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Avraham and His Children

At the farbrengen of Shabbos Parshas Toldos 5741, the Rebbe quoted the Zohar¹ on the *possuk*² “*Vayigdelu hane’arim*” (and the boys—Yaakov and Esav—grew up):

סטרא דאברהם גרים לון לאתגדלא, וזכותי סייע לון. הוא הוה מחנך לון במצות, דכתיב כי ידעתיו למען אשר יצוה את בניו וגו', לאסגאה יעקב ועשו...

“The side of Avraham caused them to grow up [lit. grow big], and the merit of his [good deeds] assisted them. He educated them in the ways of mitzvos, as it says: “For I [Hashem] know him [Avraham], because he commands his children [and his household to guard the ways of Hashem] etc.”—to include Yaakov and Esav.”

The Rebbe pointed out that Avraham’s effect on his offspring was not only that they grew up and matured physically, but also became great spiritually, as is understood from the words of the Zohar. However, Avraham’s influence lasted only as long as he was actively educating them; once he passed away, Esav went his own way. (See lengthy explanation in the *sicha* there.³)

After the farbrengen, an individual wrote to the Rebbe asking the following question:

We know that Avraham’s life was cut short by five years so that he wouldn’t see Esav turn to bad behavior. But considering the Zohar’s words cited at the farbrengen, why did Hashem do this? If Avraham would have lived longer, his *zechus* could have protected Esav for longer!

The Rebbe responded in his holy handwriting:⁴

ה”ז זכותי דבו”ד [=דבשר ודם] - מוגבל - ובפרט כשצריך להתגבר על בחירת המקבל.

ועפ”ז מתורץ קלאץ קושיא (שכמובן איש לא הקשה) דישמעאל משך זמן לא התנהג כדבעי ורק אח”כ עשה **תשובה** (רש”י כה, ט).

This merit [of Avraham] is one of [a human of] flesh and blood—which is [by definition] limited [in its capacity]—especially when it needs to override the **free choice** of the one he is trying to influence.

[I.e. the merit of Avraham was enough to allow Esav to grow spiritually, but only to a certain extent, especially when factoring in that this merit would have to counteract and reign in on Esav’s choices—for which Hashem accords him free will.]

This also provides an answer to a **basic question** (which, obviously, **no one asked**):

[How is it that] Yishmael didn’t act appropriately for a while, only doing *teshuva* afterwards [later in life]. (**Rashi** [Bereishis] 25:9.)

[I.e. we see elsewhere that Avraham’s *zechus* did not stop Yishmael from going astray for most of his life.] **T**

1. Vol. 1, 138b.

2. Toldos 25, 27.

3. Sichos Kodesh 5741, vol. 1, pp. 458–62, 475–7, edited by the Rebbe and published in Likkutei Sichos vol. 20, pp. 108–15.

4. Published in Teshura Sperlin-Ceitlin 5775.

אז כַּךְ אִתְּמַר לְיִשְׂרָאֵל

דהיה תועבות כלבד מהרבות מאד
 כַּךְ אָמַר אֱלֹהִים אֶת אֲמָר הַזֶּה עַל הַפֶּסֶן
 וּבִמְהֵרָה תְּעָרֹךְ, לָמָּה יִפְתָּח אֶת הַמַּחְנֵהוּ
 בְּאֶרֶץ סִינַי, לֹא תֵרְאֶה וּבֹרָא
 וְשִׂיא מְבֹרָא דִּבְרָה וְגַם אִפְתָּח לְפִי לְאֵלֹהֵי
 כִּי הָיָה הַהִבְטָחָה כִּי יִבְעֲלוּ אֶתְּכֶן אֶשֶׁת
 יְבוּדָה וּבֹרָא, אֲבָאֵרָה לְפִי כִּי בְּכֹיֶבֶת
 אֶהְיֶה לְעַם קָדִים הַקֹּדֶה הַזֶּה שְׁנֵי אֶלְוֵינוּ
 כִּי שָׁלוֹם וְנַחֲמֵה אֶת עַמּוֹ יוּבָא לְמַגְדוֹ
 דְּעָה - הָלֹא אֵת הַזֶּה מִן אֶת הַזֶּה בְּפֹתֵינוּ
 מִיַּעַן אֶתְּכֶן,

ר' שלום
 מִן הַמַּחְנֵהוּ
 מִן הַמַּחְנֵהוּ

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