

PARASHAT TOLDOT-2014, 5775

“Learning From Eisav”

Rivka disguised Ya'akov by dressing him in Eisav's special set of clothes. (27:15). Our Chazal (Sages) tell us that this was a special set of clothing that Eisav reserved for serving his father. In spite of the fact that he was a rasha in every other way, he showed tremendous respect to his father and honored him with extraordinary devotion.

Whenever Yitzchak requested him to do something, Eisav did it with alacrity, but not in his hunting clothes or street clothes. He had a special set of clothing reserved exclusively for the service of his father. This prompted Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel to comment in the Midrash, “All my life I tried to faithfully serve my father according to Halacha, but I did not come close to the honor that Eisav gave to his father, Yitzchak.

We must bear in mind that at this time, Yitzchak was already blind, as we clearly see later from the story of the blessings. So when Eisav came dressed in special clothes, it really did not make any difference to Yitzchak, for Yitzchak would have no way of knowing what Eisav was wearing. This fact demonstrates that when Eisav was serving his father it was not merely an act. He put on his best clothes even when his father was not aware of it. This was the great extent of Kibbud Av that Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel was jealous of.

Many people in our generation are blessed with elderly parents. Sometimes, when old age sets in, parents lose awareness of their surroundings; be it Alzheimer's disease or other factors. Unfortunately and sadly, parents may at times, not even recognize their own children.

When reading this parasha it behooves us to focus and internalize this aspect. Eisav dressed up for his father, even when his father was not aware of what Eisav was wearing, for all that matters, he could have been wearing street clothes or Shabbat clothes, or no clothes. His Kibbud Av was such that he would say to himself, “it does not matter what my father knows or what my father does not know, I have an unconditional responsibility to honor my father.”

In this respect, we should all try to emulate Eisav.