



## TOWARDS MEANINGFUL PARENTING

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# The Torah's Timeless Message of Parental Love

In Parshat Vayishlach, we read that when Yitzchak passed away, וַיִּקְבְּרוּ אוֹתוֹ עֵשָׂו וַיַּעֲקֹב וּבְנֵי “Esav and Yaakov his sons buried him” (Bereishit 35:29). It is a short and almost quiet pasuk, yet it reveals something profound. After all the years of conflict and separation, Esav returns to stand beside his brother in honoring their father. Somehow, even after a lifetime of drifting far from his family's path, Esav still felt bound to Yitzchak and to the family he came from. What caused him to remain connected?

Looking back in Parshat Toldot, perhaps we can find the answer. In Toldot, the Torah tells us: וַיֵּאָהֶב יִצְחָק אֶת עֵשָׂו - “*Yitzchak loved Esav.*” Many commentaries ask the obvious question - why does Yitzchak love Esav? Could Yitzchak not see who Esav was — a man of the field, a hunter, impulsive, even selling his birthright for a bowl of lentil soup? Was this the son to carry forward the spiritual legacy of Am Yisrael?

Yitzchak was not naïve. He knew Esav's nature and saw the pain it caused. When

Esav married two idol-worshipping women from the חֵתִי nation, the Torah says clearly וַתְּהִי־מִנְתָּה לְיִצְחָק וּלְרִבְקָה. “*They were a source of grief to Yitzchak and Rivkah.*” Yet despite his disappointment, Yitzchak's love for Esav never faded. The Torah emphasizes that love as something constant and deep.

And so the question remains – why? Some explain that Esav “hunted” his father Yitzchak with his words, deceiving him and pretending to be righteous in order to gain his affection and the bracha. **Rabbi Jonathan Sacks**, however, offers a very different and profoundly important explanation in the realm of parenting. He writes as follows -

*“Yitzchak loved Eisav because Eisav was his son, and that is what parents do. They love their children no matter what. This does not mean that Yitzchak thought Eisav was the right person to continue the covenant, or that he was happy with Eisav marrying Hittite women. The text explicitly says he was troubled by this. Yitzchak could see Eisav's true character. But he also knew that a parent must love their child because this is their child. They can still reproach them for their actions. But a parent does not disown their child, even when they are disappointed in them. Yitzchak was teaching us a fundamental lesson in parenthood.”*

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**Rabbi Don Tiomkin** (parenting expert and author of *Boser Melachim*) observes that in previous generations, parenting relied more heavily on rules and discipline. Today, however, those methods alone are no longer effective. Our generation, he writes, must be raised with love. Quoting the Chazon Ish, he explains that our role is *למשכם בעבותות — “to pull them in with ropes of love.”*

**Rav Shlomo Wolbe** adds that the strongest influence parents have in *chinuch* is the love bond itself (*Alei Shur*, vol. 1, p. 260). To be an effective parent, one must begin with genuine love.

Loving our children is something that comes naturally to most parents. However, **Rabbi Yechiel Yaakovson** (parenting expert and author of *אל תחסאו בילד*) warns that many parents assume their children “know” they are loved. But if love is not spoken, shown, and felt, it is often not known at all. He tells the story of a top yeshivah student who would cry whenever he saw a parent show affection to a child — because he had never experienced that warmth himself. We must therefore ensure that our children *feel* they are deeply loved — not for their achievements, but simply because they are our children.

As we know, everything in the physical world has a parallel in the spiritual world. Just as a parent’s love is constant, so, too, Hashem’s love for us is constant. Just as a parent’s greatest desire is that his child should want to be close to him, so too, Hashem’s greatest desire is that we should want to be close to Him. And regardless of whether or not we act in ways that show our desire for closeness with Him, Hashem continues to love us and care for us.

In **Devarim 14:1**, the Torah states: *בְּנִים אַתֶּם,*

*לֵה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם*: “You are children of Hashem your God.” **Gemara Kiddushin 36a** brings a debate - Rabbi Yehuda held that this applies only when Jews behaved in a way worthy of being the children of God. However, Rabbi Meir said that it was unconditional: whether Jews behave like Hashem’s children or they do not, they are still called the children of Hashem.

**Rabbi Sacks** expands on this idea: *“The Jewish idea of Avinu Malkeinu, that our God, our King is first and foremost our Parent, is to instil the most profound emotions into our relationship with God. There is bound to be conflict, as all children sometimes conflict with their parents. The relationship can be fraught, even painful, yet what gives it its depth is the knowledge that it is unbreakable. Whatever happens, a parent is still a parent, and a child is still a child. The bond may be deeply damaged but it is never broken beyond repair”.*

Yitzchak’s love for Esav — unconditional, steadfast, and expressive — was not blindness. It was strength, a model for parental love and Hashem’s love for us. And it is precisely because of that love that Esav remained connected even years later. Unconditional love is not uncritical, but it is unbreakable. That is how Yitzchak loved Esav. That is how parents must love their children. And that is how Hashem loves us. ■

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