

Yitzchak loved Eisav for game was in his mouth, but Rivkah loved Yaakov. (25:28)

Rashi explains *tzayid b'fiv* as “cunning in his mouth.” Eisav was extremely smooth and able to articulate *halachic* questions, thereby giving the ruse that he was meticulous in his observance – which he was not. The obvious question is: How did Eisav pull one over Yitzchak *Avinu*? To suggest that, due to his immense level of *kedushah*, our Patriarch was slightly “naïve” in the evil ways of the world demeans the greatness of Yitzchak. Being holy does not mean being naïve. Indeed, Torah study makes one wiser and equips him with greater acuity. We have no question that Yitzchak knew who Eisav was, and, even if he did not, Rivkah certainly would have told him.

Horav Meir Rubman, zl, explains that Yitzchak was well aware of his errant son’s behavior, but, as a loving father, he wanted to keep the door open and the light on – with the hope that Eisav would one day walk back through that door. If so, why did Rivkah not show the same level of acquiescence? Perhaps, because Rivkah was so acutely cognizant of Eisav’s egregious escapades, she could not absolve him. Idol worship and murder, accompanied by a profligate moral compass, were too much for even a tolerant parent to swallow. Yitzchak? Perhaps he was aware that Eisav had gone off the *derech*, but not how far he had actually strayed.

Rav Rubman explains two approaches to addressing the tragic issue of a child leaving the fold. A son or daughter who has completely, knowingly and with a sane mind, rebelled against his/her parents to the point that he treats them in a disrespectful, uncivilized manner, has no place at home. One must show respect to one’s parents, even if they are not on the same page with regard to religious observance. I have written this many times: The Torah does not say one has to love his parents, but he must demonstrate respect for them. One has no excuse for disrespect. When a child descends to the point of disrespect, we no longer leave on the light for him or her.

Eisav was many things. He committed evil of the lowest, base nature. Yet, he was the paragon of *kibud av*, treating Yitzchak with unparalleled reverence. This is why Yitzchak gave him every chance to do *teshuvah*. A son who dons *bigdei malchus*, royal garments, when he serves his father must be allowed some leeway. This is an indication that he is not totally gone. Our Patriarch felt that Eisav’s *kibud av* was a sufficient redeeming factor to leave the door open for him to do *teshuvah*, repent, and return home.

Rav Rubman derives from here the critical importance of every parent (and every *mechanech*) thinking long and deep, delving into every student, so that he can “teach according to his way.” Growing up, we used to have a toy box with geometrical shapes coinciding with similar plastic shapes that were to fit into its identical shape. We were but young toddlers, and our hexagon did not fit into the square. We became agitated and started to smash the toy. All we needed was patience and perseverance to find the matching piece. We cannot impose on a child who is a “circle” to fit into a “rectangle.” “One size fits all” learning does not work, even under the best of

circumstances.

Commentators have written much about the higher level of Eisav *ha'rasha's kibud av*. My question is: How do we define *kibud av*? When someone claims to “honor” or “revere” a parent, but he no longer respects him or lives in accordance with his parents’ convictions, is this *kibud av*?

Obviously, this approach causes the parent great pain. How can such a person claim he still fulfills *kibud av v'eim*, when, from a Torah perspective, he is probably manifesting the greatest affront to the manner in which his parents have raised him. When a child rejects the Torah and *mitzvos* which his parents hold dear, he is stabbing them in the heart. That is not my idea of *kibud av v'eim*. [I know I am writing this too strongly, but, at this point in my life, having met and known many who suffered through such trauma, I feel I should tell it like it is. I will add that each child that rejects Torah has a reason, (usually self-centered). In some cases, the child is the product of a father and mother who had no clue what parenting was about.)

My issue is with Eisav, the paradigm of *kibud av*. How can a *rasha*, murderer, *no'eif*, *ganiv* be considered a *nachas* to his parents? Indeed, this evil son reminds us that it is possible to honor one's parents with one's hands, while dishonoring them with one's heart. Helping parents in every way, while simultaneously rejecting their deepest truths is, at best, only partial honor. The flipside is the child who, for some reason, is unable to properly execute the physical demands on him. This child, however, might live in fealty to his parents' Torah values, ironically projecting eternal honor onto them.

I have ruminated over the question for some time, and I have come to the realization that, in such situations the reality in the eyes of the spectator (us) and the perception in the mind of the child are not aligned. I am certain that, if we were to approach any spiritually recalcitrant child and say, “Look at what you're doing to your parents,” the response would be, “I love my parents. They are the world to me. I just feel I must move on from Orthodoxy. It is stifling me. I hated school/*yeshivah*/Bais Yaakov. I went because my parents insisted. I no longer can live like that. I do not want to live a lie.”

In their perverted, self-centered logic they truly think they love their parents and are not transgressing the *mitzvah* of *kibud av v'eim*. I guess all we can do is try to understand their mindset and hope that one day, if and when it changes, we are still here to enjoy the transformation.