BS"D
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Potomac Torah Study Center
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NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org**. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah. New: a limited number of copies of the first attachment will now be available at Beth Sholom on the Shabbas table!**

Before the pandemic, Beth Sholom had a late maariv service at 8 p.m. Monday - Thursday evenings during standard time. Since the start of the pandemic, with mincha/maariv on Zoom, a large increase in our members working remotely, and decreased attendance in local shuls, many who would otherwise have attended a late maariv are instead davening mincha/maariv on Zoom. Some of our members take half an hour out of work for the Zoom service and extend their work time an extra half hour. Since we have not had requests for a late maariv at Beth Sholom, we have not planned for one for this winter. If anyone feels a need for this service (for a yahrtzeit or regularly), contact me at AfisherADS@Yahoo.com.

Parshat Toldot opens by stating that Yitzhak's legacy is that Avraham sired Yitzhak (25:19). The Torah states explicitly that the key accomplishment of Yitzhak is that he is Avraham's son – with all that this statement implies. The Torah spends three parshot on Avraham and four complete parshot plus parts of a few others on Yaakov. In contrast, other than the Akeidah and his meeting with Rivka, only Toldot focuses on Yitzhak.

Most of the incidents involving Yitzhak seem mundane. During a famine, Yitzhak goes to Gerar and encounters Avimelech (as did his father) and passes off Rivka as his sister (as his father did with Sarah). Yitzhak settles in Gerar, plants crops, and God gives him a yield of a hundred times what he plants (thereby inspiring jealousy among his Philistine neighbors). He re-digs his father's wells, fights with the Philistines over the water, and moves two more times, until he moves far enough from Gerar that the Philistines leave him alone. Yitzhak only attains peace and success when he follows his father's example and moves around, puts up tents rather than a permanent home, builds an alter, and calls out about Hashem. Yitzhak learns the lesson that God gives him wealth so he can move around and educate people about God.

Yitzhak's significance is, as the Torah states, that he is Avraham's son (in actions as well as in looks). Yitzhak carries Avraham's logical deductions about Hashem and chesed to a new generation – and teaches these lessons to his children. Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, and Steinsaltz all emphasize that Avraham's insights make him an innovator, and any innovator must have followers after him. As Rabbi Linzer puts it, using scientific terminology, an innovator without followers is a "kook." When a second innovator follows an innovator, the first one is a kook, because he lacks followers to spread his wisdom. By taking Avraham's logical deductions (insights) and lessons and teaching them to his children (as well as others in the land), Yitzhak turns Avraham's insights into traditions and thereby starts a Jewish heritage to pass along to later generations, for family and to build a nation.

For me, the concept of legacy implies a focus on human mortality. A focus on death becomes more intense as a person ages. Many incidents involving Yitzhak focus on aspects of death. The Akeidah involves Yitzhak traveling with his father for three days to offer a sacrifice, which Yitzhak soon realizes is to be him. Rabbi David Fohrman closely examines Yitzhak's request to Esav to go hunting, kill an animal, prepare the meat, and bring it to him so he can offer him a bracha. Rabbi Fohrman observes that the order of the conversation, and the exact words of the conversation that Yitzhak has with his sons, parallel the Akeidah. Yitzhak must realize that his interactions with his son (or sons) is becoming a spooky repeat of the Akeidah. Instead of a young Yitzhak going to a premature death as a korban, an aged, blind Yitzhak, feeling his death approaching, is now the father, this time interacting with his much younger son(s). Yitzhak's emotional anguish at not understanding which son is before him must be interacting with the spooky reliving of his earlier life changing experience.

While Yitzhak goes through life consolidating his father's religious and interpersonal innovations, Yitzhak and Rivka struggle to find the best way to raise two very different sons – twins but opposites in personal characteristics. Rabbi Mordechai Rhine beautifully explores Yitzhak's vision of two sons working together as partners. Esav, man of the world, would defend the family, successfully interact in the business world, and support Yaakov. In turn, Yaakov, the scholar, would take the lead in religious matters and preserve Avraham's innovations for future generations. Rivka, however, raised in Lavan's University of Deception, realizes that Esav would not fulfill the role of financial and military partner. She understands that Yaakov must develop these skills, so she sends him to Lavan's university to develop the skills he lacks. Both Esav and Yaakov have much to learn – and Rivka realizes that Yaakov is the better bet to develop these skills. (Rivka has a prophesy to reinforce what she observes. The tradition is that one may not share a prophesy with another person without permission.)

Many modern commentators consider Esav to be an evil character. As with most humans, Esav is complex and neither totally good nor totally evil. The Midrash, for example, praises Esav for loving and honoring his father (although also admitting that Esav often acts improperly). Esav's parents never approve of his wives, especially his first two (Canaanite) wives. Although Esav has a hot temper and threatens to kill his brother after their father dies, Esav never does so. Instead, the brothers embrace when they meet again, and they come together to bury their father. Many years later, when B'Nai Yisrael are finally ready to enter the land that God promised to the Patriarchs, Moshe reminds them that they are not to attack Edom, because Edom are family (Esav). The prohibition of abusing Edom (despite its unwillingness to permit B'Nai Yisrael to cross its territory or even purchase water or food) contrasts with the commandment to wipe out Esav's grandson Amalek.

As we turn to a new generation in the Torah, the world continues. We mourn the loss of our long time friend Judy Stein on the same day when we receive an invitation to our daughter-in-law's cousin's wedding. Next week marks the 83rd anniversary of Kristallnacht, Holocaust Memorial Day (the night of November 9). We have a beautiful woven metal tallit by our close friend Renate Chernoff representing Kristallnacht. Renate's husband Amoz has just shared with us the beautiful news that two of Renate's major pieces are going to Holocaust museums – one in Los Angeles and the other in Washington, DC. These events, some happy, some sad, and some special in their own way, all involve legacies. Sefer Bereishis is a collection of toldot, or legacies – and in studying the Sefer, we learn to appreciate legacies in many different ways.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, introduced my family and me to deeper levels of appreciation for the legacy of Judaism than I had learned before. By starting me on a lifetime of learning, Rabbi Cahan encouraged us to explore the richness of the toldot of our religion through shul, our sons' schools, books – many different ways. Although a Conservative Rabbi, he encouraged us when we sent our sons to Orthodox schools and approved when we felt that it was time to join Orthodox shuls. Rabbi Cahan was proud to have former congregants in numerous Orthodox shuls (and also proud to have numerous children of his congregants training to become Rabbis or work in other contexts in the Jewish community). Our family members are all proud to be part of toldot Rabbi Leonard Cahan.

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Yehoshua Mayer HaLevi ben Nechama Zelda, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, David Leib ben Sheina Reizel, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, Ramesh bat Heshmat, and Regina bat Simcha, who need our prayers. I have removed a number of names that have been on the list for a long time. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

Drasha: Toldos: Butter Battles

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1996

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

This week the Torah tells us of the great dichotomy of character between Yaakov and his older brother Esav. Yaakov sat and studied while Esav hunted. Though it is difficult to understand the roots of this great divide, their parents' reaction to this diversity is even more confusing. The Torah tells us that "Yitzchak loved Esav for there was game in his mouth, and Rivka loved Yaakov." (Genesis 25:28)

The variance in their opinions manifested itself in the fight over the blessings. Yitzchak intended that Esav receive his blessings for worldly goods, intending to save the spiritual ones for Yaakov. Rivka pushed her son Yaakov to attain the blessings for the worldly goods, too.

What was the fundamental difference between Yitzchak's and Rivka's view of their children? Why was there such a diverse notion as to who should inherit the wealth of this world? How is it possible that Yitzchak, who epitomized the very essence of spirituality, favored Esav, a man steeped in worldly desires?

Vice President Al Gore tells a story about outgoing Senator Bill Bradley. Senator Bradley once attended a dinner at which he was a guest speaker. The waiter set down a side dish of potatoes, and placed a pat of butter upon them. The Senator asked for an extra portion of butter.

"I'm sorry sir," the very unyielding server replied tersely, "one pat per guest."

With a combined expression of shock, scorn, and disbelief, Senator Bradley looked up at the formal steward. "Excuse me," he said. "Do you know who I am? I am New Jersey Senator Bill Bradley." The Senator cleared his throat. "I am a Rhodes scholar and a former NBA star. I currently serve on the International Trade and Long-Term Growth Committee, and the Debt and Deficit Reduction Committee, and I am in charge of Taxation and IRS Oversight. And I'd like another pat of butter on my potatoes."

The waiter looked down at the Senator.

"Do you know who I am?" he asked.
"I am the one in charge of the butter."

Yitzchok understood the great contrariety between his children. However, he felt that Esav, the hunter-child, understood the mundane world much better. So it was only fitting that Esav be gifted with the blessings of a mundane world. Esav would then supplement Yaakov's needs, and a true symbiosis would emerge. Rivka, on the other hand, was pragmatic. She felt that putting Esav in charge of the material world would lead to selfish hoarding that would hardly give Yaakov a portion.

She understood that while Yaakov's sustenance was basically from spirituality, he still needed a little butter to survive. And she could not rely on Esav controlling the butter: she knew the personality all too well. There would be no parity or sharing. Esav would take it all.

Everybody has a job, whether it be spiritual or menial, and each job must be executed with a sense of responsibility and mission. The argument between Rivka and Yitzchak was complex, but it was simple too. Esav may be more astute in churning the butter; however, will he make sure to give Yaakov his fair share? Rivka knew that the world would be a better place if we all shared our respective portions. But she wouldn't count on it.

Good Shabbos!

https://torah.org/torah-portion/drasha-5759-chayeisarah/

In Praise of Yitzchak

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2021

Who was Yitzchak? What was his life about, and what was the lasting legacy that he left for future generations?

The first verse of Parshat Toldot contains the answer: "These are the generations of Yitzchak, the son of Avraham: Avraham fathered Yitzchak" (Gen. 25:19). Yitzchak's life can be distilled into this one fact: He was the son of Avraham.

The significant events of Yitzchak's life, as told by the Torah, are those in which he follows in his father's footsteps, as he repeats and re-lives moments of Avraham's life. During his life, Avraham had claimed that Sarah was his sister, and so Avimelekh tried to take her as his wife. Yitzchak also claims that Rivka is his sister, and Avimelekh — perhaps somewhat wiser this time — also almost takes Rivka for a wife. Avraham had dug wells in the land of the Philistines; Yitzchak re-digs those same wells and re-dedicates them by calling them by the names that Avraham had given them.

It is hard to feel inspired by Yitzchak's life. He is not the compelling visionary, the path-breaking pioneer, that his father was. And yet, as a people, we would never have survived and prospered were it not for our forefather Yitzchak and for all the "Yitzchaks" who followed him.

After Avraham, you need a Yitzchak.

After a visionary, you do not want another visionary. After the advent of a radical new religious worldview — a belief in a single, ethical God — the last thing you need is another worldview that is also radical and new. What you need, after all this excitement, is a little normalcy. You need to stop the pilgrimages and the wanderings, and to put down roots and settle the land.

For that first leader's vision to take hold and get traction, the leader who comes after a visionary must ground that vision in reality. That leader must model how to sustain that vision so that it can continue in the next generation, and in the generations after that one.

Yitzchak took what Avraham did and made it into a fact of life, a structure of how we live. He translated vision into practice, and into the daily rhythms of life. He shepherded the next generation from charisma to custom.

To some degree, Yitzchak is a follower, not a leader. We would do him and ourselves a great disservice, however, to downplay the power of this role. As Derek Sivers teaches in his well-known TED talk, without followers, a leader is just a kook. It is the followers — and critically, the first follower — who make this would-be kook into a leader, and who transform one person's actions into the start of a wider movement.

In this role as a follower, one can be a great leader. Yitzchak, critically, does not just follow the forms of Avraham's practice. He understands the vision and he works to keep it alive. After Avraham dies, the wells that Avraham had dug — the life-giving, nurturing sources that he uncovered — had become stopped up. It is Yitzchak's task to ensure that these waters — their energy and their power — keep on flowing, even when Avraham, with his magnetic charisma, is no longer around. As a leader, Yitzchak also understands that what inspires and what nurtures the soul for one generation will not

necessarily be the same for the next one. For Avraham's legacy not to become ossified, hollow forms and new wells need to be dug. This time, they are new wells, with new names.

A famous scholar once said that tradition is the living religion of the dead, while traditionalism is the dead religion of the living. It is Yitzchak's leadership, his digging of both old and new wells, that ensures that Avraham's religious vision will translate into a living tradition rather than a dead traditionalism.

Thank God, in our millenia-long history as a people, we have had our Avrahams. In fact, we have had a good number just in the last century: Theodore Herzl, Rav Soloveitchik, Rav Kook, and the Lubavitcher Rebbe, among others. However, it is the Yitzchaks — the ones who have continued and sustained our tradition, who have treasured it, taught it and passed it down, who have found ways to keep its waters flowing, who have dug new wells so that those wells continues to give life and nourishment to the soul — it is those Yitzchaks, with their follower-ship and their leadership, who have kept our Judaism alive throughout the centuries.

Shabbat shalom.

https://library.yctorah.org/2021/11/in-praise-of-yitzchak/

With Two Shoulders

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine * © 2021

Partnerships are great. Each partner can excel in the areas in which they are gifted and be complemented by their partner who is gifted in other areas. It is with reliable partnerships that marriages are built between husband and wife, and it is through reliable partnerships that the Jewish people thrive. In the case of Yakov and Esav it was not to be.

In understanding Yitzchak's intent to give the blessings to Esav, the commentaries explain that Yitzchak had a vision that Yakov would be the scholar and leader of the Jewish family and Esav would be in charge of finance and defense. In this way each could excel in the area in which they were best, and rest assured that the other needs of the joint endeavor (building the Jewish people) were being attended to.

Rivka, however, realized the reality. Esav was not accepting upon himself the role of loyal partner in that proposed partnership, and so, Yakov would personally need to shoulder both sets of responsibilities. Rivka knew that to shoulder the physical responsibilities in addition to the spiritual ones, would require great fortitude and blessing. So, she sent Yakov into Yitzchak with a bit of a trick, to obtain the blessings which we would need to carry on the family legacy.

In fact, perhaps this is why Hashem made Yitzchak blind. A prominent reason given is "so that Yakov could get the blessings." By making Yitzchak blind, Hashem made him unaware of Esav's ways, that Esav had deviated from the family legacy. We wonder: Wouldn't it have been simpler for Yitzchak not to be blind, to be aware of Esav's ways, and choose to give Yakov the blessings?

Yet, if Yitzchak had been aware that Esav chose to depart from the family legacy, he would have given the blessings to Yakov with less exuberance, viewing Yakov as a person who is mainly a scholar, but would now multitask the spiritual and physical. This would not be sufficient. Yakov was shouldering both portfolios with full responsibility. He would need to excel in both areas and needed his father's heartfelt blessing as if each responsibility was mutually exclusive, and not merely an add-on.

Yakov accepted the dual responsibility that was thrust upon him. He emerged as the noble scholar and sage, and also as the savvy man of the world who could personally deal with Lavan in business, and with Esav on the battlefield. But he did try to implement the concept of partnerships in the dynamic of his children as he founded the Jewish people. Indeed, the partnership of Yissachar and Zevulun, scholar and businessman, emerged as a prototype of a reliable partnership. Likewise, the relationship of Levi and the other brothers emerged as a manner where one tribe would be focused on spiritual service and be ready to inspire the people, especially on the holidays when everyone came to the Beis Hamikdash where the Leviyim served.

All of us are children of Yakov, and so, even as we have areas in which we are particularly strong, we can never really live lives that are mutually exclusive in one area or another. The historical responsibility which Yakov shouldered in both spiritual and physical, remains implanted in our genes regardless of which tribe we are from. For the businessman, even as he shoulders the responsibility of making an honest living and supporting Torah causes, he will also see himself, on a personal level, having a scholarly relationship with Torah. Likewise, the Torah scholar, even as he shoulders the responsibilities of leadership, scholarship, tradition, and education, he will also see himself, on a personal level, having an awareness of the logistics that it takes to succeed as a Jewish people.

One example of this dual awareness is Yehoshua, the beloved disciple of Moshe, and Moshe's successor in leading the Jewish people. Yehoshua was the disciple of note. He never missed a lecture. Yet, he also was busy arranging the benches supporting and providing the logistics needed for success in Torah. Regarding him Chazal declare, "Hashem saw that Torah was dear to him --" he studied it, and he supported it with great devotion, "— and blessed him, 'the Torah shall never depart from you or your descendants, forever.'"

Have a wonderful Shabbos!

Rabbi Rhine, until recently Rav of Southeast Congregation in Silver Spring, is a well known mediator and coach. His web site, Teach613.org, contains many of his brilliant Devrei Torah. RMRhine@Teach613.org

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Truth or Consequences: Thoughts for Parashat Toledot

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Hans Christian Anderson wrote a classic tale about an Emperor who took great pride in his clothes. Several clever swindlers convinced the Emperor to buy a most wonderful outfit — one that only stupid people would be unable to see.

The Emperor sent advisers to view the new regal attire — which in fact consisted of nothing at all. The advisers were too embarrassed to admit that they couldn't see the garments. They praised the new clothes to the Emperor, who then tried them on himself. He also couldn't see them, but didn't want to admit this since he did not want to be deemed to be stupid.

The Emperor dressed in his new clothes and led a parade through town. The townspeople were too ashamed to admit that they couldn't see the clothes, because they did not want to be thought to be stupid. At last, a child looked up at the Emperor and shouted spontaneously: "Look, the Emperor has no clothes." Everyone, including the Emperor, knew that the child was right; but the Emperor continued with the procession comporting himself with as much dignity as he could muster.

Truth is a troublesome thing. It shatters illusions. It can be abrupt and unpleasant. But once one realizes the truth, one should accept it and act accordingly. Instead, so many — like the Emperor in the tale — continue as though they never heard the truth. They have too much invested in their illusions and falsehoods. It costs too much emotionally to give up on mistakes or to admit errors in judgment.

Spin doctors do their best to make falsehood appear to be truth. P.R. specialists promote the illusions and make the public think they will look stupid if they deny these illusions. At last, someone cries out: "The Emperor has no clothes." But that voice is ignored or silenced. Folly marches on.

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Ephraim (1748-1800), a grandson of the Baal Shem Tov, wrote a Torah commentary — "Degel Mahanei Ephraim" – drawing on many of the teachings of his illustrious grandfather. He offers an interesting comment on an anomalous word usage in this week's Torah portion.

When Esau is born, the Torah states "and they named him Esau" — they, in the plural. When Jacob is born, the Torah states "and he named him Jacob" — he, in the singular. Why the discrepancy?

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Ephraim, drawing on classic rabbinic Midrashim, suggests that Esau and Jacob symbolically represent two opposite qualities. Esau is the embodiment of falsehood; Jacob is the embodiment of truth. Esau is named in the plural, because many people are attracted to falsehood. Jacob is named in the singular, because only rare individuals are attracted to truth.

But how can that be? Doesn't everyone crave truth? Don't all people repudiate falsehood?

The problem is that we live in a world where it is difficult to distinguish between truth and falsehood, where things are subject to interpretation. Was Don Quixote a madman, or was everyone else insane? Or was there truth and madness on both sides? Who is to decide what is really true and what is genuinely false?

Wise people know that truth and falsehood, like Jacob and Esau, are twins. But they also know that they need to work hard and think clearly to distinguish between the two. Most people are inclined to believe whatever they want to believe, whatever is convenient to believe, whatever is politically correct to believe, whatever they are told to believe. Few people are inclined to cut through the omnipresent static of falsehood, especially when exertion for truth can exact a heavy personal toll.

The late great psychiatrist, Dr. Silvano Arieti, once described a dilemma he faced. He dealt with patients whose grasp of reality was very weak. Patients thought they were kings or queens, that they were all powerful. As long as they lived with these illusions, they were actually happy. To "cure" them would entail the undoing of their fantasies, making them face a reality which was far less pleasant than their world of illusions. While each case and each diagnosis needed to be dealt with on its own terms, Dr. Arieti's basic belief was that human dignity ultimately needed to be based on truth, not on illusions. Even if truth is more unpleasant than falsehood, the pursuit of truth is a basic human ideal.

"The Emperor has no clothes!" These words pierce through the illusions and propaganda and political correctness that engulf us. The many will ignore or deny these words. The few will listen, will face the truth, and will maintain their dignity and the dignity of humanity.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

https://www.jewishideas.org/truth-or-consequences-thoughts-parashat-toledot

The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website jewishideas.org or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Instutite for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time.

Forgiveness, Piety, Tolerance
Rabbi M. Angel Responds to Questions from the Jewish Press

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Is it proper to tell someone you forgive them if you don't mean it?

In his "Laws of Repentance," (2:10), Rambam writes: "When a sinner asks forgiveness, one should grant it with a full heart and willing soul. Even if the other has sinned greatly against him and caused him much anguish, he should not take revenge or bear a grudge."

Rambam expects a lot of us! How can we forgive someone with a full heart when that person has wronged us grievously? How can we be expected to act in such a lofty, saintly manner?

The answer is: when we harbor grudges, we infect ourselves with negative emotions. We are expected to offer forgiveness not only for the sake of the sinner—but for our own sakes. If a person has the courage to apologize to us and admit past sins against us, we now have an opportunity to rid ourselves of negative, self-destructive feelings.

What if we cannot reach this high level of forgiving? Then we should forgive anyway, even if not sincerely. At least this is a step toward reconciliation with the offender. And it is also a step toward self-purification.

Is it good to fill one's sentences with "baruch Hashem," 'iyH," and "bli neder." How about when talking with non Jews?

