

Parshas Vayishlach

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Towards the end of this week's parsha, we are shown that Amalek was a descendant of the evil Esav. The Torah tells us that Esav had a son Elifaz, and Amalek was the son of Elifaz and Timna.

The Gemara in Sanhedrin (99b) relates the tale of how Timna came to marry Elifaz and thus give birth to Amalek. Timna was a princess, and she had a strong desire to marry into the holy Jewish Nation, into the family of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. She approached them and asked to convert, but they refused her. Considering it to be of greater value to be included in Avraham's (albeit extended) family than to live a life of royalty, she went ahead and married Elifaz. The Gemara tells us that it was this refusal to accept Timna that brought about the wicked Amalek, who has been a thorn in the side of the Jewish People until this very day. Rashi explains that although the Avot meant well by rejecting her, they should have accepted her and given her a chance.

The question on the Gemara is glaring; surely the Avot knew what they were doing by rejecting Timna! They surely foresaw some measure of evil in her that had the potential to cause her to bear evil descendants. Why were they punished so severely with the birth of Amalek when their sole intent was to prevent such a birth from happening in the first place?

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz zt"l, the Mirrer Rosh Yeshiva, explains that we must learn from here how important it is to never give up on a human being. No matter how far a person might be, they always deserve a chance. This lesson is highlighted many times in the Torah. One example is when Yaakov Avinu is punished for hiding

his daughter Dina from Esav. Who can blame Yaakov for not wanting Esav as a son in law? However, the commentaries explain that Dina might have been able to change Esav for the good, thus Yaakov was taken to task for denying Esav that opportunity.

The idea of giving a troubled individual a chance to succeed is evident in the story of Lot as well. The Midrash speaks critically of Avraham's banishing of Lot. The Midrash asks rhetorically, "Avraham brought everyone close to him, but Lot he had to send away?"

Wasn't Avraham justified in sending the wicked Lot away? It is told that Avraham Avinu did not experience

The Ohr Hachaim explains that Yitzchak saw the great potential in Esav. Yitzchak's dream was that Esav harness that potential and utilize it towards greatness. Greatness in Torah, greatness for the world, and greatness for humanity. If Yitzchak saw that potential, this means the potential was there! By giving Esav the bracha, the hope was that his son's confidence would be boosted to the point where Esav is thinking, "Wow! My righteous father really believes in me! He knows I'm up to no good yet he's still giving me the bracha!"

Who knows what kind of positive energy can be infused in an individual-

“We must not give up on any Jew.”

Nevuah, prophecy, all the time he was with Lot. As soon as Lot was gone, the power of Nevuah came back to him. Yet the Midrash finds fault in Avraham's treatment of his nephew that he was not willing enough to give Lot another chance to succeed as a human being.

The idea presented here is a heavy one. No one wants to feel responsible for the actions of a wayward individual - certainly not if that individual lives in one's own home. So what is one to do in such a situation? How is a person to create a healthy relationship with that individual, while also helping them with their troubled personality?

The lesson can and must be learned from Yitzchak Avinu. We saw 2 weeks ago in Parshat Toldot that Yitzchak loved Esav while Rivka loved Yaakov. Yitzchak loved Esav? How are we to understand this? How can we view Yitzchak Avinu with such a shallow lens and say that he was totally oblivious to Esav's evil nature and character?

even a depraved individual - when he or she is given the knowledge that others have faith in them. If Chazal are telling us that Timna, the person who produced Amalek, was deserving of a chance to join Klal Yisrael, then certainly our fellow Jews deserve no less of a chance from us. This knowledge itself, that we have faith in them, can cause them to succeed.

This concept is true in all of our relationships. Our children, or spouses, and our friends need to know that we believe in them.

When I was in Eretz Yisrael I asked Rav Yitzchok Berkovits Shlit"a if there's a chiyuv, a requirement, to be mekarev even a wayward Jew, to reach out even to a Jew who is completely disinterested in Torah and Mitzvos. Before explaining the answer to my question, he immediately proclaimed loud and clear, "We don't give up on any Jew."

Shabbat shalom! ♦