yitzchak's love of Eisav, Rivka's love of Yaakov and the trading of the lentil soup, the *Torah* describes - עָרָאב בְּעַר יְהוּדָה - *there was a famine in the land*. Perhaps even if Yitzchak was wealthy beforehand, the advent of the famine had brought hard times upon the family. Now without the security of their former wealth, they relied on the hunting prowess of Eisav. And Yitzchak loved him for it.

However this only half answers the question raised. This might be something about Eisav which Yitzchak loved and appreciated, but why is there a need to give a reason for his love? Yaakov's love is not attributed to a specific reason, we are left to presume that Rivka loved him simply because he was Yaakov.

The answer is the Eisav *was not easy to love*. But Yitzchak *wanted to love him anyway*. He did not become the child they had fervently prayed for. But he was still their child. He didn't act like a grandson of Avraham, and he wasn't pious like his brother Yaakov. Yaakov was easy to love, they didn't have to think back and find a reason why they loved him. Eisav caused them a lot of grief, but a pained father was still a father, he was forced to look back and find something loveable in his son. He could reminisce back to the early days, where this wild man did his part for the family, and fed them when they needed it. He could think back and still love his son, not for what he was, but for something he had done.

For this same reason, Rivka's love for Yaakov is expressed in the present tense, whereas Yitzchak's love for Eisav is described in the past. Rivka could love Yaakov for what he was, every day he led a life that they were proud of. Yitzchak couldn't love his son for what he was doing, but he continued to love him for what he did. Yitzchak, is often mistakenly depicted as being naïve and not connected to the reality of his children. In truth, he was connected to reality and *despite* that, he remained connected to his children.

This idea can be seen in the climax of the parasha, in the story of the brachot. The Torah clearly describes that Eisav's wives caused pain and distress to both Rivka **and** Yitzchak. Immediately afterwards, Yitzchak's summons Eisav and tells him that he wants to bless him. The Torah is almost saying explicitly that despite the pain that Eisav's family was causing them, Yitzchak nonetheless summoned him for a bracha. To put Yitzchak in the correct frame of mind for that blessing he sent Eisav to hunt for him once again, just like he used to.

The *brachot* themselves reflect this idea. The *bracha* that was meant for Eisav but taken by Yaakov is custom made. Yitzchak makes no attempt to appoint Eisav as his spiritual heir, there is no mention of the Abrahamic legacy or of Eretz Yisrael, it is a blessing for a man of materialism. This stands in direct contrast with the *bracha* given at the end of the *parasha* (28:1-4), this time consciously from Yitzchak to Yaakov, where Yaakov is clearly named as the successor to Avraham who will inherit Eretz Yisrael. These custom made brachot make it very clear, that Yitzchak knew that his sons were different **and** that Yitzchak wanted to bless both of his sons anyway.

To love Eisav, Yitzchak had to choose what to look at and what to turn a blind eye to. To bless Eisav, Yitzchak had to be blind.

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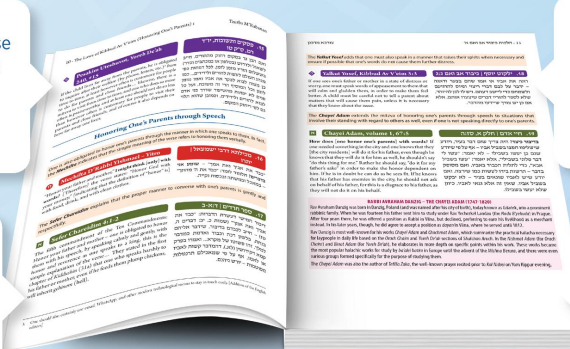
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