Genuinely religious people feel the presence of Hashem. They naturally and spontaneously offer blessings. They know that future plans are contingent on the will of Hashem. They often use such phrases as barukh Hashem or im yirtseh Hashem…and these are sincere expressions of a religiously sensitive person.

If these phrases are used "for show" or to impress others with one's religiosity, then these phrases are counterfeit. Instead of reflecting genuine piety, they reflect hypocrisy.

Whether speaking with a Jew or non-Jew, one should use such phrases carefully and appropriately. One should neither flaunt one's piety nor be ashamed to mention blessing and gratitude to the Almighty.

We learn from religious role models. My grandfather Marco Romey, of blessed memory, used to say "bendicho el Dio" (Ladino for barukh Hashem) on many occasions. When he said it, though, he tended to pause a moment so that the words were said with concentration, not merely mumbled as a formula. He set a good example that all of us would do well to follow.

Should parents encourage children to be tolerant of opposing political opinions?

Parents "encourage" their children to be tolerant and respectful by setting the example themselves. Children learn more from their parents' behavior than from their preachments.

Unfortunately, we face growing divisions within society. The level of vitriol and outright hatred has risen dramatically in recent years. There is a tendency to stick to one's own views, political or otherwise, and not give careful attention to those who differ. Instead of thoughtful discussion and dialogue, we too often are confronted with hostile shouting and name-calling.

Those who foster extreme divisiveness are part of the problem; we should strive for ourselves and our children to be part of the solution. The issue isn't merely tolerance of opposing opinions, but actually listening to what the opponents are saying. If they have any truth on their side, admit it. If they are wrong, then refute their positions respectfully.

Some people are so opinionated, it's not possible to discuss things with them in a calm way. So it's best to articulate one's own views without wasting time in useless arguing.

We want our children and grandchildren to grow into responsible, thinking and respectful citizens. Don't preach at them: set the proper example.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

https://www.jewishideas.org/article/forgiveness-piety-tolerance-rabbi-m-angel-responds-questions-jewish-press

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Benjamin Disraeli: An Ongoing Enigma

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881) was one of the most illustrious and powerful men in 19th century England (and the world), and yet he remains an enigma. Was he a proud Jew? Was he a sincere Christian? Was he a brilliant politician? Was he a buffoon? Was he a great and visionary leader of the British Empire? Was he a party hack who was mostly interested in advancing himself and his loyalists?

The answer to all these questions seems to be: yes, no, perhaps, we are not sure.

Disraeli's family had been members of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of London. His father, Isaac — for a variety of reasons — decided to have his children baptized and raised as Christians. In July 1817, shortly before Benjamin would have celebrated his Bar Mitzvah, the young boy was brought to church and was baptized.

Now that he was a Christian, he could blend in better with English society, right? In a way yes, but in a way no. He was still identified as a Jew. His very name gave him away. His appearance was described as being "oriental," not really a pure English Christian. Benjamin dressed flamboyantly and acted accordingly. After completing his studies, he spent a few years with a firm of solicitors in London, and then he tried his hand at journalism. He made some disastrous investments that put him in serious financial trouble. Heavily in debt, he tried to salvage the situation by writing popular novels that would pay him decent royalties.

He turned to politics but lost his first several attempts to get elected to Parliament. At last, in 1837 he won an election and became a member of Parliament. In 1839, he married a prosperous widow (although not as wealthy as he had expected), and went on to live a happy married life with her until her passing in 1872. Benjamin Disraeli was a gifted orator and a very able debater. He came to lead the "Young England Party" in Parliament. He rose to various high positions in government, and became Prime Minister in 1868 for a short spell. He again rose to become Prime Minister in 1874 and served in that position into 1880. He held the title of Earl of Beaconsfield.

Although Disraeli was a Christian, a member of Parliament, a popular author, a confidant of Queen Victoria…his detractors never stopped seeing him as a Jew, an outsider, an interloper. He had to struggle against unceasing political malice and anti-Jewish malevolence. He climbed to the top of the "slippery pole" of political power by dint of his genius, his political prowess, and his ability to outshine all his rivals.

Instead of denying or de-emphasizing his Jewish roots, Disraeli flaunted his Jewishness. His public posture was that Christianity was an outgrowth and broader expression of Judaism. "Everything gentle and sublime in the religious code of the New Testament is a mere transcript from the so-called oral law of the Jews" (Weintraub, p. 453). In his novel, Tancred, one of his Jewish characters taunts the English nobleman by pointing out that "half Christendom worships a Jewess, and the other half a Jew….Which is the superior race, the worshipped or the worshippers?" The Christian world owed the Jews an immense debt.

In his novel, Coningsby, Disraeli idealized a wise man by name of Sidonia. "All of us encounter, at least once in our life, some individual who utters words that make us think forever. There are men whose phrases are oracles; who condense in a sentence the secrets of life; who blurt out an aphorism that forms a character or illustrates an existence. A great thing is a great book; but greater than all is the talk of a great man" (Coningsby, p.149). Sidonia the Jew was such a man, one who had "exhausted all the sources of human knowledge." Sidonia propounded the greatness of the Jews. "And at this moment, in spite of centuries, of tens of centuries, of degradation, the Jewish mind exercises a vast influence on the affairs of Europe. I speak not of their laws, which you still obey; of their literature, with which your minds are saturated; but of the living Hebrew intellect. You never observe a great intellectual movement in Europe in which the Jews do not greatly participate" (p. 271). Sidonia reminds Coningsby that Europe owes the Jews "the best part of its laws, a fine portion of its literature, all its religion" (p. 273).

Anti-Semites never forgave Disraeli's Jewishness and constantly identified him as a Jew in spite of his conversion to Anglicanism. In response to a vicious anti-Semitic comment made in the British parliament, Disraeli famously retorted: "Yes, I am a Jew, and when the ancestors of the Right Honourable Gentleman were brutal savages in an unknown island, mine were priests in the Temple of Solomon."

Disraeli's novel, Tancred, originally published in 1847, tells of a young British nobleman who had a spiritual longing to visit the Holy Land. When he arrived, he spent time with a Jewish family and became acquainted with Jewish religious life. His visit coincided with Succoth, and he was told that this is a great national festival celebrating the harvest. He was shown the lulav and etrog, symbols of the autumn harvest. Tancred was deeply impressed.

Disraeli writes: "The vineyards of Israel have ceased to exist, but the eternal law enjoins the children of Israel still to celebrate the vintage. A race that persist in celebrating their vintage, although they have no fruits to gather, will regain their vineyards. What sublime inexorability in the law! But what indomitable spirit in the people!"

Disraeli notes that it is easier for "the happier Sephardim, the Hebrews who have never quitted the sunny regions that are laved by the Midland Ocean," to observe the festival, since they can identify with the climate and setting of the early

generations of Israelites who celebrated Succoth. “But picture to yourself the child of Israel in the dingy suburb or the squalid quarter of some bleak northern town, where there is never a sun that can at any rate ripen grapes. Yet he must celebrate the vintage of purple Palestine! The law has told him, though a denizen in an icy clime, that he must dwell for seven days in a bower….”

He continues with a description of the ignominies which Jews suffer in their ghettos in Europe “living amid fogs and filth, never treated with kindness, seldom with justice....Conceive such a being, an object to you of prejudice, dislike, disgust, perhaps hatred. The season arrives, and the mind and heart of that being are filled with images and passions that have been ranked in all ages among the most beautiful and the most genial of human experience; filled with a subject the most vivid, the most graceful, the most joyous, and the most exuberant…the harvest of the grape in the native regions of the vine.”

The downtrodden Jews, in observance of Succoth, find real joy in life. They decorate their Succahs as beautifully as they can; their families gather together to eat festive meals in the Succah. The outside world may be cruel and ugly; but their inner life is joyous and noble. Their external conditions may not seem too happy, but their internal happiness is real. The Jews, while remembering the glories of the Israelite past, also dream of the future glories of the Israelites when their people will be restored to their ancient greatness.

Was Disraeli a Zionist before there was an official Zionist movement? Yes…and no. Like so much about Disraeli, there is ambiguity. On the one hand, he spoke and wrote emotionally about the Jewish attachment to the holy land, and to their ultimate return to Israel. But on the other hand, he did not actively initiate or pursue any policies that would lead to a Jewish return to the land of Israel.

In his novel, Alroy, the Jewish hero states: “You ask me what I wish: my answer is, a national existence, which we have not. You ask me what I wish: my answer is, the Land of Promise. You ask me what I wish: my answer is, Jerusalem. You ask me what I wish: my answer is, the Temple, all we forfeited, all we have yearned after, all for which we have fought, our beauteous country, our holy creed, our simple manners, and our ancient customs.”

One of Disraeli’s political associates, Lord Stanley, wrote in his diary that on one occasion Disraeli spoke to him “with great apparent earnestness on the subject of restoring the Jews to their own land….The country, he said, had ample natural capabilities; all it wanted was labour, and protection for the labourer; the ownership of the soil might be bought from Turkey: money would be forthcoming: the Rothschilds and leading Hebrew capitalists would all help.” These words were spoken a half century before Herzl’s The Jewish State (1897). Yet, Stanley went on to note that Disraeli “never recurred to it again. I have heard of no practical step taken or attempted to be taken by him in the matter” (Kirsch pp.909-91).

Disraeli described himself as the blank page between the Old and New Testaments. He belonged to both Testaments in part, and to neither in full. He was born a Sephardic Jew and remained very proud of his Jewish roots. He was a member of the Anglican Church, and expressed loyalty to its teachings. But in spite of his being baptized as a child, he was still thought of as a Jew. Winston Churchill put it very well: “I always believed in Dizzy, that old Jew. He saw into the future.”

* * *

Benjamin Disraeli’s family were members of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of London, a sister Congregation of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York — where I’ve been associated as rabbi since 1969. The two congregations share the Western Sephardic traditions and religious worldview. When I think of Benjamin Disraeli, I somehow imagine him as one of my own congregants…even though our lives are separated by many decades, and our actual religious commitments are very far apart.

It is difficult for me to be “proud” of Disraeli, since he was, after all, a Jewish apostate who lived his entire adult life as a Christian. Yet, it is also difficult not to be “proud” of him. He was, in spite of his being a Christian, very visible as a Jew, very identified as being a Jew. He spoke with tremendous pride of his Jewish antecedents and believed the Christian world owed an immense debt to Judaism and the Jewish people.

If his father had not had Benjamin baptized, it would have been impossible for him to have risen within the British political system, and he never would have become Prime Minister. His entire success as a statesman was contingent on his being

a Christian. Yet, this Christian political figure never stopped being a Jew. However hard his anti-Jewish detractors strove to undermine him, he outmaneuvered, outsmarted, and outlasted them.

Fortunately, it is not our responsibility or right to judge Disraeli. That is entirely left up to the Almighty. But I admit, without apology, that I still regard this wayward son of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue as one of our own.

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https://www.jewishideas.org/article/benjamin-disraeli-ongoing-enigma

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Toldos – The Value of Physical Joys

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2021

When Yitzchok is ready to confer the blessings of the birthright, he is unaware that Eisav has sold the birthright to Yaakov. He, therefore, calls Eisav in and asks Eisav to prepare a tasty dish for him, “in order that my soul should bless you”. (Bereishis 27:4) These blessings were not simply blessings of good will for the future. Rather, these blessings were intended to confer upon their recipient the health and prosperity to lay the foundation for G-d’s nation and ensure the ultimate fruition of G-d’s blessings and goodness on all of humanity. Why would Yitzchok require a tasty dish before he was able to confer these spiritual blessings?

Furthermore, our rabbis teach us that Eisav had managed to fool Yitzchak to some extent into believing he was righteous enough to be worthy of the blessings. If Yitzchok thought Eisav was worthy of such lofty spiritual blessings, why was it necessary for Eisav to cook his father a meal before actually receiving the blessings? Surely we could think of more appropriate ways to prepare for receiving such blessings.

Rabbeinu Bechaya (ibid.) explains that Yitzchok’s request was based on a depth of understanding of the nature of blessings and of how we function as human beings. Blessings are a form of prayer and for blessings to be most effective, one most focus on G-d and connect with Him. True closeness with G-d can only be fully attained through joy. The essence of our relationship with G-d is His love for us and His desire to give us the ultimate joy that we can experience. We can only properly experience that relationship when we are happy.

Yitzchok also understood the depth of the mechanics of the human psyche. We have two elements within us - a spiritual self and a physical self. We are aware that these two elements are constantly at war, attempting to pull us in opposite directions. However, if we can harmonize these two elements, they can be great assets for each other. Emotions aroused by physical experiences can arouse our spiritual self, and vice-versa. Yitzchok, therefore asked Eisav to prepare him a tasty meal in order that he could use the physical pleasure to bring his spiritual self to a state of joy. This is what Yitzchok means when he says, “in order that my soul should bless you.” The physical pleasure would bring the soul to a greater state of joy.

Rabbeinu Bechaye explains further that the connection between our physical and spiritual selves impacts the nature of the joy, as well. Yitzchok specifically asked Eisav for a tasty meal, because he intended to bless him with physical prosperity in the form of abundant harvest and produce. He, therefore, wanted the joy to be rooted in the very items he would be blessing him with. By enjoying a good meal from Eisav, Yitzchok’s spiritual sense of joy would also contain an

element of an appreciation for the value of abundant harvest, and would enable him to more fully bless Eisav in that fashion.

Eisav preparing a tasty meal for Yitzchok was, therefore, the most ideal way for Eisav to prepare for receiving these spiritual blessings. He was ensuring that Yitzchok would feel a strong sense of spiritual joy and goodwill towards him to more fully bestow this blessing upon him.

This concept can be applied to any mitzvah we do. Our rabbis teach us that the joy and appreciation of the mitzvah is a critical element in the performance of a mitzvah. Yet, life has many ups and downs, and it can sometimes be hard to feel joy when doing a mitzvah. We can try to focus on the spiritual meaning and value, but it is difficult to respond emotionally when we are just not in the mood.

The Torah is teaching us through Yitzchak's example that there is an easy tool we can use to change our tone at such times. If we take a moment to focus on a related physical joy, that will arouse our physical sense of joy. Once we feel that joy, we can channel it into the joy of the opportunity to do G-d's mitzvah. Once we are in a more joyous mindset, it is much easier to appreciate the spiritual value of the mitzvah.

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Where the Wild Things Are

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

Is the ideal Jew one who is inside bent over tomes of knowledge? We imbibe this ideal from the many paintings of rabbis hunched over the Talmud or discussing with each other. Or perhaps we think of a woman looking at her Shabbos candles. The word "ideal Jew" conjures up personal images for each of us. However it appears to you is fine and should be an exciting basis of self exploration of how you see Jewish life and journey.

But if I were playing a free association game and said the word "Jew" would an image of a scholar come up or an image of a person sauntering through the woods, the wild bush surrounding him and animals running to and fro?

For me, it's the former. That is until I catch myself and wonder why this image comes to mind. Do not Jews have many great warriors, sportsmen, and explorers? Are we not capable of finding meaning in the wilds of nature or an outside adventure as well as over a book? After all, we're just about to experience Channukah which is all about the Maccabees. So why does this image not present itself?

Maybe from the way I've seen the Torah's description of Yaakov and Esav. Yaakov is a dweller of tents while Esav is a hunter. And since Esav is bad and Yaakov is good, it follows that everything about Esav we should reject and accept as good everything about Yaakov right?

That is only of course if we stop reading there. But we have the foresight to know what happens next. Yaakov's odyssey is not about him staying in tents, but rather putting on the clothes of Esav and smelling like the open fields. In order to receive his father's blessings, he must have the hands of Esav.

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), the popular American naturalist and writer, had an apt way of talking about hands. In his essay "Walking" he states,

> *"Living much out of doors in the sun and wind will no doubt produce a certain roughness of character -- will cause a thicker cuticle to grow over some of the finer qualities of our nature, as on the face and hands."*

The more time we spend outside

> *"there will be so much the more air and sunshine in our thoughts. The callous palms of the laborer are conversant with finer tissues of self-respect and heroism, whose touch fills the heart compared with languid fingers."*

Thoreau continues about how the source of the soul of a nation is the wild forests through which poets and scholars can recreate themselves:

> *"The civilized nations, have been sustained by the primitive forests which anciently rotted where they stand. Little is to be expected of a nation when the vegetable mould is exhausted and is compelled to make manure of the bones of its fathers."*

He continues,

> *"How near to good is what is wild! The most alive is wildness. Not yet subdued by man, its presence refreshes him. Hope and the future for me are not in lawns and cultivated fields, not in towns and cities, but in the impervious and quaking swamps."*

Thoreau quotes the great traveler known as Burton who said being in the wild causes:

> *"your morale to improve. You become more frank, cordial, hospitable and single minded. In the desert, spirituous liquors excite only disgust There is a keen enjoyment to mere existence."*

(In other words, no need to get happy through alcohol when you have the fresh air available to you.)

Maybe this is what Yaakov had to learn. Maybe when the Torah called him a dweller of tents, it was stating what he was lacking more than an ideal. Indeed, Yaakov goes into the wild next week in order to build himself, his family, and eventually the Jewish nation. The Jewish nation (like the nations Thoreau mentioned) could only be created through the wild. Through the powers that we sometimes attribute only to Esav.

From personal experience, I can attest that thoughts, Torah or otherwise are always different after a walk outside. I'm not sure how to describe it, but it feels more alive. This is the Torah that fills the heart -- our own along with the hearts of our fellow Jews and human beings. And we need to go know where the wild things are to access it.

But the best part is you don't have to take my word for it. We can all walk in our forefather's footsteps and see what emerges.

Life is beautiful. Shabbat Shalom and Chodesh Tov!

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Rav Kook Torah
Toldot: Harnessing the Power of Esau

We know little about the birth of most Biblical personalities. Yet, the Torah describes in detail the birth of Jacob and Esau and their respective naming.

> *“The first one came out reddish, hairy all over like a fur coat. They named him Esau. His brother then came out, his hand grasping Esau’s heel. He named him Jacob.”* (Gen. 25:25-26)

The name Esau means “made” or “completed.” From day one, Esau was full of strength and energy. The name Jacob (Ya’akov) refers to the fact that he was holding on to Esau’s heel (ekev). Later on, Jacob is named a second time; here too, his name refers to his relationship with his brother Esau. The night before meeting up with Esau, he struggles with a mysterious stranger. This stranger — according to some, Esau’s guardian angel — informs him:

> *“Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel. You have struggled with angels and men, and you have prevailed”* (Gen. 32:29).

What is the inner meaning of Jacob's names? What is the significance of his grasping on to Esau's heel? Why does he have two names?

Restraint versus Control

Just as there are both positive and negative forces in the world, so too, every person is a composite of positive and negative traits. We need these negative forces, however; without their power and vitality, many goals and aspirations would lack the energy necessary to be realized.

Esau represents the raw, base forces in the world. His reddish complexion indicated the violent and brutal nature of his personality. Jacob did not prevent Esau from coming into the world; after all, the world needs Esau and his raw power. Rather, Jacob held on to Esau's heel, holding him back. The name Jacob refers to this aspect of restraint, reining in the fierce forces.

Ultimately, however, our goal is not to simply hold back these negative forces. We aspire to gain control over them and utilize them, like a hydroelectric dam that harnesses the vast energy of a raging waterfall for the production of electricity. For example, the Talmud tells us that a person with blood-thirsty tendencies should become a shochet (ritual slaughterer) or a mohel, thus sublimating his violent nature for noble purposes. This higher aspiration is represented by Jacob's second name, Israel, which comes from the root-word sar, meaning "to rule."

The name Jacob is appropriate when the Jews are in the Diaspora. There, they serve as a moral conscience to partially restrict the wild and violent forces in the world. But when redeemed and living in their own land, the Jewish people are able to attain the higher level of Israel. Then they have the opportunity to demonstrate how a nation may utilize its material capabilities for constructive and ethical goals.

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 58-59. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, p. 68.)

http://www.ravkooktorah.org/TOLDOT59.htm

Why Did Isaac Love Esau? (Toldot 5777)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Former UK Chief Rabbi,*

Even before they were born, Jacob and Esau struggled in the womb. They were destined, it seems, to be eternal adversaries. Not only were they were different in character and appearance. They also held different places in their parents' affections:

> *The boys grew up, and Esau became a skilful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was a quiet man, staying among the tents. Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.* (Gen. 25:27-28)

We know why Rebekah loved Jacob. Before the twins were born, the pains Rebekah felt were so great that "she went to inquire of the Lord." This is what she was told:

> *"Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."* (Gen. 25:23)

It seemed as if God were saying that the younger would prevail and carry forward the burden of history, so it was the younger, Jacob, whom she loved.

But why, in that case, did Isaac love Esau? Did he not know about Rebekah's oracle? Had she not told him about it? Besides, did he not know that Esau was wild and impetuous? Can we really take literally the proposition that Isaac loved Esau because "he had a taste for wild game," as if his affections were determined by his stomach, by the fact that his elder son brought him food he loved? Surely not, when the very future of the covenant was at stake.

