

TOLDOS (GENESIS 25:19-28:9)

Closed Eyes and Closed Mouths

2006 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

Abraham had a total of eight sons. However, most of them did not represent the future of Israel. Abraham passed his legacy on to his second son Isaac. The other sons weren't worthy of that honor and responsibility. The Torah would some day be given only to the descendants of Isaac.

Isaac had two sons, Esau and Jacob. Who would be the standard bearer of the descendants of Isaac?

Esau was perhaps the greatest con man who ever lived. He managed to pull the wool over the eyes of his father Isaac by serving him conscientiously. He brought fresh meat for his father to eat, and waited on him devotedly. Isaac viewed Esau's behavior as a sign of dedication; his mother, however, was not impressed:

Isaac loved Esau because he ate the meat that he trapped (Rashi's explanation: Isaac was taken in by Esau's deception); *but Rebecca loved Jacob.* (Genesis, 28:28)

Rebecca saw her older son for the wicked man, the *hunter who knew how to entrap*, (Ibid, verse 27) that he was. She was not taken in by the fact that Esau treated his father with deference and respect. She was the sister of Laban; she knew a fake, phony, fraud when she saw one. She knew that it was really Jacob, the studious younger twin, who was the righteous man who should lead the future Nation of Israel.

King Solomon writes that “*Justifying an evildoer and considering a righteous person evil, both are abominations to G-d.*” (Proverbs, 17:15) The Talmud (Midrash Rabbah, 65) applies this verse to Isaac. He was judging the situation incorrectly. He viewed his evil son as just, and, by comparison, saw his righteous son Jacob lacking. Due to this “*abomination*,” says the Midrash, G-d caused Isaac to lose his eyesight:

It came to pass, when Isaac had become old, and his eyes dimmed from seeing, that he summoned Esau... He said, Go out to the field and trap game for me...bring it to me and I will eat, so that my soul may bless you before I die.” (Genesis, 27:1-3)

Rebecca was distressed. What should she do? Surely if Isaac knew that Esau was a murderer and an idol worshipper, he would never grant his blessings to his wicked son! These blessings rightfully belonged to Jacob, who deserved them. If Esau were to receive these blessings, it would have devastating effects on Jacob and his future generations. She therefore undertook to take advantage of Isaac's blindness and instructed Jacob to pretend to be Esau, and thereby receive his father's blessings.

There are many explanations given to Rebecca's and Jacob's decision to deceive Isaac. The Yalkut Yehudah, by Rabbi Yehudah Ginsberg of Denver, quotes the commentary Hekesav Vehakaballah. He writes that Rebecca and Jacob felt that they had to "sin for the sake of a Mitzvah." They had a dilemma: If they were to stand by silently, allowing Isaac to mistakenly bless his evil son, they would be violating the commandment of "*Don't put a stumbling block in front of the blind*," (Leviticus, 19:14) i.e., don't allow a person to sin unwittingly. If, on the other hand, they would tell Isaac the ugly truth about his wayward firstborn son, they would be violating the Torah's prohibition against *Lashon Hara*, gossip. Therefore, they decided to fool him.

That decision, writes Hekesav Vehakaballah, was a mistake. Had Rebecca and Jacob been up front with Isaac, he would have been appreciative. He would have thanked them for saving him from the "abomination" of "*justifying an evildoer and considering a righteous person evil*." They would have saved him from the error in judgment that he had made about his son. (This is borne out by the fact that when Isaac eventually realized what had happened, he agreed willingly that the blessings rightfully belonged to Jacob.)

Gossiping is a terrible sin. It is wrong to prattle and blabber about everyone else's shortcomings. We must be very careful to avoid sully someone else's reputation.

However, there are times when one is not permitted to be silent. Is your friend about to go into business with someone you know to be a swindler? Is your neighbor's daughter about to get engaged to the Boston Strangler? Has your best friend's son begun hanging out with a bad crowd?

"Oh, no!" you may say. "I don't want to get involved. I don't want to be a gossip!"

No one should want to be a gossip. But you also shouldn't want to mislead anyone, actively or passively. Your silence, allowing someone to "*justify an evildoer and consider a righteous person evil*", would be an abomination*.*

It's not always easy to know when to speak and when to be silent. The laws of permitted and prohibited speech are very complex. Books such as Chofetz Chaim: A Daily Companion and Chofetz Chaim: A Lesson A Day are an excellent start. Go to the links and buy them! The Chofetz Chaim Heritage Foundation is an organization that has been established to teach people how and when to speak about others. They have lots of dynamic programs consisting of classes by email, tapes, books, and telephone. Call them at 800-867-2482 for more information. It could change your life!

Have a great Shabbos.

Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz

