

His sons Yitzchak and Yishmael buried him. (25:9)

Rashi quotes *Chazal* in the *Talmud Bava Basra* 16b, who derive from the above *pasuk* which places Yitzchak before Yishmael that Yishmael repented his ways. The errant son told Yitzchak to precede him. This display of respect is an indicator of Yishmael's spiritual well-being, resulting from his repentance. Apparently, the fact that Yishmael had come from a distance to attend the funeral was not a strong enough indication that he had changed. It was the fact that he allowed his younger brother, the one who "replaced" him as Avraham *Avinu's* "son," to precede him that serves as a proof of his repentance. Does a Yishmael change his stripes due to a single act of *mentchlichkeit*, human decency and respect?

A similar question may be asked a bit later on in the Patriarchal saga. Eisav came in from the field "tired and hungry." Yaakov *Avinu* had just returned from Avraham *Avinu's* funeral. Eisav wants some of Yaakov's porridge. The future Patriarch traded the soup for the rite of the firstborn. Eisav could care less. *Chazal* tell us that the day in question was not one of Eisav's better days: "That *rasha*, wicked one (Eisav), transgressed five sins on that day: He cohabited with a betrothed woman; he killed a man; he denied the existence of G-d; he denied *Techiyas Ha'Meisim*, the Resurrection of the dead; he degraded the *bechorah*, rite of the firstborn." Pretty bad day for Eisav, but what does degrading the *bechorah* have to do with the other four sins? Once it has been established that Eisav had committed heresy, killed a man, denied the Resurrection, violated a betrothed woman, what was there to add? Is there anything worse than an agnostic?

Yishmael allowed his younger brother to precede him – obviously he had repented. Eisav denigrated the *bechorah* – obviously he was a *rasha*. Hadn't that already been confirmed by his heretical activities? It is almost as if we are "nickel and dimeing," picking up on what seems to be minor activities and infractions, while ignoring blatant sinful behavior.

There is more. Let us see how our sages defined *rasha*, wicked. Clearly, when we see what they feel determines wicked, we will have an idea concerning the barometer for determining righteous. The *shidduch*, matrimonial match, of Yitzchak to Rivkah was proposed by Eliezer, Avraham's servant. Lavan and Besuel – son and father – replied, "*Vayaan Lavan u'Besuel va'yomru mei Hashem yatza hadavar*," "Then Lavan and Besuel answered and said, 'The matter stemmed from Hashem'" (*Bereishis* 24:50). *Chazal* note that Lavan, the son, preceded Besuel, the father. Why? In his great insolence, Lavan rushed to speak up before his father, an indication of his wickedness.

Horav Michael Peretz, Shlita, observes from the above three Torah lessons that respect and its various derivatives play critical roles in determining a person's moral posture, with which its ripple effect on his spiritual nature are equally compelling. The root of Eisav's spiritual descent to total infamy was his denigration of the *bechorah*. If the *bechorah* had no value, then *mitzvos* in general had no significance to him. This disdain regressed further, to the point that he denied the Resurrection and ultimately became an apostate, denying that G-d is in control of the world. Such a person has no qualms concerning taking a human life or violating a woman betrothed to another

man. Man's actions coincide with his values and beliefs. If there are no *mitzvos*, then there is no Afterlife and, ultimately, there is no G-d. Killing becomes a minor infraction. It all begins, however, with a disdain for the spiritual. If the behavior means nothing – so it goes with everything else.

Likewise, if Yishmael had demonstrated respect for Yitzchak, it would have indicated that he respected what Yitzchak represented: spirituality, morality, ethics and belief in Hashem. Yishmael's display of respect for Yitzchak, was not merely a demonstration of his good manners. It shows that he had changed; he had repented and now embraced what Yitzchak symbolized to him.

A great man shows respect to everyone – even those who are clearly on a lower echelon than he is. A great man respects everything that he is asked to do. Nothing is beneath him. Everything has value. The small-minded, insecure person hides behind a cloak of arrogance, and impugns the integrity of anyone who might pose a threat to his self-generated pedestal. He presents the greatest threat to society. Only one who has self-respect can give respect to others.