The classic answer, given by Rashi, listens closely to the literal text. Esau, says the Torah, "knew how to trap [yode'a tzayid]." Isaac loved him "because entrapment was in his mouth [ki tzayid befiv]." Esau, says Rashi, trapped Isaac by his mouth. Here is Rashi's comment on the phrase "knew how to trap":

> *He knew how to trap and deceive his father with his mouth. He would ask him, "Father, how should one tithe salt and straw?" Consequently his father believed him to be strict in observing the commands.* (Rashi to 25:27)

Esau knew full well that salt and straw do not require tithes, but he asked so as to give the impression that he was strictly religious. And here it is Rashi's comment on the phrase that Isaac loved him "because entrapment was in his mouth":

> *The midrashic explanation is that there was entrapment in the mouth of Esau, who trapped his father and deceived him by his words.* (Rashi 25:28)

The Maggid of Dubnow adds a perceptive comment as to why Isaac, but not Rebekah, was deceived. Rebekah grew up with the wily Laban. She knew deception when she saw it. Isaac, by contrast, had grown up with Abraham and Sarah. He only knew total honesty and was thus easily deceived. (Bertrand Russell once commented on the philosopher G. E. Moore, that he only once heard Moore tell a lie, when he asked Moore if he had ever told a lie, and Moore replied, "Yes").

So the classic answer is that Isaac loved Esau because he simply did not know who or what Esau was. But there is another possible answer: that Isaac loved Esau precisely because he did know what Esau was. *[emphasis added]*

In the early twentieth century someone brought to the great Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Kook, first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of pre-state Israel, the following dilemma. He had given his son a good Jewish education. He had always kept the commands at home. Now however the son had drifted far from Judaism. He no longer kept the commandments. He did not even identify as a Jew. What should the father do? "Did you love him when he was religious?" asked Rav Kook. "Of course," replied the father. "Well then," Rav Kook replied, "Now love him even more."

Sometimes love can do what rebuke cannot. It may be that the Torah is telling us that Isaac was anything but blind as to his elder son's true nature. But if you have two children, one well behaved, the other liable to turn out badly, to whom should you devote greater attention? With whom should you spend more time?

It may be that Isaac loved Esau not blindly but with open eyes, knowing that there would be times when his elder son would give him grief, but knowing too that the moral responsibility of parenthood demands that we do not despair of or disown a wayward son.

Did Isaac's love have an effect on Esau? Yes and no. It is clear that there was a special bond of connection between Esau and Isaac. This was recognised by the sages:

Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel said:

> *No man ever honoured his father as I honoured my father, but I found that Esau honoured his father even more.* (Devarim Rabbah 1:15)

Rabbi Shimon derives this from the fact that usually people serve their parents wearing ordinary clothes while they reserve their best for going out. Esau, however, had kept his best clothes in readiness to serve his father the food he had gone out to hunt. That is why Jacob was able to wear them while Esau was still out hunting (27:14).

We find, much later in the Torah, that God forbids the Israelites to wage war against Esau's descendants. He tells Moses:

Give the people these orders:

> *"You are about to pass through the territory of your brothers the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir. They will be afraid of you, but be very careful. Do not provoke them to war, for I will not give you any of their land, not even enough to put your foot on. I have given Esau the hill country of Seir as his own."* (Deut. 2:4-5)

And later still Moses commands the Israelites:

> *Do not abhor an Edomite [i.e. a descendant of Esau], for he is your brother.* (Deut. 23:8)

The sages saw these provisions as an enduring reward to Esau for the way he honoured his father.

So, was Isaac right or wrong to love Esau? Esau reciprocated the love, but remained Esau, the hunter, the man of the field, not the man to carry forward the demanding covenant with the invisible God and the spiritual sacrifices it called for. Not all children follow the path of their parents. If it was Isaac's intent that Esau should do so, he failed.

But there are some failures that are honourable. Loving your children, whatever they become, is one, for surely that is how God loves us.

* https://rabbisacks.org/isaac-love-esau/ Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar.

The Challenge of Being an Isaac: An Essay on Toldot

By Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz) * © Chabad 2021

Abraham and Isaac

Isaac uncovers the wells that his father Abraham had dug, an act that appears to be a fundamental part of his divine service. The Torah recounts the episode as follows:

> *Now all the wells which his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines had stopped them up, filling them with earth…And Isaac dug again the wells of water which had been dug in the days of Abraham his father and which the Philistines had stopped up after Abraham's death; and he gave them the same names that his father had given them*.1

Our sages elaborated on the matter of the wells as well; many midrashim exist on the subject, attributing to them great importance and significance.

Abraham's divine service is to go and dig into the earth, and to discover that it holds living waters. Broadly considered, his task is to find the meaning in things. Abraham is known for this quality: We learn that even at age three, he is constantly searching for meaning, recognizing his Creator. Thus, the Midrash2 compares Abraham to a man who, upon seeing a building on fire, asks: "Does this building have an owner? When the building is on fire, who watches over it?" It is very simple for a person to ignore the realities of this world, passing them by all his life without paying attention to them. Abraham is not this way; he looks all around him and asks questions, digging wells and discovering water within.

Isaac's divine service, whose essence is encapsulated in the words, "And Isaac dug again the wells that Abraham his father had dug,"3 is to pattern his actions after Abraham's, and in a certain respect this is the most difficult task that a person can undertake. Isaac emulates Abraham not just in one particular practice but in his entire life; he follows the same path, step after step. What happened to his father involving the king of the Philistines happens to him as well, and the same is true of many other incidents.

All that Isaac does is redig the wells that his father dug and give them the same names that his father gave. This creates a problem that anyone who grew up in a good Jewish home and chooses to continue the path of his forebears has faced. If someone has to dig new wells, he lives in a different world, with different sources of inspiration and a different dynamic. But for Isaac, and for everyone like Isaac, there is no point of revival and renewal in one's own right. These are the same names and the same places – everything is the same. The wells that he puts so much effort into digging are not truly new wells at all.

The problem of Isaac's divine service is part of a larger dilemma – the difficulty of renewal, the challenge of redigging the wells that one's father already dug. Can this really be considered an accomplishment? What does one achieve by simply retreading old ground?

The Midrash comments on the verse, “These words that I command you today,”4 explaining, “‘That I command you today’ – they [Torah and mitzvot] should not be in your sight like an obsolete ordinance to which no one pays any attention, but like a new one in which everyone takes a keen interest.”5 In the same vein, Rashi comments on the verse, “Today God your Lord commands you to obey these laws,”6 saying, “Each day they should be in your sight like something new, as though you had received these commands on that very day.” The suggestion that our sages offer – to treat old mitzvot as if they are new and exciting – only seems to accentuate the problem. New tasks are relatively easy to muster excitement for. When it is only as though they were new – that is much more difficult.

The ability to continue

According to the Midrash,7 we should thank God for creating us with the attribute of forgetfulness, for as a result we can learn things more than once. If we were unable to forget, then whenever we would study some subject a second time, the experience would be identical to the first time. Now, thanks to forgetfulness, our learning always contains an aspect of renewal. Nevertheless, sometimes it is easier to learn three new pages than to review one page, for in new things there is power and rejuvenation. The process of review, of relearning old ideas – fascinating as they may be – will inevitably be deficient simply because it is not new.

The saying goes that all beginnings are difficult. As true as this may be, it is not nearly as difficult to begin as it is to continue – and that is the challenge faced by the second generation, the generation that cannot be innovative, that must not be innovative. It must only continue, and it can only succeed in this by marshaling the strength and the power of renewal. Compared to continuing, beginning is easy; reaching the finish line is easy as well. What is truly difficult is to continue after the enthusiasm of the beginning has passed. For some people, the excitement of the new lasts for five years; for others, it lasts only five months or five minutes. But no matter what, the excitement ultimately ends and a question presents itself: What happens next?

The ability to persist, to continue, is what distinguishes one person from another and, on a larger scale, between one people and another.

The true test is if the second generation has the ability to maintain the same energy, inspiration, and enthusiasm – or at least the same pace – as the first generation. For the first generation, it is easy to break the mold; to the second generation, however, monotony and decay pose a real danger.

In Parashat Vayera, God says, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? For I have known him, so that he will command his children and his household after him to keep the way of God.”8 The man who holds the secret to the future is not merely one who gives his children instructions and orders; rather, he is the one who can successfully encourage his children and posterity to continue his direction.

A look at earlier and later generations shows that the personal ability of an individual does not guarantee his ability to transmit his greatness to his posterity. There are people who by their very nature cannot produce children and disciples like themselves, even though they may be great Jewish leaders. Moses, for example, did not produce a dynasty of great leaders. The dynasty that continued through the ages is that of the sons of Aaron, for Moses had no sons who could qualify as his successor. There cannot be a “Moses II,” let alone a glorious Mosaic line.

Isaac’s whole essence is his ability to carry God’s cause to the next stage in history. In this sense, it can be said, literally, that “this is the story of Isaac, son of Abraham: Abraham begot Isaac,”9 and in exactly the same sense: “This is the story of Jacob – Joseph.”10 The ability to raise a son who will be able to carry on the cause, to bring to fruition what he had begun, is Abraham’s genius – his story. Without Isaac, without Isaac’s ability to provide continuity, Abraham would not be Abraham at all. Rather, he would be like any of the eminent personalities that preceded him. Abraham was preceded by Enoch, but the two could not have been more different. While Enoch was an angel, his son was not an angel. There have been all sorts of people throughout history who were essentially “dead ends,” whose legacies could not continue after their demise. Likewise, the difference between Saul and David was apparently rooted not only in the nature of their respective personalities but also in that Saul was incapable of fashioning for himself a successor of his own kind. *[emphasis added]*

In this sense, just as Abraham begets Isaac, Isaac “makes” Abraham by giving him relevance and an enduring legacy. If Abraham’s sons had been only Ishmael and the sons of Ketura, his narrative would have been only a passing episode.

For it does not matter who these sons were, or what they did with their lives. To be sure, the Talmud records that Ishmael atoned for his sins, a claim that is supported by the fact that his children are given his name. Nevertheless, in spite of his later righteousness, Ishmael and his line do not constitute continuity for the legacy of Abraham.

The ability to create continuity is not only important in itself and significant for the future, but it even changes the significance of the past. Therefore, one must ultimately judge a person based on the larger picture: what he did and what is left after him. A person is judged according to the deeds that he performed during his lifetime and according to the events that he indirectly effects after his lifetime. The greater his influence, the more he retroactively changes the total image of his essence as an individual. There could be an individual who was only a minor figure during his lifetime but who ultimately succeeds in reaching major accomplishments – even if these are achieved a hundred years after his death. Even after a person's death, the actions of his children and grandchildren can change the image of the person himself. The Midrash often notes that there are wicked people whom one should not judge without taking into consideration the whole range and entire network of their descendants, and from that vantage point one is forced to judge them differently.

Rabbi Isaac Luria taught11 that the verse, "Isaac favored Esau because game was in his mouth," 12 alludes to the soul of Rabbi Meir, who, as we know from other sources,13 was a descendant of Esau, and that is the "game" in Esau's mouth. When Isaac sees Esau, he sees not only Esau but also Rabbi Meir, and therefore is faced with a problem: What should be done with Esau? Should he reject Esau or accept him? When Esau asks, "How should salt be tithed?"14 he does not ask out of hypocrisy; there truly exists in him – if not in practice then in potential – an aspect that will one day manifest itself as the great tannah Rabbi Meir. It is Rabbi Meir's tone that we hear in his question. If we view a person as a whole, including his past, present, and future, the aspect of Rabbi Meir within Esau cannot be discounted.

The uncircumcised Philistines

Isaac redigs his father's wells, after "the Philistines had stopped them up (sitemum), filling them with earth."15 The use of the word "sitemum" implies that the Philistines made the wells ordinary or insignificant (stam). Many instances in Tanach label the Philistines "uncircumcised,"16 and this designation is the root of what they are all about, not just esoterically. The Philistines create a reality where everything is covered, and everything is insignificant. A troubling passage in the Talmud17 relates that Adam reversed his circumcision; that is, he was created circumcised but then rendered himself uncircumcised. This is a type of person who makes a conscious and constant effort to become a man of stam, of utter insignificance.

The Philistines are not fundamentally evil. Although they are called "the uncircumcised Philistines," the Torah does not speak of their sinfulness or abominable behavior. By contrast, we find lists of sins and transgressions entitled, "the practices of the land of Egypt" and "the practices of the land of Canaan,"18 but there are no "practices of the land of the Philistines." Similarly, a look at Israel's contact with the Philistines over the years shows that although the Philistine kings – Avimelech and even Achish – were not just and merciful, on the whole they were decent people, rational actors who followed accepted norms of behavior.

What reveals their fundamental character is the following: "The Philistines had stopped them up." The Philistines consistently follow accepted norms of behavior; they are not especially righteous or wicked. When an important question or moral dilemma arises, instead of taking one side or another, the Philistines "stop up" the entire issue at hand. Instead of denying the existence of God, the Philistines avoid the question altogether. When the Philistines commit sins, they never do so out of spite; they sin because, "That's just the way it is." The Philistines dull and deflate everything they encounter, refraining from lending any special significance to their actions. By following this path of least resistance, the Philistines create for themselves a world of randomness. Instead of fastening locks to the mouths of Abraham's wells, thus barring people from using them, they "stopped them up," essentially claiming that they never held any water to begin with. This course of action should not surprise us – the Philistines stop up all the "wells" that they find in life, refusing to come to grips with the water within them.

This attitude of stam – the modern Hebrew equivalent of a shrug – is extremely powerful. For one thing, it requires neither proof nor support, neither character nor meaning. If a person asks a question or presents a topic for consideration, it is the simplest thing to diminish it, responding with this verbal shrug. To be a Philistine means that when someone presents a meaningful or inspiring point, the response is to immediately fill it with earth. Philistines do not poison wells, God forbid; they merely stop them up. This is a contagious phenomenon, for after a while the person who posed the original question will no longer search for a life of meaning; he, in turn, will adopt the attitude of the Philistines, growing accustomed to life in a world of stam.

“The Philistines had stopped them up”

How does this process, this attitude of stam, develop within a person? Let us answer this question with the following scenario: A person attends a Torah lesson for the first time, and he is greatly inspired. He meditates upon the ideas he has learned, becomes enthusiastic, and is preoccupied with them day and night. How can he sit quietly after hearing such brilliant words of Torah? After a while, he attends another lesson, but this new lesson has no effect on him at all. So he attends another and another, his interest and enthusiasm slowly but steadily fading after each lesson. A person who reads a joke book from cover to cover experiences this same phenomenon: He reads one joke after another, in stitches at first, but by the end barely able to crack a smile.

A person who is constantly steeped in the world of Torah and piety is liable to lose the power of rejuvenation, not because he does not understand, but precisely because he understands. After all, he has already heard everything; and if, by chance, he has never heard a particular idea, he has certainly heard something like it. And even if the idea itself is totally novel, he is still uninterested, as he is already familiar with the subject.
It can happen that someone, during Shacharit, is struck by the sudden epiphany that he loves God. This is a rare thing, which happens perhaps once a year. Will he then jump onto the table and shout, “I love God!”? Generally not. But why not? The answer is that there is a certain element of stam that dictates that – even when a point of inspiration comes to him – it would not be proper: One must follow the practice of the land of the Philistines. In Jerusalem’s German Colony, there is a law that prohibits building above three stories. Similarly, there are people who have an inner law to that effect, not to build above three stories, and not to delve beyond a certain depth: It is against municipal regulations. This is the custom of the land of the Philistines.

How does this happen to a person? It happens because all the wells that he owns and that he has ever owned have been stopped up by Philistines and filled with earth. This happens not just to the elderly but to young people as well. One’s inner life is simply stopped up. Like sand dunes on the seashore, even if I do nothing to stop up the wells, little by little, time covers up everything. Where once there was a well of living water, now there remains only a small hole in the wilderness.

Throughout history, our sages have addressed the question of what can be done to protect oneself against this danger. The danger here is not that one will fall all at once. Rather, it is a gradual, hardly noticeable fall. Life wastes away, and when one finally dies, no one can tell the difference, since he had already been a walking corpse long before then.

When does a person begin to die? In truth, the process of dying can begin at any time in a person’s life. He can be sixteen years old, and yet in effect he is dying. He lacks only the final act of physical death, for a doctor to sign his death certificate, and then he can be buried. He does not know it yet, and his family does not know it yet, but for years he has been living without purpose, dragging himself along. In some cases this happens because people dry up; in other cases it is because they become frozen or stopped up with earth. But in all these cases, the attitude of stam is at work.

A similar phenomenon occurs in the case of people who freeze to death. Walking in extremely cold weather, they reach a stage where they are on the verge of falling asleep in the snow – and that is the great danger.

Why does this happen? The wear and tear of everyday life slowly affect the person so that he does not want to move or to grow; he becomes complacent, and he remains in the same spot.

This well had already been dug and excavated, but if it is not frequently redug anew so as to rediscover the water within, over the course of time it becomes stopped up, even without the involvement of Philistines. Even for the very individual who personally dug the well, after a while the earth penetrates his soul and the feeling of stam begins to pervade his life. What is required is constant attention to the task of spiritual revival and renewal.

Spiritual digging

The task of Isaac is to redig the wells and thus banish the infectious force of stam. On the one hand, this is easy work, for an opening has already been made, and Isaac already knows that there is something inside. On the other hand, this is a difficult assignment, for it involves no new discoveries. Despite the difficulty, Isaac pushes himself forward and redigs the wells.

Every morning, we recite the Shema. Some people recite the Ten Commandments daily as well. But in addition, one must also resolve to himself each and every morning that he is not a Philistine. That is to say, every day must be different from the previous one; every experience must be different from the next.

This is a very difficult task. After all, we are not talking about a sudden point of change and renewal, like a spontaneous decision to travel to the Amazon rainforest. Rather, it is the simple decision to make a change, even if one does not yet know how and where he will make it. It is a decision to stay in the same place, redigging the same wells. One will continue to read his prayers from the same siddur that he used yesterday, to recite the same blessings that he recited yesterday. Nevertheless, one must recite, over and over again, "I am not a Philistine."

In addition, redigging old wells involves the same amount of physical labor as digging new wells. In the framework of each person's life, whether he is leading a holy life or not, a conscious effort must be made to search for the meaning behind things, to open up wells and find the waters hiding within. To be sure, not everyone can reach the same level and the same achievements, but part of one's success is a result of the spiritual effort that one expends.

One of the main ways of accomplishing this spiritual work is by asking new questions, something that has almost become second nature for the Jewish people. Whether one is facing a page of Talmud or a section of the siddur, the best way to explore and dig into things is by asking questions. One cannot always find the answers, but through questions one can always uncover important ideas and meaning.

Likkutei Torah19 notes that just as there is a mitzvah to "be fruitful and multiply" in the physical realm, there is a similar mitzvah in the spiritual realm: One must reach at least one new Torah insight each day. This is true in the wider sense of this obligation as well. For even if the new insight is not always a spectacular innovation, and sometimes it may not even make sense, the main thing is not to suffice oneself with the world of stam. Instead, one must fight the world's existing format and flux by raising questions.

One of the great hasidic rabbis (who was the rabbi of a small town in his youth and would often volunteer to serve as a merrymaker at weddings) would say that the essence of Hasidism is that one must constantly be asking, "Why?" about everything that one encounters in life. That is the way his life went, he said. One day, when he went to perform the ritual washing of the hands, this question of "Why?" occurred to him. He began to reflect on the ritual and stood there, towel on his shoulder, for two hours. He said that afterward, whenever he recited the blessing on the ritual, his level of devotion was higher than ever.

To reach the point where one feels the need to renew oneself – where one is able to consistently dig the well anew, asking "Why?", "For what purpose?", and "For what reason?" – requires much training and practice. One must train oneself to understand that "that's just the way it is" is only a satisfactory answer for the Philistines. A Jew is not like a Philistine; he must constantly dig wells.

Not everyone can break new ground, and not everyone can dig new wells. What everyone can and must do is to take the old wells and rediscover them for himself as an entirely new creation.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Gen. 26:15–18.

2. Genesis Rabbah 39:1.

3. Gen. 26:18.

4. Deut. 6:6.

5. Sifrei, Deuteronomy 33.

6. Deut. 26:16.

7. Ecclesiastes Rabbah 1:13

8. Gen. 18:17–19.

9. Gen. 25:19.

10. Gen. 37:2.

11. Peri Tzaddik, Toldot.

12. Gen. 25:28.

13. Gittin 56a.

14. Genesis Rabba 63:10.

15. Gen. 26:15.
16. See Judges 14:3, for example.

17. Sanhedrin 38b.

18. Lev. 18:3.

19. Shir HaShirim 38d.

* Rabbi Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz) (1937-2020) was internationally regarded as one of the leading rabbis of this century. The author of many books, he was best known for his monumental translation of and commentary on the Talmud.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4942399/jewish/The-Challenge-of-Being-an-Isaac.htm

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Chai Elul: Foundations of the Chassidic Movement

by Chaya Mushka and Nechama Krimmer

Parshas Toldos tells the curious story of Rivka's pregnancy, after twenty years of childlessness, and the struggle between her twin sons, Yaakov and Esau, which began in the womb.

Rivka felt uneasy and a bit confused during her pregnancy. Our Sages explain that if Rivka walked past a house of study, one child would begin kicking his feet. And if she walked past a place of avoda zara, idol worship, the other child would begin kicking.

When Rivka's twins were born and began to mature, it was easy for her to identify which child was which. Rivka's younger twin, Yaakov, enjoyed being at home and learning Torah at the feet of his father, Yitzchok, and grandfather, Avraham. Yaakov was born with a refined and gentle nature.

Esau, the older twin, however, was a man of the field, coarse and fearless. He preferred being outside, trapping and hunting animals for both food and sport. It wasn't unusual for him to be gone several days on his excursions.

The day that Avraham passed away, Esau had killed a man on the road and came home starving and exhausted. Yaakov was in the kitchen cooking lentil soup for Yitzchok, who was mourning the loss of his father.

In his harried state, Esau demanded that Yaakov pour him a bowl of soup. Yaakov replied that he would give Esau a bowl of soup if Esau would give Yaakov his birthright as the first born. Esau saw no use in the blessings bequeathed to the eldest son and gladly agreed to the exchange.

Rivka, having grown up in a home of evil doers, saw the distinct differences between her two sons. She recognized the unsavory character traits of her relatives in Esau, while seeing that Yaakov possessed the spiritual attributes of Avraham and Yitzchok.

On the other hand, the Torah tells us strangely that Yitzchok loved Esau, while Rivka loved Yaakov (Genesis 25:28).

Wouldn't a righteous man like Yitzchok favor the refined, holy son who walked in his footsteps? What was it specifically that Yitzchok saw in Esau?

Some commentators posit that Esau was able to trick Yitzchok into believing he was a righteous man. Having lived a life surrounded by holiness, Yitzchok did not see the guile or deception in his oldest son.

Other commentators posit, however, that Yitzchok saw Esau exactly as he was and loved him because of it. How could this be?

We can understand this position by learning about the two types of Divine Service, discussed by Maimonides and elucidated further by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the author of the Tanya.

According to the Tanya, the first type of Divine Service is that of the Tzaddik, the perfectly righteous one, who has no evil inclination. He, or she, is good and does good. These holy ones are rare, perhaps "one in a generation" rare. This was the service of Yaakov.

The second type of Divine Service is that of the Benoni, loosely translated as the Intermediate One. The work of the Benoni is to sublimate and overcome his evil inclination therefore transforming evil into good. The Benoni, in essence, is a fighter. He struggles. He battles. He overcomes. He isn't born holy. He makes himself holy.

What Yitzchok saw is that Esau had the potential to transform evil into good, an accomplishment that, as Tzaddikim, neither he nor Yaakov could achieve.

Rivka also saw this potential in Esau but with the experience of her youth, she realized it was a goal he would fail to achieve.

https://www.chabaddayton.com/templates/articlecco_cdo/aid/5300988/jewish/Toldos.htm

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Toldot: Why Be Wealthy?

An Insight from the Rebbe

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky * © Chabad 2021

> ***Isaac sowed grain in that region that year. He reaped a hundredfold, for G-d had blessed him.*** **(Genesis 26:12)**

It is clear from a close reading of the Torah's narrative that the patriarchs were astute businessmen. Nonetheless, it is also clear that they engaged in material pursuits solely with the objective of fulfilling G-d's will.

In this case, Isaac's true goal in sowing grain was to be able to give charity to the poor, which the Torah stipulates can only be performed with one's own produce. Like our patriarchs, when our involvement in the pursuit of a livelihood and wealth is similarly motivated, we are blessed with overwhelming success.

* — from *Daily Wisdom #1*

Gut Shabbos,

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Shabbat Shalom

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Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

Was Jacob Right to Take the Blessings?

Was Jacob right to take Esau's blessing in disguise? Was he right to deceive his father and to take from his brother the blessing Isaac sought to give him? Was Rebecca right in conceiving the plan in the first place and encouraging Jacob to carry it out? These are fundamental questions. What is at stake is not just biblical interpretation but the moral life itself. How we read a text shapes the kind of person we become.

Here is one way of interpreting the narrative. Rebecca was right to propose what she did and Jacob was right to do it. Rebecca knew that it would be Jacob, not Esau, who would continue the covenant and carry the mission of Abraham into the future. She knew this on two separate grounds. First, she had heard it from God Himself, in the oracle she received before the twins were born:

> 'Two nations are in your womb,
> and two peoples from within you will be separated;
> one people will be stronger than the other,
> and the elder will serve the younger.' (Gen. 25:23)

Esau was the elder, Jacob the younger. Therefore it was Jacob who would emerge with greater strength, Jacob who was chosen by God.

Second, she had watched the twins grow up. She knew that Esau was a hunter, a man of violence. She had seen that he was impetuous, mercurial, a man of impulse, not calm reflection. She had seen him sell his birthright for a bowl of soup. She had watched while he "ate, drank, rose and left. So Esau despised his birthright" (Gen. 25:34). No one who despises his birthright can be the trusted guardian of a covenant intended for eternity.

Third, just before the episode of the blessing we read: "When Esau was forty years old, he married Judith, daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and also Basemath, daughter of Elon the Hittite. They were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebecca." (Gen. 26:34) This, too, was evidence of Esau's failure to understand what the covenant requires. By marrying Hittite women he proved himself indifferent both to the feelings of his parents and to the self-restraint in the choice of marriage partner that was essential to being Abraham's heir.

The blessing had to go to Jacob. If you had two sons, one indifferent to art, the other an art-lover and aesthete, to whom would you leave the Rembrandt that has been part of the family heritage for generations? And if Isaac did not understand the true nature of his sons, if he was "blind" not only physically but also psychologically, might it not be necessary to deceive him? He was by now old, and if Rebecca had failed in the early years to get him to see the true nature of their children, was it likely that she could do so now?

This was, after all, not just a matter of relationships within the family. It was about God and destiny and spiritual vocation. It was about the future of an entire people since God had repeatedly told Abraham that he would be the ancestor of a great nation who would be a blessing to humanity as a whole. And if Rebecca was right, then Jacob was right to follow her instructions.

This was the woman whom Abraham's servant had chosen to be the wife of his master's son, because she was kind, because at the well she had given water to a stranger and to his camels also. Rebecca was not Lady Macbeth, acting out of favouritism or ambition. She was the embodiment of loving-kindness. And if she had no other way of ensuring that the blessing went to one who would cherish it and live it, then in this case the end justified the means. This is one way of reading the story and it is taken by many of the commentators.

However it is not the only way.[1] Consider, for example, the scene that transpired immediately after Jacob left his father. Esau returned from hunting and brought Isaac the food he had requested. We then read this:

> Isaac trembled violently and said, 'Who was it, then, that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came and I blessed him – and indeed he will be blessed!'
>
> When Esau heard his father's words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father, 'Bless me – me too, my father!'
>
> But he said, 'Your brother came deceitfully [be-mirma] and took your blessing.'
>
> Esau said, 'Isn't he rightly named Jacob? This is the second time he has taken advantage of me: he took my birthright, and now he's taken my blessing!' Then he asked, 'Haven't you reserved any blessing for me?' (Gen. 27:33-36)

It is impossible to read Genesis 27 – the text as it stands without commentary – and not to feel sympathy for Isaac and Esau rather than Rebecca and Jacob. The Torah is sparing in its use of emotion. It is completely silent, for example, on the feelings of Abraham and Isaac as they journeyed together toward the trial of the Binding. Phrases like "trembled violently" and "burst out with a loud and bitter cry" cannot but affect us deeply. Here is an old man who has been deceived by his younger son, and a young man, Esau, who feels cheated out of what was rightfully his. The emotions triggered by this scene will long stay with us.

Then consider the consequences. Jacob had to stay away from home for more than twenty years, fearing of his life. He then suffered an almost identical deceit practised against him by Laban when he substituted Leah for Rachel. When Jacob cried out "Why did you deceive me [rimitani]" Laban replied: "It is not done in our place to place the younger before the elder" (Gen. 29:25-26). Not only the act but even the words imply a punishment, measure for measure. "Deceit," of which Jacob accuses Laban, is the very word Isaac used about Jacob. Laban's reply sounds like a virtually explicit reference to what Jacob had done, as if to say, "We do not do in our place what you have just done in yours."

The result of Laban's deception brought grief to the rest of Jacob's life. There was tension between Leah and Rachel. There was hatred between their children. Jacob was deceived yet again, this time by his sons, when they brought him Joseph's bloodstained robe: another deception of a father by his children involving the use of clothes. The result was that Jacob was deprived of the company of his most beloved son for twenty-two years just as Isaac was of Jacob.

Asked by Pharaoh how old he was, Jacob replied, "Few and evil have been the years of my life" (Gen. 47:9). He is the only figure in the Torah to make a remark like this. It is hard not to read the text as a precise statement of the principle of measure for measure: as you have done to others, so will others do to you. The deception brought all concerned great grief, and this persisted into the next generation.

My reading of the text is therefore this.[2] The phrase in Rebecca's oracle, Ve-rav ya'avod tsair (Gen. 25:23), is in fact ambiguous. It may mean, "The elder will serve the younger," but it may also mean, "The younger will serve the elder." It was what the Torah calls a chiddah (Numbers 12:8), that is, an opaque, deliberately ambiguous communication. It suggested an ongoing conflict between the two sons and their descendants, but not who would win.

Isaac fully understood the nature of his two sons. He loved Esau but this did not blind him to the fact that Jacob would be the heir of the covenant. Therefore Isaac prepared two sets of blessings, one for Esau, the other for Jacob. He blessed Esau (Gen. 27:28-29) with the gifts he felt he would appreciate: "May God give you heaven's dew and earth's richness – an abundance of grain and new wine" – that is, wealth. "May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you" – that is, power. These are not the covenantal blessings.

The covenantal blessings that God had given Abraham and Isaac were completely different. They were about children and a land. It is this blessing that Isaac later gave Jacob before he left home (Gen. 28:3-4): "May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples" – that is, children. "May He give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now reside as a foreigner, the land God gave to Abraham" – that is, land. This was the blessing Isaac had intended for Jacob all along. There was no need for deceit and disguise.

Jacob eventually came to understand all this, perhaps during his wrestling match with the angel during the night before his meeting with Esau after their long estrangement. What happened at that meeting is incomprehensible unless we understand that Jacob was giving back to Esau the blessings he had wrongly taken from him. The massive gift of sheep, cattle and other livestock represented "heaven's dew and earth's richness," that is, wealth. The fact that Jacob bowed down seven times to Esau was his way of fulfilling the words, "May the sons of your mother bow down to you," that is, power.

Jacob gave the blessing back. Indeed he said so explicitly. He said to Esau: "Please accept the blessing [birkati] that was brought to you, for God has been gracious to me and I have all I need." (Gen. 33:11) On this reading of the story, Rebecca and Jacob made a mistake, a forgivable one, an understandable one, but a mistake nonetheless. The blessing Isaac was about to give Esau was not the blessing of Abraham. He intended to give Esau a blessing appropriate to him. In so doing, he was acting on the basis of precedent. God had blessed Ishmael, with the words "I will make him into a great nation." (Gen. 21:18) This was the fulfilment of a promise God had given Abraham many years before when He told him that it would be Isaac, not Ishmael, who would continue the covenant:

Abraham said to God, "If only Ishmael might live under Your blessing!" Then God said, "Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation." (Gen. 17:18-21)

Isaac surely knew this because, according to midrashic tradition, he and Ishmael were reconciled later in life. We see them standing together at Abraham's grave (Gen. 25:9). It may be that this was a fact that Rebecca did not know. She associated blessing with covenant. She may have been unaware that Abraham wanted Ishmael blessed even though he would not inherit the covenant, and that God had acceded to the request.

If so, then it is possible all four people acted rightly as they understood the situation, yet still tragedy occurred. Isaac was right to wish Esau blessed as Abraham sought for Ishmael. Esau acted honourably toward his father. Rebecca sought to safeguard the future of the covenant. Jacob felt qualms but did what his mother said, knowing she would not have proposed deceit without a strong moral reason for doing so.

Do we have here one story with two possible interpretations? Perhaps, but that is not the best way of describing it. What we have here, and there are other examples in Genesis, is a story we understand one way the first time we hear it, and a different way once we have discovered and reflected on all that happened later. It is only after we have read about the fate of Jacob in Laban's house, the tension between Leah and Rachel, and the animosity between Joseph and his brothers that we can go back and read Genesis 27, the chapter of the blessing, in a new light and with greater depth.

There is such a thing as an honest mistake, and it is a mark of Jacob's greatness that he recognised it and made amends to Esau. In the great encounter twenty-two years later the estranged brothers meet, embrace, part as friends and go their separate ways. But first, Jacob had to wrestle with an angel.

That is how the moral life is. We learn by making mistakes. We live life forward, but we understand it only looking back. Only then do we see the wrong turns we inadvertently made. This discovery is sometimes our greatest moment of moral truth.

For each of us there is a blessing that is ours. That was true not just of Isaac but also Ishmael, not just Jacob but also Esau. The moral could not be more powerful. Never seek your brother's blessing. Be content with your own.[3]

[1] Critical readings of Rebecca's or Jacob's conduct appear in several midrashic works: Bereishit Rabbah, Tanhuma (Buber), Yalkut Reuveni, Midrash ha-Neelam and Midrash Socher Tov (to Psalm 80:6). Among critical commentators are R. Eliezer Ashkenzi, Tzeda le-Derech, and R. Yaakov Zvi Mecklenberg, Ha-Ktav veha-Kabbalah. All these interpretations are based on the textual clues cited in what follows.

[2] For a more detailed explanation, see Jonathan Sacks, Covenant and Conversation Genesis: The Book of Beginnings, Maggid Books, 2009, 153-158, 219-228.

[3] This later became the tenth of the Ten Commandments.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"And Isaac loved Esau, because the game was in his mouth; but Rebekah loved Jacob" (Gen. 25:28). Of all the myriads of questions which rise up from this week's portion of familial intrigue, sibling rivalry, filial deception and maternal manipulation, perhaps the one that gives rise to all the others is why the Patriarch Isaac prefers the more aggressive, extroverted hunter Esau over the whole-hearted, introspective and studious Jacob.

I believe it is superficial, even a bit crass, to suggest that it was because Esau provided his father with his favorite dish of food, venison; after all, what is at stake at this moment is who was to continue the Abrahamic legacy, who would be the standard bearer of "the blessing to all the nations of the earth," commanding his progeny and his future household to guard the pathway of the Lord by living a life dedicated to compassionate righteousness and moral justice (Gen.18:18-19).

Who was the more likely candidate for that task: the burly and materialistic Esau or the gentler and more bookish "tent dweller" Jacob? So why does Isaac favor Esau? In order to properly respond to this query, we must take another look at Abraham's legacy. Yes, he was so inspired, "inspirited" if you will, with the Divine pathway of compassionate righteousness and moral justice that with missionary zeal he would erect altars wherever he went, not in order to offer sacrifices, but rather to call humankind to the service of God (see Maimonides, Mishne Torah, Laws of Idolatry, 1-3 and Book of Commandments, Positive Commandment 3). To this end, he functioned like a Chabad emissary, opening his tent to dislocated wanderers, hosting them and teaching them about ethical monotheism; and because of his passion, he even castigates God Himself for punishing all the inhabitants of wicked Sodom and Gomorrah: "Will God then destroy the righteous together with the wicked…? Far be it from You, the moral judge of all the world, not to act with moral justice" (Gen. 18:23, 25).

But there is also another side to the leadership of Abraham, another aspect to the legacy which must be perpetuated by Abraham's heirs. One cannot enthrone compassionate righteousness without denuding cruel corruption; the good can never hope to triumph if the evil is quietly countenanced.

And so the Bible records – within the context of Lot leaving the more ethical and spiritual Abraham for the greener pastures of

materialistic Sodom – how four marauding kings attacked the other five kings within the Fertile Crescent (Gen. 14). Chedorlaomer, the king of Elam (Persia) – apparently the most powerful of the four aggressors – subjugated the conquered five for twelve years.

For the next thirteen years, the enslaved kingdoms rebelled; in the fourteenth year, Chedorlaomer struck back with a vengeance and the five kings fled, three to nearby mountains with the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, falling into bitumen pits. The four aggressor kings went into Sodom and seized all their assets and took their people captive including Lot, Abraham's nephew—a weak act of terrorism, abusing the weak and unprotected.

Abraham sprang to action against the four terrorist kings—together with 318 men from his household (apparently his converts). He won a resounding victory, returned all the captives and refused to take any of the booty. Melchizedek the king of Shalem (Jerusalem) greeted Abraham with bread and wine, "blessing Abraham to God Supreme, Possessor of heaven and earth, and blessing God Supreme who delivered Abraham's enemies into his hands" (Gen. 14:19-20). Abraham emerged a great international military hero—who fought together with God against the enslaving terrorist kings to free the captives. After this second legacy, the battle against terrorism, comes chapter 15 containing Abraham's Covenant with God.

Now let us return to patriarch Isaac. Abraham's legacy was that of the spirit as well as the sword. Could Isaac ever measure up? Could anyone ever measure up? One more piece remains before we can answer our initial question; we must read between the lines of the Bible. Our portion of Toldot deals with familial strife in the struggle to appoint the right successor to Isaac. Chapter 25 concludes with Esau spurning the legacy of the first-born; chapter 27 opens with an aged and blind Isaac, who requests venison from his beloved Esau before he gives him the blessing of the firstborn. Chapter 26 seems to be completely misplaced, totally interrupting the storyline and harking back to an earlier incident between Isaac and Abimelech, the Philistine king of Gerar. Now Abraham had also encountered Abimelech, made a treaty with him, received permission for him and his progeny to dwell in Gerar and dig wells in Gerar. All of this seemed forgotten when Isaac now meets Abimelech.

Abimelech stopped up Abraham's wells, and as soon as Isaac prospered, Abimelech tells him, "Go away from us, because you have become more powerful than us"—or "your power has come from what you have taken from us" (Gen. 26:16).

Isaac leaves quietly. Abimelech again confronts Isaac, desirous of making another treaty; he now claims that, after all, he had only done well to Isaac; he did not harm him and he allowed him to leave (sent him away) intact, be'shalom. And Isaac concludes another treaty. The chapter ends with Esau marrying two Hittite wives, and the next chapter begins with Isaac's request of Esau to bring him venison so that he may give him the blessings.

I believe the Bible is explaining to us in this chapter 26 why Isaac prefers Esau over Jacob. The legacy of Abraham demands military prowess alongside ethical integrity; if "Abrahamism" is to succeed, we must teach ethical monotheism and defend it militarily.

Since the latter ability was lacking in Isaac, he is drawn to the more aggressive Esau. He understands that Jewish survival—and ultimate triumph—requires power alongside piety.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

The Difference Between a 'Double-Life' and a Broad Life

Near the beginning of our parsha, the pasuk says "…And Eisav was a man who knew how to hunt, a man of the field; and Yaakov was a pure and straight person who dwelt in tents." [Bereshis 25:27] Eisav and Yaakov are described as two brothers with very different personalities. There is an inference that jumps out at us from this pasuk. When speaking about Eisav, the Torah describes him twice as an 'Ish' (man). That means there were two distinct aspects of his personality: (a) He knew how to hunt; and (b) He was a man of the field. Yaakov Avinu is also described in two ways: (a) He was a "Tam"—a very pure, innocent, and straightforward uncunning type of person, and (b) He was also a "Yoshev Ohalim"—he dwelt in tents. However, in reference to Yaakov, the Torah only uses the word 'Ish' (man) once. What is the reason for this lack of literary parallelism in describing the two brothers?

I saw an answer to this question in a sefer called Mishchas Shemen. In the 1950s, there was already talk about the possibility of putting a man on the moon. The author of this sefer asked the Shotzer Rebbe (Rabbi Shulem Moskovitz [1877-1958]) "Will they ever put a man on the moon?" The Rebbe responded with a definitive "No!" He buttressed his answer by quoting the pasuk "The Heaven belongs to Hashem and the Earth belongs to mankind." [Tehillim 115:16].

As we all know, President Kennedy pledged early in his brief presidency that by the end of the decade of the 1960s, America would put a man on the moon, and so it was—on July 20, 1969, a man walked on the moon! 1969 is the year I received Semicha. The Chag HaSemicha was in August of that year, less than a month after this historic event. [Parenthetically, this was the last Chag HaSemicha Ner Israel has ever held – don't ask me why.] The guest speaker at that event was Rav Simcha Elberg. He spoke (in Yiddish) about "de shpatzir af de Levana".

At any rate, the author of Mishchas Shemen now had a strong question on the definitive answer given to him years earlier by the Shotzer Rebbe. This Rebbe was no longer alive by that time, so the author went to the Biala Rebbe and told him about his previous conversation with the Shotzer Rebbe. The Biala Rebbe did not say "The moon landing was all a fake—it took place in a Hollywood studio (as some claimed at the time). He did say that the event that occurred was not a contradiction to the cited pasuk. Even though America indeed placed a man on the moon, but Neil Armstrong could not survive on his own in the atmosphere of the moon. He had to bring oxygen from earth, he had to wear a space suit to protect him from the moon's environment. His lifeline was still the 'Aretz' (Earth). He may have physically been on the moon, but since he still needed all the earthly elements to exist, he was still considered an 'earthling' – not a 'moonling.' The eternal truth of the pasuk "HaShamayim Shamayim L'Hashem v'ha'Aretz nasan livnei Adam' remains. Neil Armstrong still remained a human being who belonged to the earth, his source of life.

With that in mind, the Mishchas Shemen explains why Yaakov Avinu is called an Ish Tam Yoshev Ohalim and Eisav is called an Ish Yodeah Tzayid; Ish Sadeh.

Yaakov Avinu, no matter where he went, no matter what he did, and no matter what environment he found himself in, his life line and his life blood was still from the "tent"—the Makom Torahi which reflected his "home base". His sustenance always came from that holy place, no matter what he did with the rest of his life. His lived a unified existence. All dimensions of his life had a singularity to them that all stemmed back to the Ohalei Torah.

True, he became a shepherd, engaged in commerce and became a wealthy man. But even while he was in the field shepherding, he was still a "Yoshev Ohalim." Just like the man on the moon may have been far away from "his base", but his oxygen was still brought from his home planet and he is still called an earthling. That is the source of his life.

