

D'var Torah for Parshat Toldot
By Mikel Garner, 8th grade

Have you ever seen something you felt was so awful, but a friend felt it was no big deal? Something like that happens in this week's parsha, Toldot.

ויהי עשו בן-ארבעים שנה ויקח אשה את-יהודית בת-בארי החתי ואת-בשמת בת-אילן

החתי: ותהיין מרת רוח ליצחק ולרבקה.

*And Eisav was forty years when he married Yehudit, the daughter of Ari the Hitite and Busmat, the daughter of Alon the Hitite. And they were an embittering of the spirit **to** Yitzchak **and to** Rivka.*

Rashi wonders why the Torah is not more concise. Couldn't the Torah write "ליצחק ורבקה", "**to** Yitzchak and Rivka" rather than "ליצחק ולרבקה", **to** Yitzchak and **to** Rivka? Two "to's" is too much!

Rashi's solution is:

שהיו עובדות עבודה זרה

They were worshipping idols

Huh? How does that answer anything? Yitzchak and Rivka both didn't like that Eisav's wives were worshipping idols. Still, that doesn't explain why the word "to" is written separately by both Yitzchak and Rivka!

The commentaries on Rashi explain that writing the word "to" separately before each person implies that Yitzchak and Rivka were embittered at different levels. Since Yitzchak is written first, the Torah is indicating that he was more embittered by their daughters-in-laws' behavior than was Rivka. Rashi chooses idolatry as their offense since that would be a sin that Rivka would not mind as much as Yitzchak would. Rivka had grown up in a culture of idol worship, as a result of which she might have been "used to it" a bit. Yitzchak, having grown up in the home of Avraham and Sarah, would have been somewhat sheltered from idolatry, and would therefore be more upset at his daughters-in-law's involvement in it.

I have a problem with this approach. At the start of Toldot, in verse 20 of the 25th chapter, the Torah repeats something that is already known from the previous parsha, Chayei Sarah: Rivka's family and background. It says that Rivka was...

...בת-בתואל הארמי מפדן ארם אחות לבן

...Daughter of Bituel the Aramite, from Padan Aram, sister of Lavan...

Rashi asks,

וכי עדין לא נכתב שהיא בת בתואל ואחות לבן מפדן ארם?

Doesn't it already write that Rivka was the daughter of Bituel, sister of Lavan, from Padan Aram?

He answers,

אלא להגיד שבחה שהיתה בת רשע ואחות רשע ומקומה אנשי רשע ולא למדה ממעשיהם.

But to praise her, that she was the daughter of evil, the sister of evil, and in a place of evil people, and she didn't learn from their actions.

Rivka had to resist her idolatrous environment with a strength that Yitzchak never had to develop. But wouldn't Rivka's opposition to idolatry have created a hatred to it that would have been activated by seeing her daughters-in-law worship idols?

Rashi is telling us that even though she needed to courageously oppose her entire culture to be the way she was, she could not avoid becoming somewhat tolerant of idol worship. Being surrounded by something you oppose means that you always see it and can't help but get somewhat used to it.

Is it good or bad to be **less** embittered by evil? It depends. We should never lose our inability to recognize evil. But being able to tolerate it emotionally is helpful when you want or need to interact with the people whose ideas you oppose. You might even be more effective fighting the evil than someone who "can't stand it", because you can remain calm and perhaps make better decisions about how to fight the evil.