

Excuseless

There are those that give different excuses why they can't accomplish in various areas (studying Torah, being successful at a profession, and so on). One's excuse is because of his upbringing while another blames his Rebbe. Another claims he has a learning disability. The list goes on. Nevertheless, we see some that have troubles yet become successes and others that don't, as it depends on us, not outside factors. In this way the Ritva (In his commentary on the Haggada, pg 27 s.v. ואתן ליצחק. Printed in Chidushai HaRitva after Mesachta Pesachim) explains why Yaakov and Esav were twins, as it was to show that the righteousness of Yaakov came because of himself and not because of his parents or any other reason. Yaakov and Esav were in the same stomach, the same parents, and so forth yet Yaakov was righteous and Esav evil. So, the cause of our greatness or lack of it is dependent on us. This is just as R' Elazar Ben Durdiya remarked אין הדבר תלוי אלא בי, it depends solely on me (Avoda Zara 17a. The Pasuk says by Yaakov and Esav ...ויגדלו הנערים, they grew up. Esav became one who knows hunting and Yaakov was an איש תם, wholesome [Breishis 25:27]. When one grows up and he is out of the domain of his parents and Yeshiva, which way does he go? Like an Esav or

a Yaakov.)

The great R' Akiva could have had many excuses for why he shouldn't be a success. He didn't begin learning Torah until age 40 (Avos Drebi Nosson 6:2 describes how he, together with his young son, went to Cheder to learn the Alef-Beis.), didn't descend from Jewish lineage (Brachos 27b. See R' Nissim Gaon, s.v. עקיבא לר' עקיבא.), his father-in-law was against him marrying his daughter (Kesubos 62b. After he betrothed her, and she sent him away to learn Torah, her father threw her out of his house and made a vow prohibiting her to benefit from his possessions.), 24,000 students of his died (Yevamos 62b. This is alluded to in [Vayikra 23:15]- את עמר in dealing with Sefira- as it is an acronym for עקיבא מתו מגבת עד אנטיפרס, the students of R' Akiva from Gevas until Antifras [border towns] died during Sefira. How many died? This is alluded to in the same Pasuk in the words וספרתם לכם, count for yourselves. Let us multiply each letter of the word לכם by its adjoining letter.

ל [20] multiplied by כ [30] is 600. 600 multiplied by מ [40] is 24,000! and so on. Yet he persevered and became the great R' Akiva to the extent that he recited Shema at his final moments on this world while being combed to death with saying I finally have the

opportunity to fulfill לכתב, even if he takes your soul (Brachos 61b. R' Akiva was arrested because the Roman government decreed that the Jewish people not engage in learning Torah yet R' Akiva convened public assemblies and studied Torah with them.)!

This idea is shown in the Parsha where it speaks of the two goats of Yom Kippur. The Mishna (Yoma 62a) states that they should be alike in appearance, height, value, and purchased in a single transaction. Yet, one is for Hashem and one is לזאועל (Vayikra 16:8). Similarly, two people can have the same parents, attend the same Yeshivos and the like and turn out so different. One may have good excuses for why he is unsuccessful. We can compare this to one that is overweight who was extremely busy working and taking care of his family that he had no time to exercise thereby being unable to lose weight. Although it may be true, nevertheless because of his inaction he looks the way he looks.

The Gemara says יוח סיבבוש סינב ובוש, return wayward sons except for Acher (Chagiga 15a). This can also be interpreted that those who say I am the exception, I am different (רחא) are the ones that can't (יוח) do Teshuva because they think they are different. It is the ones who say I am different that don't accomplish in life, as they always have excuses.

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