On the other hand, Eisav lived a double life. The Torah testifies that he knew how to hunt. Chazal say that this means he knew how to put on a good act and trick people. He even knew how to fool his father. He would ask Yitzchak all his "frum shaylos"—how does a person take tithes from salt? He was an Ish tzayid, a cunning person. Beyond that, he was an Ish Sadeh. He was a different person than the person he pretended to be. He led a double life. He talked the talk of a pious person (through his cunningness as a Yodeah Tzayid), but he walked the walk of a man of the field.

This reminds me of a very famous letter that Rav Hutner, zt"l, wrote to one of his students. In addition to Rav Hutner's Pachad Yitzchak on the Yomim Tovim, he also wrote a sefer called Igros v'Michtavim, in which he publishes correspondence he had with various students. One of these letters (#94) is a response to a former student who engaged in a secular career. The student complained to his former Rosh Yeshiva that he felt he was living a "double life." On the one hand, he was a Ben Torah, a Yeshiva graduate; on the other hand, he spent the majority of his day in a very secular environment. He felt that he was being hypocritical by leading this contradictory life.

Rav Hutner wrote back to him that his assumption that engaging in a career was ipso facto leading a secular life is not true. Having a secular career does not mean you are leading a "double life." Rav Hutner compares this to a person who has a multi-room house where different rooms are used for different activities. This does not imply he is leading a "double life". It means he is living a broad life. He writes that it is not a contradiction for a person to be in the secular world and yet be a full-fledged Ben Torah and an Ehrliche Yid (a Jew with integrity). As long as one derives his chiyus (sustenance) from the "Ohel of Torah" then regardless of how he spends the rest of his day, he is still in the Beis Medrash.

Rav Hutner writes that he remembers once visiting the Shaarei Tzedek Hospital founded by Dr. (Moshe) Wallach [1866-1957]. He noticed that when Dr. Wallach would visit a patient who was about to go into surgery, he asked him for his mother's name so that he could pray for him before his operation. Rav Hutner writes, "When I told over this story to one of the Gedolim in Yerushalayim, he commented, 'How much a person must be jealous of such a Jew as Dr. Wallach, who uses his professional career as a vessel to promote the Honor of Heaven." This is not a double life; it is a broad life. It is not a contradiction. A person can be an Ish Tam, Yoshev Ohalim—grounded in the Beis Medrash, in the Tents of Torah—no matter where he may find himself during considerable portions of his day.

The Wells Were Part of a Master Plan

Parshas Toldos is the only parsha in Sefer Bereshis that deals with the Patriarch Yitzchak. It is ironic—Avraham is the main subject of the Parshiyos Lech Lecha, Vayera, and Chayei Sarah. Yaakov is featured in the Parshiyos Vayetzei, Vayishlach, and VaYeshev. Miketz, Vayigash, and Vayechi deal primarily with Yosef with Vayechi also returning to feature Yaakov. So, the majority of Sefer Bereshis deals with either Avraham or Yaakov. Yitzchak has merely one parsha. There is an entire section of Parshas Toldos about wells.

Avraham Avinu had dug wells and the Pelishtim stopped them up. Yitzchak re-dug them, made them viable again, and called them the same names as his father had called them. (I saw someone comment that of the Avos, Yitzchak is the only one whose name remained the same throughout his life—not being changed by the Almighty or a Malach! Avraham started as Avram and Yaakov later was called Yisrael. Yitzchak's name remained with him throughout his life, in the merit of the fact that he did not change the names of the wells!)

But the point is, what is the big deal? Avraham dug the wells; the Pelishtim stopped them up. Yitzchak re-dug them. Yitzchak names the wells with the same names. Who cares? Only one parsha in the Torah covers Yitzchak, and this incident is so important to take up so much space in that one parsha? Why?

Obviously, there is something significant here. The sefer HaKsav v'Ha'Kabbalah says a very interesting thing. The reason Avraham called these wells by those particular names was because he had one mission in this world—to bring the concept of One G-d into this world. That is why wherever he went, he gave the name of the place he visited a name having to do with Hashem. Yerushalayim was Hashem Yir'eh. Another place was Beis El. These wells all contained the Name of Hashem.

When people would meet each other, they would say – "I will meet you by the well—the Be'er L'Chai Ro-ee." Or they would arrange to meet by another well that he called "K-El Olam." The Name and concept of Hashem would thus constantly be in the mouths and on the lips of people. L'Havdil (a million times), consider M&T Bank Stadium (home of the Baltimore Ravens). Maybe I am an atypical consumer, but the fact that M&T Bank has a sports stadium with its name would not influence me to open up a checking account with M&T Bank. I have my bank which I have had for the last 47 years, and I am not going to change. Similarly, I am not going to buy a specific life insurance policy because MetLife has a stadium. I do not know who they are targeting, but apparently there are people who will buy MetLife insurance because they have their name on a stadium.

L'Havdil a million times – Avraham Avinu wanted the name of the Ribono shel Olam to be in people's mouths. People needed wells. This was not just a utilitarian place from which to draw water. This was part of Avraham Avinu's master plan to put the concept and the Name of G-d in people's minds and in people's mouths.

So, when Avraham Avinu died, the Pelishtim stuffed up those wells. Were they crazy? Do you know how valuable a well is in an arid country like Eretz Canaan? It is self-defeating. So why did they do that? It is because there was a culture war. If it has the Name of Hashem on it, we do not want the name of Hashem in our country. This is a fight to the death. They stopped up the wells even though it was injurious to them.

That is why using the same names was so important for Yitzchak Avinu. It was not only about re-digging the wells, but it was the tradition and mission of Yitzchak Avinu to keep the Name of Hashem in the mouths of the people. "This is the legacy of my father and this is what my father lived for. I am going to go ahead and call them by the same names because I want to keep the same tradition that my father started."

The Ponevezher Rav [Rav Yosef Shlomo Kahaneman (1888-1969)] lost eleven children and his wife in the Holocaust. He came to Eretz Yisrael and began a Yeshiva in Bnei Brak. He called it Ponevezh, because that was the name of the Yeshiva in Lithuania that was wiped out by the Holocaust. He later started another Yeshiva in Ashdod. He called that Yeshiva Grodno, after the Yeshiva in Lithuania that Rav Shimon Shkop started, which was also wiped out by Hitler. Why? "Because I have to build again and I have to build new, but I want to keep alive the spirit and the principles that Ponevezh represented and that Grodno represented."

This is what Yitzchak did as well. "My father called the well K-El Olam, so I am going to call it K-El Olam. I am going to call it by the same name. The mission that my father started—to put the Shem Hashem into the mouths and minds of people—that is my legacy as well." Therefore, the Torah spent all this time speaking about the wells, because the wells were just a means to spread the Shem HaShem in the mouths of the people.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Why are our voices today more powerful than ever before? In Parshat Toldot, the Torah tells us how Yaakov successfully deceived his father Yizchak into giving him the bracha of the firstborn. Yitzchak felt his son and he felt like Eisav, and yet the voice was the voice of Yaakov prompting Yitzchak to exclaim, "Hakol kol Yaakov v'hayadayim yedei Eisav," – "The voice is the voice of Yaakov while the hands are the hands of Eisav."

The Midrash tells us that this actually was a bracha. Yitzchak was saying as follows: May Hashem bless you and your descendants that the Eisavs of this world, your enemies, will only be able to potentially harm you with their hands, that is to say when they are in your presence. But may Hashem give you and your descendants the potential through all the blessings that you give to the world to say something here which will make an impact on the other side of the world.

Through the generations we have always understood that the power of the 'kolo shel Yaakov' – the voice of Jacob – has been through tefillah, prayer, so that from here on Earth we can make an impact in the heavens above through Hashem listening to our

prayers. But more recently, through recordings, people have been able to hear the voice of somebody elsewhere. Through the telephone we've been able to communicate and to inspire. We have found and discovered new means through which our voices can be heard emphatically, right around the globe. We've discovered that actually we can include everybody everywhere. The result has been absolutely extraordinary.

I've discovered for myself, for example, an opportunity – I now learn regularly with my grandchildren who live in three continents. We bond together through learning and it's wonderful that we're able to study together and appreciate our traditions together, and I highly recommend this to you all.

And let us not forget about a different type of 'kol' – it's the kol, the sound, of singing: being able to see concerts, hear recordings and benefit from the ruach, the wonderful spirituality, of the singing of others wherever they might be through the modern methods that are available to us.

Let us therefore pray to Hashem that, "Hayadayim yedei Eisav," – the hands of the eisavs of this world will not even harm us when they are in our presence, and at the same time, may we continue to excel through the, "kol kol Yaakov,' – the voice which is the voice of Jacob through what we teach, through what we learn, through how we sing, and how we inspire our world thanks to the voices that God has given us. *[Excerpted]*

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel
Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*

When Is Lying Permitted In Judaism

In this week's Parsha, when Yaakov lies to his father and comes to get his brother's blessing, telling him "I am your eldest son Esau", the commentaries have a "field day", either explaining why this was indeed a sin by Yaakov he was later punished, or that this was not really a lie (since he was now technically the Bechor), or that he was fulfilling the Mitzvah of honoring his mother who took upon herself Yaakov's punishment (see commentaries on Genesis 27:13 "עלי קללתך בני"). But irrespective of justifying Yaakov's behavior, the question should be asked and investigated: is it ever permitted to lie in normative Judaism? The answer to this question will surprise most readers.

The Importance Of Not Lying - The centrality of the concept of truth in Judaism The importance of telling the absolute truth, especially in a Jewish courtroom, is sacred and will not be discussed in detail here. However, just a few examples about the importance of truth before we get to the permissibility of lying. Based on a Torah verse (Leviticus 19:36, Bava Metzia 49a), the Talmud declares that lying in all business activities is forbidden, i.e., that your "yes" should really be a yes, and your "no" should truly be a no. A sixteenth century Rabbi (Sefer Chareidim, Mitzvot Asei Bipeh, 26) writes that telling the truth and not lying in a Jew's everyday routine in an actual Mitzvah-commandment. The Talmud (Sotah 42a) describes four groups of people who are denied the Divine Presence, and one of them is people who lie regularly. By using one extra letter, the Torah teaches us to be exact in our words and never lie, even in small and obvious matters. Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato calls lying a sickness that envelops an individual, but then he differentiates between diverse types and degrees of lying (Mesilat Yesharim 11, Midat Hanekiut). When then, can or should a Jew lie?

Lying To Prevent Danger To Human Life - It is known by many that if a Jew must violate 610 of the 613 Mitzvot-Commandments to save a life even in remote danger, he or she should do so (Maimonides, Hilchot Yesodai HaTorah 5:1-2). Among these 610 is the commandment to tell the truth. Therefore, if a Jew must lie to save his or her life, one not only has permission to do so, but must lie in such a situation. During war, a time of life and death decisions, it is perfectly legitimate to lie to one's enemy. Sisra, the Philistine general, did not know that Yael was Jewish when she invited him into her tent. She said she would give him water, but she gave him warm milk instead, which made him sleepy, and she then killed him (Judges 4:17-21). The Talmud states a general rule that it is permitted to "modify the truth" for the sake of peace (Yevamot 65b) but based on the three Biblical examples and proofs it gives for this rule, the peace referred to is life itself. The Talmud brings a case of a man who was invited to another man's house and suspected the man was about to kill him. When the meal was served, the guest remarked that this food tasted like the meal that the king had served him. When the host heard that his guest knew the king, he refrained from killing him. The man lied about knowing the king, but this bluff saved his life (Sotah 41a).

The "White Lie" To Maintain Peace – But With Specific Conditions - It is very common in Western Society to hear many "White Lies" which society seems to believe is ethical. What does Judaism believe? A "White Lie" could be defined as a fib, a trivial, diplomatic, or well-intentioned untruth. It also may be characterized as a minor, harmless, or unimportant lie, especially one uttered in the interests of tact or politeness. Would such a lie be permitted in Judaism? Unlike lying to preserve human life, while there is consensus in Judaism that lying is permitted to save a life, there is little agreement by Jewish thinkers about when and where the "White Lie" is valid.

Rabbi Eliezer of Metz (Sefer Yerai-im, Amud 8, 245)writes that any lie where no harm will come as a result is not forbidden in Judaism. He bases his belief on the famous Talmud passage in Ketuvot, where the House of Shammai and the House of Hillel argue about how to describe a Jewish bride (Ketuvot 16a with Rashi and Tosafot commentaries). To fulfill the commandment to bring joy to the bride and groom, how should Jew's dance and address the bride? Should the Jews at the wedding say that the bride is beautiful when she clearly is not attractive, or should they refrain from such a characterization? Beit Shammai says that no mention of any bride's beauty should ever be uttered (since it would be terribly insulting to characterize some of the brides as beautiful and say nothing about those that are not beautiful), and, thus, it is forbidden to lie and say a bride is beautiful when she is clearly not. Beit Hillel says every bride should be characterized as beautiful. Beit Hillel asks Beit Shammai about the situation where a wife buys a dress she likes (and it cannot be returned) and asks her husband how he likes the dress (which is clearly nothing special). Should the husband lie and say the dress is beautiful? In this situation, even Beit Shammai agrees with Beit Hillel that it is permitted to lie and say the dress is beautiful, because telling the truth in this situation to the wife would only result in hurt, while praising the dress will cause no harm. Beit Hillel says the same logic applies to the bride. From this Talmudic passage, it seems that it is permissible to tell a "White Lie" in Judaism to make someone feel better,. where no practical harm will come of the lie. The Shulchan Aruch rules like Beit Hillel (). However, tow caveats are in order. Rabbeinu Yonah (Shaarei Teshuva, Shaar 3:181) seems to say that if the only intention of the "White Lie" was to make the person feel better and it causes no one harm, then it is permitted, as maintaining family peace is of a higher value than truth. Rabbi Yehuda Chasid adds an important caveat. The "White Lie" is only permitted regarding past events (i.e., the dress was already bought and cannot be returned, or the bride is already married). But if it affects anything in the future, then even a "White Lie" is not permitted.

Lying To Maintain Dignity Or Prevent Embarrassment - Regarding a Torah scholar, The Talmud (Bava Metzia 23b with Tosafot commentary) states that in three specific areas a Torah scholar may not tell the truth – all to avoid embarrassment or appearing haughty. In the same vein, we learn that under certain circumstances it is permitted to lie to a sick person, and tell him or her that the illness is not terminal even if it is – if the person is sure that the truth will only make that same individual feel much worse psychologically and may even affect the patient's physical condition (The concept about when to tell the truth to patients and when one may lie is a long and complicated. ethical discussion in and of itself, which is beyond the scope of this article.) The prophet Elisha lied to the King of Aram by not indicating that his illness was terminal (II Kings 8:7-10). The very modest Shmuel Hakatan lied to avoid causing someone embarrassment: Rabban Gamliel had

invited seven scholars to a particular meeting, but when he noticed that there were eight people in the room, he asked who had not been invited. Shmuel Hakatan lied and said that he had not been invited and excused himself, even though he had indeed been invited. He wanted to avoid embarrassing the young scholar who had invited himself to the meeting (Sanhedrin 11a). There are several other categories that permit Jew to lie in specific instances, but these, too, go beyond the scope of this article. ***This column has been adapted from a series of volumes written by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel "The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values" available from Urim and Amazon. For the full article or to review all the footnotes in the original, contact the author at nachum@jewishdestiny.com**

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Can One Commit Fraud for the Right Reasons? The Matriarchs' Corruption Commitment by Margot Botwinick

Rivka's Questionable Ways - Deception is a theme of the Torah portions that we are now reading and it is done by our greatest role models. While there are many jarring questions surrounding the deception in this week's Parsha, it's Rivka's actions which are most disturbing:

Why doesn't she tell him about the prophecy she receives? Why does she take advantage of him and his blindness? Why resort to involving her son in deceit? How can she ask her son to lie to his father? What was her emotional plan for when Yitzchak realizes what happened and feels that betrayal from his son? Why would she cause all of this struggle, that would last for generations, seemingly on her own accord? Did she not think that Hashem would not find another way to let the truth come out?

And even if she wants to achieve the "right" result by deceiving her husband and son…is it "right" if she goes about in the wrong way?

A Pattern Amongst Our Matriarchs - Before we attempt to answer these questions, let's back up and ask them about Sarah too. Sarah is heavily critiqued by Chazal for her actions. The moment Sarah feels that something in the air is not right with Yishmael's relationship with her son Yitzchak, she sends Hagar and Yishmael out of the house, even though it was she who encouraged Avraham to have a child with Hagar in the first place. Being alone as a woman at that time, without protection or enough food and water or any plan for refuge – why does Sarah act so cruelly? Wasn't there another way?

And what about Leah and Rachel? Rachel too, according to the Midrash, deceives Yaakov. She teaches Leah the signs in order to trick Yaakov into marrying Leah. While it's certainly laudable that Rachel's deceit is to the detriment of her own self interest, still, is this a way to start off a marriage? The tears, the brotherly hate, the jealousy and pain between the sisters and their sons – does that not all stem from this deception?

Is it possible that Sarah, Rivka, Rachel or Leah could have acted differently? Was there not a way for them to ensure Yitzchak and Yaakov futures without resorting to such duplicitous ways?

The Detrimental Results - When we look at the scheme of history, these episodes of deception do not pan out well. The repercussions of the friction between Yitzchak and Yishmael are still felt today, 4,000 years later. We are still at war with our Ishmaelite cousins. The same is true for Yaakov and Eisav. The hatred that was created through Rivka's plan has echoed throughout the centuries of persecutions from Eisav's descendants.

Perhaps, as Chazal indeed suggest, our Matriarchs did not act fully properly in these stories. The Torah and Chazal do critique our Matriarchs for not choosing the more honest path. The brothers lie to Yaakov about Yosef's fate, Rashi says that this was mida k'negged mida, measure for measure, for the deception Yaakov did to his own father. Rash clearly tells us: The hurt and pain need not have happened.

And yet, what made our matriarchs who they are is that they refused to "throw away" their children the moment there was struggle, in the way we see Hagar cast aside Yishmael. The Imahot were dedicated, passionate, committed and took matters of the future of their children and Bnei Yisrael with the utmost seriousness. And with all our greatest leaders, their mothers go to unconventional lengths for their future, like Yocheved and Channah for their children Moshe and Shmuel.

They Were Wrong, But We Can Learn From It. - The results speak for themselves on how the deceptive approach was not the proper way. There must have been another way. But what we can learn from our matriarchs is their complete dedication to fight for their children's futures. Their intense motivation to continue their family's legacy may have sometimes taken them too far. Yet that motivation was exactly what made them so crucial in starting our people's history and ultimately impacting all of humankind.

So, is it okay to do a little cheating behind the scenes? Unequivocally, no. There is always another way.

Yet, we can learn from this a defining trait of our matriarchs: an almost crazed commitment to their children's future. Without compromising our values, we always have, and must continue, to fiercely fight to ensure the future of our nation and its messages to the world.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

The Challenge of Living in Gerar

When a famine occurs in the Land of Canaan, Yitzchak is forced to travel to Gerar. Similar to his father Avraham's experience years before, Yitzchak is about to face the challenge of having to say that Rivka is his sister rather than his wife. The immorality of the society of Gerar necessitated this decision, as Yitzchak feared for his life if he told the truth about Rivka. Immediately prior to entering Gerar, Hashem appears to Yitzchak and assures him that Hashem will bless him in the merit of Avraham. Hashem concludes this vision by highlighting the greatness of Avraham that warranted the blessings being bestowed upon his descendants. Avraham observed all the mitzvos of Hashem, which Chazal interpret to mean that he fulfilled the actual mitzvos of the Torah which he understood through ruach hakodesh even though they had not yet been given. Not only did Avraham observe the mitzvos of Hashem, but he is also described as "vayishmor mishmarti" - he was careful to safeguard these mitzvos. Rashi comments that this phrase refers to Avraham's fulfillment of even the rabbinic ordinations that were later instituted to protect the observance of Torah law. Examples of these are the many rabbinic prohibitions that we observe on Shabbos, thereby preventing desecration of Shabbos by Torah standards. Is there a reason that Hashem informs Yitzchak to be reminded that his father was one who safeguarded Hashem's mitzvos?

There are two interactions between Avimelech, the king of Gerar and Avraham that are recorded in Parshas Vayera. When Avraham hid Sarah's true identity as his wife because he feared that the people of Gerar would kill him, he was confronted by Avimelech who could not understand why he and his nation were being punished for his taking Sarah, being that he was not aware that she was Avraham's wife. Avimelech questioned Avraham's actions and Avraham responded that he had to act this way because there was no fear of Hashem in Gerar. Although Avimelech thought that he is not accountable for a sin done unintentionally, he is rebuked by Avraham that the background for such a sin is the lack of fear of Hashem in Avimelech's Kingdom. The Torah requires teshuva and atonement even for sins committed unintentionally. Perhaps one would have been more careful if one would have been more cognizant that Hashem is constantly watching. The rebuke that Avraham gave Avimelech for his unintentional sin is the correct response to Avimelech another confrontation between Avraham and Avimelech as well. When Avimelech came to Avraham to enter into a treaty with him, Avraham informed him that three wells had been stolen by Avimelech's servants. Avimelech defended himself by stating that he knew nothing about this. Once again, Avimelech is guilty for not being aware of something that he should have known about. As the king, he was responsible to prevent the

crime of theft. Although he didn't know about this particular act, in a society in which the fear of Hashem doesn't exist the king is held accountable for fostering a climate in which these crimes occur.

Although Avimelech was not an intentional sinner, he fell short in his role of creating a culture of fear of Hashem, a heightened recognition of Hashem that would prevent these types of unintentional acts from occurring. Avimelech starkly contrasts with Avraham. Avraham is described as a "yerei Elokim" - one who fears Hashem - and the one who is "shomeir derech Hashem" - guarding the path of Hashem. Realizing the significance of observing Hashem's mitzvos, he not only observes them properly, but enacts proper safeguards to be certain that even unintentional violation of Hashem's word will not occur. It is this yiras Shomayim that is the basis for the safeguards enacted by Chazal to protect the mitzvos of the Torah. It is precisely when Yitzchak is about to encounter a culture very different from the one in which he grew up in when he is reminded of the legacy of his father. He must be careful in the land of Gerar not to be influenced by the place in which he found himself. Let us merit to learn from our avos how yiras Shamayim must be the central feature of our lives.

Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash

"And Esav Despised the Birthright"
Harav Aharon Lichtenstein

When we read this week's parasha, we cannot help but be amazed and astonished at Esav's ability to forego his birthright with such ease, selling it on the spur of the moment to Yaakov. How can a pot of lentil stew possibly appear to him as an appropriate trade for the respected status of the firstborn?

Rashi attempts to answer this question in light of the religious function of the birthright: Esav said: What is the nature of this [firstborn] service? He said to him: There are several prohibitions and punishments and death sentences involved, like the one which we have learned – "These are they that are [deserving] of death: those drunk with wine, and those whose hair is unkempt."
He said: I will end up dying as a result of it; if so, of what use is it to me?

Ramban, on the other hand, takes a different view of Esav foregoing the birthright: The reason he agreed to the sale was because he was in constant mortal danger while hunting animals, and he would likely die while his father was still alive. But the birthright assumes its significance only after the death of the father, so of what use would the birthright be to him? And it says, "He ate and he drank and he arose and he went on his way and he despised…," for after eating and drinking he returned to the field, to his hunting, and this was the reason for him despising the birthright: for the foolish want nothing more than to eat and drink and to do as they please whenever they please, with no concern for the future.

According to this approach, Yaakov and Esav represent two completely opposite world views. Esav's perspective focuses solely on the functional. His only guiding principle in life is, "What's in it for me?" He seeks continually to benefit himself, here and now. Considerations of personal status, responsibility, and calling are foreign to him and to his way of thinking, for they add nothing on the functional, immediate level.

Yaakov, in contrast, is characterized by an altogether different view. His life is not a constant quest for self-gratification; rather, he aspires to spiritual, meaningful existence, reaching outside the limiting boundaries of functionality. Yaakov recognizes the inherent quality and value of the status of the birthright, and therefore he aspires to attain it – even if this involves danger, and despite the lack of short-term benefit. Yaakov is happy to assume the service of the firstborn; he does not scorn values that carry no immediately apparent real benefits.

We, too – disciples of Yaakov – have a continuous obligation to strive for a life of meaningful spiritual fulfillment that goes beyond life's functional necessities. *(This sicha was delivered on Shabbat Parashat Toledot 5758 [1997]. Adapted by Matan Glidai with Itiel Gold; translated by Kaeren Fish*)

Torah.Org Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Label Lam

He Was What He Wasn't

And the first one emerged ruddy; he was completely like a coat of hair, and they named (called) him Eisav. (Breishis 25:25) …and they named him Esau: They all called him this because he was complete (עָשׂוּי) [lit., made,] and fully developed with hair, like one many years old. (Rashi)

Ironically, it's hunting season again. Perhaps it's a classic case of "Mida Kneged Mida" – "Measure for Measure", that every year at this time for the past 3333 years we find ourselves stalking Eisav to discover what went so terribly wrong. Here we have a talented and charismatic individual born into the best possible family imaginable and yet he earns the title RASHA- wicked!

How could that have happened?! We are like forensic scientists at a crime scene, with all the yellow police tape and flashing lights, looking for the smallest of clues. How did this happen?

This year something occurred to me from the words of Rashi. Since the verse states that "they called his name Eisav" Rashi tells us his name was given by everybody. How does that work? For certain his father Yitzchok gave him his name at the Bris but all that looked at him understood how appropriate that name was and they called him Eisav, almost as a nickname or a descriptive title.

It seems the name Eisav not only described him but his shaped his character and his destiny. He saw himself as complete without needing any improvement or development. That's a huge problem by itself. Nobody is perfect. In life we fail our way to success. The most successful person is not the one who makes the fewest mistakes but the one who learns the most from his mistakes. What if a person cannot afford to make mistakes!? If one can't afford to risk failing then he can't hope to succeed either.

When HASHEM made man he first declared, "Let us make man in our image!" To whom was HASHEM speaking and with whom was HASHEM consulting?! One answer is that HASHEM was inviting all the heavens and earth to plug into and contribute to the creation of mankind. An alternative approach is that HASHEM was speaking to man. Man needs to participate in his own making by improving himself.

I once saw that someone wrote, "Self-esteem is the reputation you have with yourself!" If in fact Eisav had this impression of his self as already made and complete, then he has a big problem. Now that problem is compounded by another seemingly small detail that Rashi spells out.

By way of introduction though let's describe the phenomenon first. I know of a few cases where a child became aware that they were a genius, and they actually were. In each of those situations the child and later the adult grossly under achieved. Why? They could not take risks since their identity was wrapped up in being a genius. They could only lose by taking action. So they played the game of life cautiously.

For this reason it's important because it may even prove harmful to praise children for being cute or brilliant because while those are gifts from HASHEM that they can be grateful for it does not represent a behavior that can be replicated. Tell a child or an adult, "It looks like you put a lot of effort into this" and that's really encouraging.

The simple fact that "everyone called him Eisav" locked him in to his identity. He became a slave to the image he inherited. Everything he did was to impress and please his followers. He devoted the entirety of his life painting an external mirror and avoiding inner reflection, to prove to the world that he was what he wasn't.

BS"D

To: parsha@groups.io
From: cshulman@gmail.com

INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
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from: Rabbi Yissocher Frand <ryfrand@torah.org>
to: ravfrand@torah.org
date: Nov 3, 2021, 6:13 PM
subject: **Rav Frand** - The Value of Planning, Forethought, Process and Development

Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Toldos

The Value of Planning, Forethought, Process and Development

The pasuk says, "And Yaakov boiled a stew, and Eisav came in from the field, and he was exhausted." (Bereshis 25:29). The sad news reached the family that Avraham Avinu has passed away. Yaakov Avinu was cooking lentils because it is customary to serve a mourner round food items. (This is why an egg is typically eaten at the Seudah Mafsekes before Tisha B'Av.) Yaakov Avinu was cooking lentil soup for his father as part of the customary "Seudas Havra'ah" (the first meal a mourner consumes following the funeral, typically prepared by neighbors). Eisav came home from the field tired and famished. We know the rest of the story. Eisav asked for the lentil soup. Yaakov made a deal with him. Eisav sold the birthright to Yaakov, and thus abandoned the bechora. This is the beginning of Parshas Toldos.

The Tolner Rebbe asks three interesting questions:

On the above cited pasuk (vayazed Yaakov nazid), Rashi explains that the word vayazed means to cook. However, the far more common word for cooking in the Torah is the word bishul or some derivative of that root word. Why suddenly over here when the Torah wants to say that Yaakov was cooking lentil soup does the Torah use the word vayazed, necessitating for Rashi to explain that vayazed is the same as bishul?

What was the dish that Yaakov cooked? The Torah here calls it nazid (some kind of soup). It is not until five pesukim later (Bereshis 25:34) that the Torah calls it nazid adashim (lentil soup). Why do we need to wait to find out what Yaakov was cooking? Get to the point right away!

Yitzchak was a wealthy man. Avraham Avinu was a wealthy man and he gave everything that he had to Yitzchak. We are not aware of Yitzchak suffering any financial setbacks. Would we not expect Yitzchak to have servants in his house who did the cooking? Yaakov was a diligent student. He spent his time in the Yeshiva of Shem v'Ever. He learns all the time. Later in life, he learned fourteen years straight without sleeping. Yet what is he doing at the beginning of Parshas Toldos? He is cooking! What about the servants? In fact, the Medrash here points out the humility of Yaakov Avinu that he was cooking lentil soup himself, despite the fact that his father had many servants!

The Tolner Rebbe cites a Malbim who explains the relationship between the word vayazed and the idea of cooking. The Torah uses the same root word in the expression "Ki ba'davar she'ZADU aleihem" (Shemos 18:11), where it means planned or schemed. The Malbim asks: Why is the same root word in Lashon HaKodesh used for cooking and also for planning and scheming? The Malbim answers that when a person schemes, he is cooking up a plan. The word zeidim (as in the expression zeidim b'yad osekei Torasecha) refers to people who plan nefarious and malevolent schemes. These plans that they "cook up" need to first percolate until they are fully ready to be put into action.

There is an expression – if someone wants to cheat in business, he "cooks the books". What kind of expression is that? It is the same idea. If someone wants to try to fool his partner or the government or someone else, he may plan how to charge this expense and how to charge that expense. That is "cooking the books".

That is why the expression vayazed is synonymous with the expression "bishul"—it requires this great forethought of planning, which is synonymous with "cooking up a plan" to do something.

Now we can explain why the pasuk specifically uses the verb vayazed Yaakov nazid. The Torah is trying to indicate that Yaakov Avinu carefully planned this activity with great forethought and intent. He reasoned: My father just became an avel. I want to cook for him. Yaakov's action was done with great planning and forethought in order to fulfill the commandment of honoring his father. This answers the first question.

That is why he did not just let the servants cook the soup—the third question. This was not just a bowl of soup. This was Kibbud Av. Yaakov wanted to do it, and he wanted to do it from the get go. "I don't just want to serve my father. I want to cook the soup and I want to prepare the soup. This is how I want to serve my father." The purpose of the cooking was not just to get something on the plate (for which the word bishul would have sufficed). The cooking over here was a well thought out plan of providing the Seudas Havra'ah and fulfilling the mitzvah of Kibbud Av v'Em.

This is also why the Torah does not state right away that it was a bowl of lentil soup—the second question. That is immaterial at this point. At this point, the Torah is interested in stating that Yaakov was doing the act of cooking, the act of preparing food to serve his bereaved father. If his only interest was to convey the bottom line, then the menu would have been mentioned up front: A bowl of lentil soup. However, that is not the Torah's intent over here. The Torah is trying to emphasize that Yaakov did this entire act with great forethought.

This answers all three questions.

The Tolner Rebbe explains further that within this idea of planning and forethought lies one of the fundamental differences between Yaakov and Eisav. Eisav (as we also see from his name and from his whole life) is not interested in process. He is not interested in preparation. He is interested in the bottom line. That is why the name Eisav is related to the verb ossuei (done). Yaakov comes from the word Akov – crooked. Yaakov's whole life was a life of process, a life of growing, a life of becoming. His life was a life in which the journey and the path itself had merit.

Eisav is a "Just get it done" person. That is why Chazal say that when Yitzchak Avinu told Eisav "Go out and hunt for me," the Medrash says that Eisav said to himself – If I find an animal quickly, fine, I will hunt for it, otherwise I will steal an animal from someone who has already found one.

To Eisav, it was just a matter of getting it done. How? Where? The process is all immaterial.

This is reflected in the difference between Yiddishkeit and secularism. Yiddishkeit emphasizes process and growing in stages. "Going through the motions" itself has value. This is not the case in the secular world. They are not interested in process. What's your batting average? How many runs did you score? How much money do you make? They are not interested in the effort you put into it. It is just the "bottom line." This is not a Jewish value. Anu ameilim v'hem ameilim (we toil, and they toil). We are rewarded even for the toil (even when it does not necessarily lead to concrete accomplishment). This is the difference between Yaakov and Eisav.

The Tolner Rebbe told an amazing story at the end of this presentation:

In Europe there were a number of very brilliant people. There was a child prodigy known in Europe as the prodigy from Meit'zat. He wrote a sefer called Chidushei ha'Ilui m'Meit'zat (https://www.hebrewbooks.org/50602). He later came to America and was a Rosh Yeshiva in Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchonon. His name was Rav Shlomo Polacheck (1877-1928). His son told over an amazing story about his father:

When Rav Polacheck came to America from Poland and he saw children playing with toys and games, he cried. Why? He said "If I would have had the opportunity to play with toys and be a child when I was young, I would be a bigger Talmid Chochom than I am today – because the process of growing up is important." There is a thing called maturation. There is a stage called childhood and a stage called adolescence and a stage called adulthood. He was such a prodigy that perhaps he knew Mishnayos by heart at age three. Someone who knows Mishanyos by heart is not able to play around with whatever little toys three-year-olds played around with in Europe. So, he did not really experience childhood. He said about himself that if he would have had a proper childhood, he could have become an even greater Talmid Chochom (which is hard to imagine).

That is the point of the Tolner Rebbe's whole shtickle Torah. Process and development have value. A person cannot just skip to the bottom line or skip to the end. That is what we learn from "vaYazed Yaakov nazid."

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com
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from: **Rav Immanuel Bernstein** <ravbernstein@journeysintorah.com>
date: Nov 4, 2021, 6:59 AM
subject: Dimensions in Toldos

DIMENSIONS IN CHUMASH

Parshas Toldos

The Avos and Taryag Mitzvos

עֵקֶב אֲשֶׁר שָׁמַע אַבְרָהָם בְּקֹלִי וַיִּשְׁמֹר מִשְׁמַרְתִּי מִצְוֹתַי חֻקּוֹתַי וְתוֹרֹתָי

Because Avraham heeded My voice, he observed My safeguards, My commandments , My decrees and My laws.[1]

Introduction

Rashi, based on Chazal,[2] explains the different phrases in this verse as comprising the various components of the Torah's mitzvos, reflecting the idea that that Avraham kept the mitzvos of the Torah even prior to it being given at Har Sinai to the Jewish People. This tradition is likewise assumed by the Rishonim to pertain also to Yitzchak and Yaakov, as well as their children. The understanding behind this idea is that even without being formally commanded regarding the mitzvos, the heightened spiritual sensitivity of the Avos enabled them to independently intuit what acts would be spiritually beneficial for them, as well as those which would be spiritually detrimental.[3]

The commentators discuss the fact that, understandably, there are many mitzvos whose practical performance would not seem to have been relevant to the Avos. Additionally, they raise the specific question of Yaakov marrying Rachel and Leah, seeing as marrying two sisters is something that the Torah would in time prohibit. Nevertheless, as a matter of general principle – to whatever degree and in whatever way feasible – the Avos kept the mitzvos of the Torah.[4]

Ramban: Home Rules

A very well-known position regarding this tradition is that of the Ramban,[5] who states that it only applied when the Avos were in the Land of Israel. They perceived and recognized that life in Hashem's Land intrinsically involves keeping the mitzvos of the Torah – regardless of whether they have been commanded yet or not. Outside of Israel, however, the Avos did not adopt this practice. With this, the Ramban offers his answer to the question of how Yaakov could marry two sisters, since he did so while he was living outside of Israel, in the land of Aram.

Counter Messages from the Midrash?

The Ramban proceeds to cite one statement of Chazal that appears to contradict his position, for the Midrash states that Yosef kept Shabbos even while he was in Egypt![6] To this, the Ramban responds by saying that this practice of Yosef was an exception, which he deemed necessary in order to instill the fundamentals of faith and monotheism within his children who were surrounded by the pagan society of Egypt. With regards to the other mitzvos, however, there was no notion of electing to keep them outside of the Land of Israel.

However, there is another statement of Chazal which the Ramban does not mention, which would appear to pose a much greater challenge his approach. Commenting on Yaakov's words to Esav upon his return to the land, " עִם לָבָן גַּרְתִּי – I sojourned with Lavan,"[7] the Midrash notes that the letters of the word "גַּרְתִּי" are identical with those of "תרי"ג," the numerical value of the six hundred and thirteen mitzvos of the Torah, indicating that Yaakov kept them all even while with Lavan.[8] Once again, with the above-mentioned proviso that that many of the taryag mitzvos could not be kept on a practical level etc., nevertheless, the Midrash indicates that, at least as a matter of principle, Yaakov was keeping the taryag mitzvos in Chutz La'aretz. This seems to directly contradict the Ramban's position!

Harmony: Pshat and Remez

Perhaps we may suggest the following. The word "גַּרְתִּי" itself actually means "I sojourned", indicating a short-term or transient stay. Let is ask: is there any connection between the pshat meaning of the word "גַּרְתִּי" itself and the gematria that Chazal attached to it denoting Yaakov's fulfilment of the mitzvos? Perhaps it is revealing the reason why Yaakov kept the mitzvos while staying with Lavan. In reality, seeing as he was in Chutz La'aretz, there was no actual need to keep the mitzvos. However, since he regarded his stay with Lavan as temporary – as indicated by the word "גַּרְתִּי" – with the notion of his return to Eretz Yisrael firmly entrenched in his vision, he thus saw it as appropriate to continue his fulfilment of the taryag mitzvos even while outside the land, in order to maintain his familiarity and fluency with them for when he would ultimately return. It thus emerges that the allusion within the word "גַּרְתִּי" is in fact a product of its meaning on a pshat level![9] Indeed, looked at in this way, not only can the above comment of the Midrash be reconciled with the Ramban's approach, but it actually emerges as a support for it, for it specifically frames Yaakov's observance of taryag within the context of the temporary nature of his stay in Chutz La'aretz. Without the "garti," element in Charan, there may not have been "taryag" there either!

[1] Bereishis 26:5. [2] See Yoma 28b and Bereishis Rabbah 64:4. [3] R' Yehoshua Heller, Beis Tefillah chap. 17. [4] For a discussion of these questions, see e.g. Daas Zekeinim mi'Baalei HaTosafos, Bereishis 37:35, Maharsha Yoma loc. cit., Gur Aryeh Bereishis 46:10, Ohr Hachaim ibid. 49:3 and Nefesh Hachaim 1:21.v [5] Bereishis 26:5. [6] See Bereishis Rabbah 92:4. [7] Bereishis 32:5. [8] Cited in Rashi ibid s.v. garti. See Torah Sheleimah ibid. sec. 31 who cites various sources in the Midrash where this comment appears. [9] In this regard, this is a "pre-echo" of the words of the Sifrei in Parshas Ekev (sec. 43, cited in Rashi Devarim 11:18 s.v. ve'samtem, and discussed at length by the Ramban in Vayikra 18:25) which state that the fulfilment of the mitzvos while in exile is in order that they not be new when we return to the Eretz Yisrael. Of course, we will understand that once the fulfilment of the taryag mitzvos in Chutz La'aretz is not essential but "provisional", it could be overridden by other concerns, such as those which led Yaakov to marry two sisters, something which would not have occurred in Eretz Yisrael itself, as the Ramban states.

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YUTORAH IN PRINT Toldot
The Genuine Kibud Av ve-Eim
Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh
(Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from the YUTorah shiur, originally entitled "Parsha Bytes - Toldot 5778," presented at Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim on November 17, 2017)
This week, in Parshas Toldos, we read about the difference between Yaakov and Eisav. And Chazal tell us that even though Eisav was generally a big rasha, nevertheless, he was a world expert—Guinness Book of World Records tzadik at performing the mitzvah of Kibud Av va-Eim. And we see throughout the Parsha how he feeds his father, how concerned he is to take care of him, and how he doesn't want his father to disapprove of his marriage—so he would not upset him. He is willing to marry someone else to make his father happy, and he does thousands of audio shiurim and articles at www.yutorah.orgnot want to kill Yaakov while his father is still alive.
When he discussed the inyan of Kibud Av va-Eim, Rav Soloveitchik pointed out that those actions do not mean that Eisav had a proper attitude towards his father. Eisav excelled in Kibud Av va-Eim, and he went off the derech? How could that be? This is a famous problem in the Acharonim. There are two mitzvos asei when it comes to your father and mother—Kibud and Morah. There is a big diyun in the poskim as to the difference between Kibud Av va-Eim and Morah Av va-Eim. Does one mean actively serving them, while the other is avoiding disrespectful actions? The Rav says that there is a tremendous philosophical difference between them. He says that Kibud Av va-Eim means striving to make your parents happy—ma'achilo, mashkeihu, etc. You feed them and give them drink; you take them out; and take care of their various needs. That is Kibud. If so, what is Morah? You don't contradict them, and you don't sit or stand in their place. The Rav says that it's not simply two different modes of making your parents happy—you give them food and drink, and you show them respect. No. They are distinct concepts. Kibud means acting to make them physically and psychologically happy. Do you want to be nice to them? Do you want to make their lives better? That's Kibud—wanting to improve their lives. Morah is not about the quality of life. Morah is about what your parents stand for—it's about what they believe in. Morah doesn't just mean to respect your parents. It doesn't mean: Don't contradict them because they will be upset. It means: Don't contradict them because you admire and respect what they stand for so much that you don't want to seem like you stand for the opposite, chas ve-shalom. The Rav says that Eisav was a world expert in Kibud Av va-Eim He always wanted to make his father happy. Eisav said: I am not going to kill my brother while my father is alive. I don't want my father to cry. I don't want my father to be upset—I just want my father to be happy all the time. But what did he say? Yikrevu yemei eivel avi ve-aharga es Yaakov achi—as soon as my father passes away, that's it, I am killing Yaakov. Doesn't he realize that Yitzchak stood for certain values? Even after Yitzchak's death, he would not want his sons to kill each other! Did Eisav care about that? The answer is: No! He cared enough for his father to be happy. But he didn't care about the values and ideals of his father. He didn't care for what his father stood for. As soon as his father passed away and would not see what he was doing anymore, Eisav felt he could betray his father's whole legacy—he could do everything his father would disapprove of. He didn't really internalize the values of his father. He just didn't want his father to cry. Ok. That's nice; that's a madreiga. That's how the Rav described the difference between Kibud and Morah. Eisav had Kibud but not Morah. That's why, ultimately, he could not continue their mesorah. He got to the chitzonius level of Kibud Av va-Eim but he did not understand the penimius. It's not enough to want your parents to be happy; it's not enough to be attentive to their physical and psychological needs. You need to be loyal to their values and what they stand for, as well. And that's what Eisav was ultimately missing. And that's why he was Eisav ha-Rasha, who said—yikrevu yemei eivel avi ve-aharga es Yaakov achi. It's our responsibility to have Kibud and Morah of Av va-Eim, to not only want our parents to be happy, but to also be loyal to what our parents stand for and what they believe in. Whether or not they realize, whether they see it. Whether they are with us, or if they have already passed on to the olam ha-emes. We should do those things that would make them proud, whether they are watching or not. That's ultimately the embodiment of Morah Av va-Eim.
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Reb Yeruchem
Based on **Daas Torah, by R. Yeruchem Levovitz**
- Real Spiritual Men Take Risks
By Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein
Parshas Toldos
Esav said, "Look, I'm going to die. For what do I need the birthright?[2] According to Rashi, Esav was not in imminent danger of expiring from hunger. Hungry he was – but not that hungry. Yaakov wished him to sign off on his potential claims as the first-born to perform the future avodah of offerings to Hashem. Esav cautiously inquired about what this birthright thing was all about.
Yaakov explained that assuming the role of the priest for the family was fraught with complications. A great honor – certainly. But there were consequences. Breaking some of the rules meant punishment – even death. "Death?!" said Esav. "What do I need that for? The birthright is yours, gladly." The question and answer say it all. They are not limited to this particular transaction, however. They apply to the pursuit of every worthwhile spiritual elevation. There is always a price to be paid for going for great, whether for a small amount or all the way. Some people are willing to pay the price to seek advancement; others are not.
Chazal looked similarly at life in general, asking[3] whether Man is better off having been created, or having never come into existence. Given all the opportunities for failure, and the attendant unsavory consequences to messing up, perhaps the entire enterprise isn't within an individual's interest. The gemara accepts the gloomy cost-benefit analysis in principle. However, that should not and does not deter some people. Those who are dedicated to spiritual achievement, to attaining new spiritual heights, don't lose sight of the goal because of the pitfalls in the road. Their thinking is that the achievement is well worth the risks.
Esav's analysis was different because he undervalued the achievement, making it indeed not worth his while to pursue. When the Torah tells us that "Esav showed contempt for the birthright,"[4] this is what it means. Undervaluing the spiritual goal in itself is the ultimate expression of contempt.
There is a parallel in the attitude taken by many people. Mesilas Yesharim [5] speaks of people who seek to make things a bit more comfortable for themselves without, G-d forbid, rejecting Torah life. They argue to themselves, however, that they really don't need that much Gan Eden. As long as they get in, taking a back seat there isn't the worst proposition, particularly if the alternative is a life in their mortal existence full of extra responsibility and concern. Setting more modest goals for eternity means getting the best of both worlds.
But it doesn't! Here is why. Many of us, whether we are aware of it or not, secretly are jealous of non-Jews. How wonderful it would be, some inner voice whispers, to move along carefree without restrictions. We could eat what and when we wished. No worrying about mitzvos, or ever having to make a berachah. There would be nothing blocking or inhibiting us from doing as we pleased.

That inner voice lies! Are we jealous of a horse – which also does what it pleases? It eats grass that is readily available, naps where and when it wishes, and never worries about proper attire. Why are we not jealous of a horse?

Because we know that that the greatest pleasure is to be fully human! We gladly trade in the inconveniences and responsibilities for the privilege of belonging to the human race! We were created not to be content with less than we could be. A person who foregoes the opportunity to achieve spiritual achievement is not merely an average, undistinguished human. In a sense, he's a horse!

Esav could spurn the avodah, if it meant too much trouble. We, however, understand that he was selling short his sense of what it means to be fully human.

1. Based on Daas Torah, by R. Yeruchem Levovitz, Toldos, pg. 169-170 ↑ 2. Bereishis 25:32 ↑ 3. Eruvin 13b ↑ 4. Bereishis 25:34 ↑ 5. Chapter 4 ↑

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subject: Was Jacob Right to Take the Blessings? (Toldot)

Was Jacob Right to Take the Blessings? (Toldot)

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Was Jacob right to take Esau's blessing in disguise? Was he right to deceive his father and to take from his brother the blessing Isaac sought to give him? Was Rebecca right in conceiving the plan in the first place and encouraging Jacob to carry it out? These are fundamental questions. What is at stake is not just biblical interpretation but the moral life itself. How we read a text shapes the kind of person we become.

Here is one way of interpreting the narrative. Rebecca was right to propose what she did and Jacob was right to do it. Rebecca knew that it would be Jacob, not Esau, who would continue the covenant and carry the mission of Abraham into the future. She knew this on two separate grounds. First, she had heard it from God Himself, in the oracle she received before the twins were born:

'Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples from within you will be separated;
one people will be stronger than the other,
and the elder will serve the younger.' (Gen. 25:23)

Esau was the elder, Jacob the younger. Therefore it was Jacob who would emerge with greater strength, Jacob who was chosen by God.

Second, she had watched the twins grow up. She knew that Esau was a hunter, a man of violence. She had seen that he was impetuous, mercurial, a man of impulse, not calm reflection. She had seen him sell his birthright for a bowl of soup. She had watched while he "ate, drank, rose and left. So Esau despised his birthright" (Gen. 25:34). No one who despises his birthright can be the trusted guardian of a covenant intended for eternity.

Third, just before the episode of the blessing we read: "When Esau was forty years old, he married Judith, daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and also Basemath, daughter of Elon the Hittite. They were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebecca." (Gen. 26:34) This, too, was evidence of Esau's failure to understand what the covenant requires. By marrying Hittite women he proved himself indifferent both to the feelings of his parents and to the self-restraint in the choice of marriage partner that was essential to being Abraham's heir.

The blessing had to go to Jacob. If you had two sons, one indifferent to art, the other an art-lover and aesthete, to whom would you leave the Rembrandt that has been part of the family heritage for generations? And if Isaac did not understand the true nature of his sons, if he was "blind" not only physically but also psychologically, might it not be necessary to deceive him? He was by now old, and if Rebecca had failed in the early years to get him to see the true nature of their children, was it likely that she could do so now?

This was, after all, not just a matter of relationships within the family. It was about God and destiny and spiritual vocation. It was about the future of an entire people since God had repeatedly told Abraham that he would be the ancestor of a great nation who would be a blessing to humanity as a whole. And if Rebecca was right, then Jacob was right to follow her instructions. This was the woman whom Abraham's servant had chosen to be the wife of his master's son, because she was kind, because at the well she had given water to a stranger and to his camels also. Rebecca was not Lady Macbeth, acting out of favouritism or ambition. She was the embodiment of loving-kindness. And if she had no other way of ensuring that the blessing went to one who would cherish it and live it, then in this case the end justified the means. This is one way of reading the story and it is taken by many of the commentators.

However it is not the only way.[1] Consider, for example, the scene that transpired immediately after Jacob left his father. Esau returned from hunting and brought Isaac the food he had requested. We then read this:

Isaac trembled violently and said, 'Who was it, then, that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came and I blessed him – and indeed he will be blessed!'

When Esau heard his father's words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father, 'Bless me – me too, my father!'

But he said, 'Your brother came deceitfully [be-mirma] and took your blessing.'

Esau said, 'Isn't he rightly named Jacob? This is the second time he has taken advantage of me: he took my birthright, and now he's taken my blessing!' Then he asked, 'Haven't you reserved any blessing for me?' (Gen. 27:33-36)

It is impossible to read Genesis 27 – the text as it stands without commentary – and not to feel sympathy for Isaac and Esau rather than Rebecca and Jacob. The Torah is sparing in its use of emotion. It is completely silent, for example, on the feelings of Abraham and Isaac as they journeyed together toward the trial of the Binding. Phrases like "trembled violently" and "burst out with a loud and bitter cry" cannot but affect us deeply. Here is an old man who has been deceived by his younger son, and a young man, Esau, who feels cheated out of what was rightfully his. The emotions triggered by this scene will long stay with us.

Then consider the consequences. Jacob had to stay away from home for more than twenty years, fearing of his life. He then suffered an almost identical deceit practised against him by Laban when he substituted Leah for Rachel. When Jacob cried out "Why did you deceive me [rimitani]" Laban replied: "It is not done in our place to place the younger before the elder" (Gen. 29:25-26). Not only the act but even the words imply a punishment, measure for measure. "Deceit," of which Jacob accuses Laban, is the very word Isaac used about Jacob. Laban's reply sounds like a virtually explicit reference to what Jacob had done, as if to say, "We do not do in our place what you have just done in yours."

The result of Laban's deception brought grief to the rest of Jacob's life. There was tension between Leah and Rachel. There was hatred between their children. Jacob was deceived yet again, this time by his sons, when they brought him Joseph's bloodstained robe: another deception of a father by his children involving the use of clothes. The result was that Jacob was deprived of the company of his most beloved son for twenty-two years just as Isaac was of Jacob.

Asked by Pharaoh how old he was, Jacob replied, "Few and evil have been the years of my life" (Gen. 47:9). He is the only figure in the Torah to make a remark like this. It is hard not to read the text as a precise statement of the principle of measure for measure: as you have done to others, so will others do to you. The deception brought all concerned great grief, and this persisted into the next generation.

My reading of the text is therefore this.[2] The phrase in Rebecca's oracle, Ve-rav ya'avod tsair (Gen. 25:23), is in fact ambiguous. It may mean, "The elder will serve the younger," but it may also mean, "The younger will serve the elder." It was what the Torah calls a chiddah (Numbers 12:8), that is, an

opaque, deliberately ambiguous communication. It suggested an ongoing conflict between the two sons and their descendants, but not who would win.
Isaac fully understood the nature of his two sons. He loved Esau but this did not blind him to the fact that Jacob would be the heir of the covenant. Therefore Isaac prepared two sets of blessings, one for Esau, the other for Jacob. He blessed Esau (Gen. 27:28-29) with the gifts he felt he would appreciate: "May God give you heaven's dew and earth's richness – an abundance of grain and new wine" – that is, wealth. "May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you" – that is, power. These are not the covenantal blessings.
The covenantal blessings that God had given Abraham and Isaac were completely different. They were about children and a land. It is this blessing that Isaac later gave Jacob before he left home (Gen. 28:3-4): "May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples" – that is, children. "May He give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now reside as a foreigner, the land God gave to Abraham" – that is, land. This was the blessing Isaac had intended for Jacob all along. There was no need for deceit and disguise.
Jacob eventually came to understand all this, perhaps during his wrestling match with the angel during the night before his meeting with Esau after their long estrangement. What happened at that meeting is incomprehensible unless we understand that Jacob was giving back to Esau the blessings he had wrongly taken from him. The massive gift of sheep, cattle and other livestock represented "heaven's dew and earth's richness," that is, wealth. The fact that Jacob bowed down seven times to Esau was his way of fulfilling the words, "May the sons of your mother bow down to you," that is, power.
Jacob gave the blessing back. Indeed he said so explicitly. He said to Esau: "Please accept the blessing [birkati] that was brought to you, for God has been gracious to me and I have all I need." (Gen. 33:11) On this reading of the story, Rebecca and Jacob made a mistake, a forgivable one, an understandable one, but a mistake nonetheless. The blessing Isaac was about to give Esau was not the blessing of Abraham. He intended to give Esau a blessing appropriate to him. In so doing, he was acting on the basis of precedent. God had blessed Ishmael, with the words "I will make him into a great nation." (Gen. 21:18) This was the fulfilment of a promise God had given Abraham many years before when He told him that it would be Isaac, not Ishmael, who would continue the covenant:
Abraham said to God, "If only Ishmael might live under Your blessing!" Then God said, "Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish My covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation." (Gen. 17:18-21)
Isaac surely knew this because, according to midrashic tradition, he and Ishmael were reconciled later in life. We see them standing together at Abraham's grave (Gen. 25:9). It may be that this was a fact that Rebecca did not know. She associated blessing with covenant. She may have been unaware that Abraham wanted Ishmael blessed even though he would not inherit the covenant, and that God had acceded to the request.
If so, then it is possible all four people acted rightly as they understood the situation, yet still tragedy occurred. Isaac was right to wish Esau blessed as Abraham sought for Ishmael. Esau acted honourably toward his father. Rebecca sought to safeguard the future of the covenant. Jacob felt qualms but did what his mother said, knowing she would not have proposed deceit without a strong moral reason for doing so.
Do we have here one story with two possible interpretations? Perhaps, but that is not the best way of describing it. What we have here, and there are other examples in Genesis, is a story we understand one way the first time we hear it, and a different way once we have discovered and reflected on all that happened later. It is only after we have read about the fate of Jacob in Laban's house, the tension between Leah and Rachel, and the animosity between Joseph and his brothers that we can go back and read Genesis 27, the chapter of the blessing, in a new light and with greater depth.
There is such a thing as an honest mistake, and it is a mark of Jacob's greatness that he recognised it and made amends to Esau. In the great encounter twenty-two years later the estranged brothers meet, embrace, part as friends and go their separate ways. But first, Jacob had to wrestle with an angel.
That is how the moral life is. We learn by making mistakes. We live life forward, but we understand it only looking back. Only then do we see the wrong turns we inadvertently made. This discovery is sometimes our greatest moment of moral truth.
For each of us there is a blessing that is ours. That was true not just of Isaac but also Ishmael, not just Jacob but also Esau. The moral could not be more powerful. Never seek your brother's blessing. Be content with your own.[3]
Footnotes: [1] Critical readings of Rebecca's or Jacob's conduct appear in several midrashic works: Bereishit Rabbah, Tanhuma (Buber), Yalkut Reuveni, Midrash ha-Neelam and Midrash Socher Tov (to Psalm 80:6). Among critical commentators are R. Eliezer Ashkenzi, Tzeda le-Derech, and R. Yaakov Zvi Mecklenberg, Ha-Ktav veha-Kabbalah. All these interpretations are based on the textual clues cited in what follows. [2] For a more detailed explanation, see Jonathan Sacks, Covenant and Conversation Genesis: The Book of Beginnings, Maggid Books, 2009, 153-158, 219-228. [3] This later became the tenth of the Ten Commandments.

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Insights Parshas Toldos Kislev 5782
Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim / Talmudic University
Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig
This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Jack Fefer, Yaakov ben Yisroel Yitzchak. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"
Conwoman?
And Yitzchak was forty years old when he took Rifkah for a wife, the daughter of Besuel the Aramean of Padan-Aram, the sister to Lavan the Aramean (25:20).
Rashi (ad loc) wonders why the Torah reiterates that Rifkah was the daughter of Besuel the Aramean and the sister of Lavan the Aramean. After all, last week's parsha clearly identified Rifkah's lineage and from where she came. Why should the Torah choose to repeat it at the beginning of this parsha? Rashi answers that the Torah is teaching us that even though Rifkah grew up with a wicked father and brother, and came from a place of wicked people, she didn't learn from their evil ways. Yet this explanation requires further clarification. In last week's parsha we see that Rifkah was a kind and generous person, as well as one of great modesty. Furthermore, Hashem clearly answered Eliezer's prayer for help and guidance by unmistakably indicating that He intended Rifkah to be Yitzchak's wife. But why is it necessary to once again highlight the difference between Rifkah and her wicked relatives from a wicked place?
Finally, it is odd that the Torah repeats by both Besuel and Lavan that they were Aramean. Why is there a special emphasis on their Aramean nationality?
The Babylonian Talmud is written in Aramaic, the language of Aram, while the Jerusalem Talmud is written in Hebrew, the language spoken in Eretz Yisroel. Yet the Talmud that is written in a foreign language is the one that enjoys a much wider popularity; it is studied far more than the Jerusalem Talmud and comprises the bulk of the curriculum in yeshivos all over the world. The Babylonian Talmud is also the foundation and source of all halacha. Why is it that the Babylonian Talmud became more widely accepted than the Jerusalem Talmud, which is written in our native tongue?
The Aramean people were known for being conmen (exactly what Yaakov was worried about when making a deal with his wicked uncle Lavan in next week's parsha, and Lavan actually did try to trick him). What is the talent that makes a conman successful? He is able to delve into the reality of his

"mark." In other words, a successful conman is able to see how his target will look at a situation; he then tailors the con to the other person's perspective and desires.
The Aramean language is one of understanding another's perspective. As an example, the word chessed in Hebrew means kindness, yet Rashi tells us (Vayikra 20:17) that in Aramaic it means shame. How can the same word mean both kindness and shame? It's all a matter of perspective: the giver feels that he is doing a kindness, but the recipient feels shame at having to accept charity. The Arameans focus on the other individual's perspective – hence in Aramaic chessed means shame.
The Babylonian Talmud is the most widely accepted authority for this very reason. When we have an argument about law we want each opinion to be sensitive to the other's perspective before we decide on the proper approach. Only in understanding the other sides' perspective can we properly distill our own perspective. This is deeply rooted in the very essence of the Aramean culture.
The reason that Rifkah's lineage is repeated in this week's parsha is because it becomes very relevant to the story line. After all, it was her idea that Yaakov enter into Yitzchak's reality and, through a subtle subterfuge, receive the brachos that were intended for her wicked son Eisav. Rifkah too, being from Aram, had the quality of insight into another's perspective, but she used it to make sure that her righteous son prevailed over her wicked son.
True Kibud Av
And Yaakov went near to Yitzchak his father; and he felt him, and said, the voice is Yaakov's voice, but the hands are the hands of Eisav (27:23).
Rashi (ad loc) directly addresses the source of Yitzchak's confusion; even though he felt that Yaakov's arms were indeed hairy like Eisav's arms (as part of the disguise worn by Yaakov), his voice was dissimilar to Eisav. Rashi goes on to explain that Yaakov had addressed his father with a very respectful statement: "Please get up and sit to eat the food that I have prepared..." (27:19). Eisav, on the other hand, would speak in a combative tone "Get up father!"
The implication is that Eisav's tone was harsh and perhaps even disrespectful, while Yaakov's was more gentle and accommodating. However, we find in the Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 65) that Raban Shimon Ben Gamliel stated: "All of my days I served my father, and I didn't accomplish even 1/100th of the degree to which Eisav honored his father. When Eisav served his father he served him (wearing) royal garments." Even the great and pious Raban Shimon Ben Gamliel's kibud av did not compare with that of Eisav's.
Similarly, it is brought down from the Zohar that there was no one in the world who honored his father like Eisav did, and that zechus protected Eisav in this world. Thus, it is difficult to imagine that the very paradigm of kibud av would err in such a basic area as communicating respectfully with his father. What can Rashi possibly mean?
Certainly, Yaakov addressed his father very respectfully, as we see from the pesukim. But Eisav actually superseded his brother's efforts. Rashi, in next week's parsha (see 28:13), says that Hashem associated His name with Yitzchak, even though Hashem does not usually associate His name with the living (for they might sin). But in the case of Yitzchak he was considered as if he was dead because he was blind and homebound and therefore no longer had an evil inclination. The implication in this week's parsha is also that Yitzchak was frail and bedridden, as we see that both Yaakov and Eisav have to tell him to get up and go over to eat.
While Yaakov treated his father with great deference, he was also catering to his father's self-image of being old and frail. Yaakov's kibud av was all about being deferential and respectful. On the other hand, Eisav was treating his father like a lazy teenager; he wasn't letting his father perceive himself as an old and sickly person. Eisav didn't accept the notion that Yitzchak is old and frail, and didn't let Yitzchak accept it either.
This is similar to people who hire personal trainers; they aren't hiring somebody who will gently ask them to "please do another pushup." Quite the opposite, they are literally paying someone to yell at them and push them past their malaise and perceived physical limits. But it is a very fine line. A personal trainer cannot be derisive or abusive, he must convey that he believes his client is far more capable than the client himself believes and push him in that direction. At the end of the day, one comes to understand that the personal trainer is making him suffer for his own good.
This was Eisav's approach and it was obviously a much more difficult way of dealing with his father because it required constant pressure and a refusal to allow Yitzchak to deteriorate to the point of actually physically requiring to become bedridden. In fact, Yitzchak goes on to live another sixty plus years. Achieving this with anyone is quite an accomplishment; doing so with one's own father is a seemingly impossible task. Eisav managed to do this, which is why he is known as the quintessential example of kibud av.
Did You Know...
The last possuk in this week's parsha, "Eisav went to Yishmael and took Machalas […] as a wife" is, quite remarkably, the source for a well-known teaching from Chazal. Rashi (Genesis 36:3) cites this possuk as the source for the maxim that on the day of their wedding a bride and groom are forgiven of their sins. This is why the name of one of Eisav's wives is originally given as "Machalas" while later she was called Basemath (Machalas is related to the word mechilah, forgiveness).
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Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parsha Insights
For the week ending 6 November 2021 / 2 Kislev 5782
Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Parshat Toldot
No Fit for Counterfeit

"And Hashem said to her (to Rivka about Esav and Yaakov), 'Two regimes are in your womb…'" (25:23)

Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica by Isaac Newton forms the foundation of classical mechanics. In it, Newton expounds his laws of motion and the law of universal gravitation. The Principia is considered one of the most important works in the history of science. But Newton was not only a scientist. He was also responsible for supervising the minting of money and amassed a considerable fortune himself. D. T. Whiteside, who became the twentieth century's preeminent scholar and shepherd of Newton's mathematical work, could not help but remark: "Only too few have ever possessed the intellectual genius and surpassing capacity to stamp their image upon the thought of their age and that of centuries to follow. Watching over the minting of a nation's coin, catching a few counterfeiters, increasing an already respectably-sized personal fortune, being a political figure, even dictating to one's fellow scientists — it should all seem a crass and empty ambition once you have written a Principia." ("Isaac Newton" by James Gleick)
Being a great scientist, it seems, does not necessarily make you a great person.
Almost certainly not coincidentally, there is another well-known work with the title Principia Mathematica. In 1910, Alfred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell published a three-volume work on the foundations of mathematics also titled Principia Mathematica. Russell's contributions to logic, epistemology, and the philosophy of mathematics established him as one of the foremost philosophers of the 20th century.
Sadly, it seems that as a person he fared no better than Newton. During his tenure as a professor at Cambridge University in England, Russell was once giving a lecture in a large amphitheater. In the middle of his discourse, a young lady raised her hand to ask a question. Russel indicated that he would

take the question and she began, "Doctor Russell, you are one of the preeminent philosophers of your day. I would like to ask you, please, how you manage to equate this with the fact that you are having an illicit affair with one of your students?" Russell looked at the young lady and without missing a beat replied, "Madam, as I am a mathematician, do you also expect me to be a triangle?"

In Judaism, you have to be a triangle.

"And Hashem said to her, 'Two regimes are in your womb…'"

Nothing in Judaism is more despised and nothing creates a greater desecration of Hashem's name than a Torah scholar who is corrupt. The regime of Esav allows and indulges in the foibles of the bright and the witty, but the regime of Torah allows no counterfeiting whatsoever.

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Drasha Parshas Drasha - With Death Do Us Apart!
Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

After a debilitating stroke, Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz, the Rosh Yeshiva of the Mirrer Yeshiva in Jerusalem, continued to say a weekly mussar shmues (ethical sermon) at the yeshiva. Hundreds of students strained to hear the brilliant words of wisdom that were peppered with anecdotes and aphorisms that shed new light on the age-old words of sages of yore.

But one Parshas Toldos, the Rosh Yeshiva stunned his audience as he opened his remarks. "Ich gai shtarben!" (I am going to die!) he announced. In a raspy voice, he repeated the words over and over again. "Ich gai shtarben!" The students' faces turned ashen. They were not sure whether or not to summon ambulances and medical teams when he suddenly stopped, smiled, and finished his thought, "that is exactly what Esav (Esau) told his brother Yaakov (Jacob) in this week's portion!"

Indeed, the transaction in which Esau gives up his birthright for a bowl of lentil soup was preceded by those very words. "Behold I am going to die," cried Esav, "so why do I need my birthright?" (Genesis 25:30)

The thought of death was a catalyst in Esav's decision to rid himself of the birthright and its responsibilities. But why? Everyone dies. However, what did the ultimate end have to do with Esav's decision? Why did it play a role in deciding whether or not to trade in the birthright for a cup of lentil soup? Could Esav not just as easily responded to Jacob's offer in the following manner: "Behold, the birthright carries too much responsibility. What do I need it for?" What, however, does the concept of death have to do with it?

A student of the Telshe Yeshiva once related the following story: An airplane carrying Dovid, a Telshe Yeshiva student, back to Cleveland began experiencing severe turbulence. The young man became quite nervous, but after seeing that his own Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Mordechai Gifter, was sitting in front of him, he felt secure. "After all," thought the young man, "with such a tzadik (righteous man) on board, what possibly could go wrong?"

Suddenly the captain's voice was heard over the intercom. "We are experiencing some difficulty with the plane's hydraulic system and may be forced to make an emergency landing. Everyone please return to your seats, fasten your seatbelts, and follow the instructions given by your flight attendants."

Dovid quickly leaned forward toward his Rebbe. "Perhaps we are in danger. I have a Tehillim in my carry-on luggage. Are there any particular Psalms or prayers should I recite?"

Quickly, Rav Gifter reassured the young man, and suggested to him a few appropriate Psalms. Then he urged him to quickly buckle up and prepare for landing. His advice was interrupted by shouts coming from a frantic passenger who sat next to Dovid. "Stewardess, quick! Get over here! Make me a double scotch on the rocks. Make it Johnny Walker Blue Label! Better make it fast, and better make it good, 'cause it may be my last drink before I die!"

The Chofetz Chaim, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan of Radin, explains that the Mishnah in Pirkei Avos tells us do repent one day before our death. (Avos 2:15). Obviously, those of us who do not know when that day is to arrive must reflect and ask pardon daily. But the catalyst of serious reflection and sobriety is the very thought of the final moment – death. Its approach should shake us if not wake us into teshuvah. Esav's approach is disturbingly different: I will cast away any vestige of responsibility or spirituality, because, after all, tomorrow I may die. His catalyst of Epicureanism is our cause for stoic concern.

And so for a bowl of lentil soup, a cocktail of craving gulped down in a moment of passion, Esav abandons his world of eternity. And the motivating factor behind his faux pas should have inspired him to seek the meaning of life.

A question that we must all ask our selves, when we stare at the prospect of gloom or wait for its imminent arrival, do we drink or do we think?

Dedicated by Yitz & Gilla Stern to commemorate the Yahrzeit of
Reb Azriel ben Reb Eliyahu Stern A"H — 7 Kislev
Good Shabbos!

Rabbi M. Kamenetzky is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore.

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http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/
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Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz
Parashat Toldot 5782 : The Process and the Goal
26 Heshvan 5782 November 1, 2021

Parashat Toldot begins with a very upsetting subject: infertility. Isaac and Rebecca waited for a child for twenty years. For twenty years, they prayed to G-d for a pregnancy until G-d granted their wish and Rebecca gave birth to twins – Jacob and Esau.

We also come into contact with the subject of infertility with Sarah who was infertile until the age of ninety when she had Isaac. In the following generation as well, Rachel – Jacob's wife – is infertile and waits many years before she has her two sons – Joseph and Benjamin.

Other mothers in the Bible are described as infertile. What they all had in common is that they were ultimately mothers to children who left an indelible mark on history and on the presence of G-d in the world. This raises the question – Why did the women around them manage to get pregnant without difficulty while those women who were going to give birth to children marked for greatness had to first undergo suffering and anxious anticipation?

Jewish sages offered this short explanation:

Why were the matriarchs infertile?… Because the Blessed be He desired their prayers, and desired their conversation. (Midrash Tanchuma Toldot 9)

Based on the simple understanding of this explanation, the mothers of the nation were infertile because G-d wanted them to pray to Him! There is great beauty in this explanation, but on the other hand, it seems so unfair. The matriarchs had to suffer so that G-d would get His wish?!

The Malbim – Rabbi Meir Leibush Wisser (Eastern Europe, 19th century) – was a unique and profound biblical commentator. Reading his commentary, the sages' comment is seen in a new light:

Humans giving birth to their own kind is rooted in nature, just like it is rooted in nature that plants and animals give birth to their own kind; but giving birth to something special, that will bear a select and sacred fruit goes against nature and necessitates Divine assistance. Therefore, our matriarchs were infertile, because nature is not ready on its own until Divine power appears which is awakened by prayer… (Malbim on Genesis 25, 21)

The Malbim explains that a regular birth is part of the natural life cycle; but the birth of a person of stature is a special event requiring the appearance of Godly powers in the world. The way that power is awakened to appear in the world is through prayer which brings about Divine abundance.

To better understand the Malbim's words, we must first take a look at our lifestyle and habits today. If in the past, man had to work hard to build himself a specific piece of furniture or to prepare a certain food, nowadays, that process has been shortened and everything can arrive with the click of a button. If we want to see the scenery of a faraway land, all we have to do is get on a plane and in just a few hours we can be at our desired destination. We have grown to expect everything to happen without delay; immediate gratification.

In a world of fast food, fast travel, online purchases, we have lost our way, we have lost sight of the process. We think the process is just a means of attaining a goal, and if we can circumvent it, even better. We even expect natural processes to go quickly, and when a problem arises, we find a better method to solve it. If we delve for a moment into the phenomenon of bringing children into the world, we discover a fascinating world. In our

bodies we have great power, the power to create life! The power to bring down a Godly soul into this world! Seeing it from this perspective, it is clear that birth is an incomparably transcendent event.

If this is true regarding bringing life into the world, imagine the birth of someone special, of a soul which is unique… Undoubtedly, the birth of a child like that requires a deep process and preparation that is physical, emotional, and spiritual. That is the process the nation's matriarchs had to undergo. The prayer and deep connection with G-d were part of the process that made it possible for them to give birth to such great people.

Seeing it this way, we can learn to appreciate the path to attaining our goals, seeing it as part of the fabric of life and not just as a means to reaching a destination. By doing so, we will be able to internalize that the more significant the goal is that we are striving to reach, the longer and more complex the process is that we have to go through in order to reach it.

The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.

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from: Rabbi Chanan Morrison <chanan@ravkooktorah.org>
date: Nov 3, 2021, 11:34 AM
subject: Toldot: Harnessing the Power of Esau

Rav Kook Torah

Toldot: Harnessing the Power of Esau

Chanan Morrison

We know little about the birth of most Biblical personalities. Yet, the Torah describes in detail the birth of Jacob and Esau and their respective naming.

"The first one came out reddish, hairy all over like a fur coat. They named him Esau. His brother then came out, his hand grasping Esau's heel. He named him Jacob." (Gen. 25:25-26)

The name Esau means "made" or "completed." From day one, Esau was full of strength and energy. The name Jacob (Ya'akov) refers to the fact that he was holding on to Esau's heel (ekev). Later on, Jacob is named a second time; here too, his name refers to his relationship with his brother Esau. The night before meeting up with Esau, he struggles with a mysterious stranger. This stranger — according to some, Esau's guardian angel — informs him:

"Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel. You have struggled with angels and men, and you have prevailed" (Gen. 32:29).

What is the inner meaning of Jacob's names? What is the significance of his grasping on to Esau's heel? Why does he have two names?

Restraint versus Control

Just as there are both positive and negative forces in the world, so too, every person is a composite of positive and negative traits. We need these negative forces, however; without their power and vitality, many goals and aspirations would lack the energy necessary to be realized.

Esau represents the raw, base forces in the world. His reddish complexion indicated the violent and brutal nature of his personality. Jacob did not prevent Esau from coming into the world; after all, the world needs Esau and his raw power. Rather, Jacob held on to Esau's heel, holding him back. The name Jacob refers to this aspect of restraint, reining in the fierce forces.

Ultimately, however, our goal is not to simply hold back these negative forces. We aspire to gain control over them and utilize them, like a hydroelectric dam that harnesses the vast energy of a raging waterfall for the production of electricity. For example, the Talmud tells us that a person with blood-thirsty tendencies should become a shochet (ritual slaughterer) or a mohel, thus sublimating his violent nature for noble purposes. This higher aspiration is represented by Jacob's second name, Israel, which comes from the root-word sar, meaning "to rule."

The name Jacob is appropriate when the Jews are in the Diaspora. There, they serve as a moral conscience to partially restrict the wild and violent forces in the world. But when redeemed and living in their own land, the Jewish people are able to attain the higher level of Israel. Then they have the opportunity to demonstrate how a nation may utilize its material capabilities for constructive and ethical goals.

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 58-59. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, p. 68)

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subject: **Peninim on the Torah**
by **Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum**

Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Toldos

פרשת תולדות תשפ"ב

אברהם הוליד את יצחק

Avraham begot Yitzchak. (25:19)

The Torah underscores that Avraham and Yitzchak were father and son. One would think this is a confirmed verity and does not require the Torah's reinforcement. Apparently, as *Midrash Tanchuma* (quoted by *Rashi*) posits, the *leitzanei ha'dor*, cynics of the generation, intimated that Sarah *Imeinu* actually had become pregnant during her short captivity in the home of Avimelech, so that Avraham *Avinu* had not fathered Yitzchak, but actually, Avimelech had fathered him. Therefore, Hashem made Yitzchak's features so undeniably similar to Avraham's that no one could doubt Avraham's status. Two questions glare at us: Why were these scoffers referred to as *leitzanim*, cynics? They were out-and-out *reshaim*, wicked! Second, what is the meaning of the appellation *leitzanei ha'dor*, cynics of the generation? If they were simply *leitzanim* who degraded Avraham, it would be sufficiently evil. Why must they be, so to speak, the cynics of the "generation"?

Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, derives from the first question that a cynic is worse than one who is wicked, because one is able to maintain an intelligent dialogue with a wicked person and even, perhaps, transform him by inspiring him. The wicked person listens. The cynic is much worse. He degrades everyone, makes a joke of everything. As *Rav* Moshe explains, the *leitz* is not *machshiv*, does not consider, anyone to be worthy of himself. It is impossible to achieve anything in a conversation with someone whose condescending attitude is the product of a jaundiced view of life. The cynic thinks that he is smart, but, by his very actions, shows otherwise. He lives a life of self-imposed blindness, negativity, with a driving desire to pull everyone else down into his abyss of acrimony.

With regard to the second question, why they were called *leitzanei ha'dor*: I think their goal was not simply to debase Avraham, but everything for which he stood and represented. *Chazal* speak about ten generations from Adam to Noach, followed by ten generations from Noach to Avraham. Our Patriarch was on the verge of altering the downward trajectory of the previous twenty generations. These cynics sought to impede his ability to do so. They sought to employ their cynicism to maintain the downward trend of the generation. Avraham's calling out in the Name of Hashem, reaching out to the world to proclaim His Glory, interfered with their nefarious success.

ויאמר עשו אל יעקב הלעיטני נא מן האדם האדום הזה... על כן קרא שמו אדום

Eisav said to Yaakov, "Pour into me, now, some of the very red stuff… (He therefore called his name Edom)." (25:30)

Avraham *Avinu* fathered Yishmael about whom we read in the previous *parsha*. The other symbol of evil born from a Patriarch was Eisav *ha'rasha*, Yaakov *Avinu's* twin. The Torah makes a point to enumerate the *alufim*, heads of the tribes, of both Yishmael and Eisav, more so than other pagan nations. This is because these two individuals/nations represent the root source of the evil of all the other pagan nations. ***Horav Moshe Shapiro, zl* (*Mimaamakim*),** explains that Yishmael and Eisav represent the two primary categories of the seventy nations of the world, with each individual nation drawing its source of character and identity from one of these two. Thirty-five nations attribute their essence to Eisav and identify with his base character traits. Likewise, the thirty-five remaining nations receive their cultural and societal character and DNA from Yishmael.

Chazal (*Tanchuma V'Zos HaBrachah*) teach that prior to giving the Torah to *Klal Yisrael*, Hashem turned to all the nations of the world and offered it to each one of them. The *Midrash*, however, only delineates the responses of two nations: Yishmael and Eisav. The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that this is not a contradiction, since Eisav and Yishmael represent the nations of the world. When these two nations demurred accepting the Torah, each of them gave a reason which is consistent with the very root of his essential character. When Eisav's descendants were asked if they would accept the Torah, their response was: *retzichah*, murder, is part of our lives. Eisav was the *rotzeach* who murdered Nimrod on the day that his grandfather, Avraham *Avinu*, left this world. The Torah fared no better with *Bnei Yishmael*, who asserted that a Torah that prohibited stealing was not acceptable to their culture. Yishmael was the *pere adam* for whom no one's possessions prevented him from fulfilling his desire. If he wanted it – he took it.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* deduces that these two nations represent the sources of evil that draw their power from the poison of the *nachash*, primordial serpent. The sin of Adam *HaRishon* was founded in *taavah*, desire, and the sin of Kayin was *retzichah*, murder. *Horav Tzadok HaKohen, zl* (*Kedushas HaShabbos* 25; Pre *Tzaddik*, 4:68), writes that the *klipah* (outer covering, husk, which conceals the G-dly light within all creation on the unholy side of the universe) of Eisav is *kaas*, anger, and *kinaah*, envy (which lead to murder), and the *klipah* of Yishmael is *taavah*, unbridled desire.

To take this further, we quote from the commentary of *Rabbeinu Bachya* to the *Parsha* (Ibid. 25:30) in which he explains the significance of the color red with regard to Eisav's intrinsic character. Eisav's repeating the word *edom* (*ha'odom ha'odom ha'zeh*) refers to the *mazalos*, discipline of astrology, in which the planet Mars appears

red, and, as such, is the symbol of war and bloodshed. *Rabbeinu Bachya* contends that scientists claim that red fruit derives some of its power from the red planet. This, likewise, applies to red gemstones, such as the ruby. In other words, the planet Mars extends its influence over some of all three categories of phenomena in our world: living creatures, vegetation, and inert substances. This planet (its horoscope) was especially germane to Eisav, which was why Yitzchak blessed him with a power that he already possessed – the power of the sword. Thus, when Eisav asked for the red lentils, it was because the color was endemic to his character, more so than any other color. He derived strength from it. A bowl of red lentils would renew his flagging spirits more quickly and effectively than anything else. Eisav's inclination to shed blood was derived from his having been born under that horoscope. [Yaakov *Avinu* was also born under that same zodiac sign. He employed the fire and passion toward serving Hashem with all his heart and soul.]

We now understand that the *kochos ha'ra*, evil powers, that exist within the seventy nations are outgrowths of the two *roshei ha'goyim*, heads of the nations: Yishmael, representing *taavah*; and Eisav, exemplifying *kaas*, the two *middos*, character traits, which essentially are the root of all evil which man perpetrates.

Eisav and Yishmael refused to accept the Torah, because it would infringe on their way of life. *Klal Yisrael* accepted the Torah with two words: *Naaseh v'nishma*, "We will do and we will listen." The *Gaon, zl, m'Vilna* (*Aderes Eliyahu*, commentary to the beginning of *V'Zos HaBrachah*) posits that *Naaseh* is the panacea to the evil of Eisav (*asiyah*, action = Eisav) and *nishma* is the remedy to Yishmael (*shmiyah*, hearing = Yishmael). We have remedied the evil created by Eisav's actions and Yishmael's listening to his heart's desires.

Two primary antagonists have confronted the Jewish People throughout our tumultuous history: one is called *oyeiv*; the other is referred to as *sonei*. These two terms describe an enemy, an adversary. *Sonei* alludes to Eisav and his minions; *oyeiv* is a reference to Yishmael and his descendants. *V'nasan Hashem Elokecha eis kol ha'alos ha'eileh al o'yivecha v'al son'echa*; "Hashem, your G-d, will place all these imprecations upon your enemies and those who hate you" (*Devarim* 30:7). *Rabbeinu Bachya* explains: *o'yivecha* – Yishmael; *so'necha* – Eisav. What is the difference between these two terms – especially in light of the tainted character traits manifested by each individual adversary?

Rav Shapiro cites *Rashi* (commentary to *Bamidbar* 10:35), *V'yafutzu o'yivecha v'yanusu so'necha*, "And let your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate you flee." *Rashi* defines *o'yivecha* to be those who are gathered together ready/planning to attack, but have not yet done so, and he interprets *so'necha* to be those who are already in pursuit of *Klal Yisrael*. This may be explained further, with *o'yeiv* being an adversary who has a reason for his hatred. He wants something. With regard to Yishmael, this would be land. Conversely, the *sonei*, Eisav, represents implacable, irrational hatred for no reason. This makes sense, especially given the *Talmudic* dictum, *Eisav sonei l'Yaakov*, "Eisav hates Yaakov." This is an absolute – no reason – just plain unvarnished hatred. In light of the previous explanation rendered by *Rabbeinu Bachya*, that Eisav derives his power source and character from the "redness" associated with his zodiac star, hatred is part of his intrinsic character. We now have two understandings of the motivational roots of anti-Semitism. Not all types of anti-Semitism are alike. Thus, they should not be bunched together and addressed in a similar manner. Nothing is what it seems.

הנה אנכי הולך למות ולמה זה לי בכרה

"Look, I am going to die, of what use to me is a birthright?" (25:32)

Eisav's negative position *vis-à-vis* the *bechorah*, birthright, is clear: He was not interested in it. His reason: "I am going to die, of what use to me is a birthright?" *Rashi* explains Eisav's rationale. He was likely to die as a result of performing the sacrificial service improperly. A deeper understanding of this may be that a life of relinquishment, or spiritual life as he knew it, was tantamount to death. Eisav viewed spirituality, with its various demands and strictures, as an imposition on his desired lifestyle. He was on earth to live – not die.

A sincere person understands that commitment to the spiritual/religious way of life may require inconvenience, hardship, danger and humiliation. One who is devoted to Hashem understands this. Eisav was not interested in accepting any difficulties. When Eisav learned that Avraham *Avinu* had died, he spurned reward and punishment. After all, if a saint such as Avraham had died, then what was the value of living a life of the spirit? He went on to deny *Techiyas HaMeisim*, Resurrection of the Dead, claiming that living a spiritual life in this world with the objective that when one dies he will live a better spiritual life in the world of the spirit meant no life at all! So, as so many like him, he said that he believed in nothing. He would live life on this world to its fullest, without constraint and without apology, come what may when he dies. He then rationally sold the *bechorah* for a pot of red bean soup, because at that moment the soup, which would satiate his hunger, had greater value than dreams of spirituality.

We have presented before us two perspectives on life: Yaakov views living on this world as an opportunity to gain entrance into *Olam Habba*, the World to Come, and, unless one lives his life on a spiritual plateau, he will succumb to the physical/material enticements of this world, which will cause him to diminish, even lose, his position in the World to Come. Eisav, on the other hand, felt that a life of the spirit was tantamount to death. Why die twice? He did not believe in the World-to-Come. If he had, he would have behaved differently in this world.

With this idea in mind, *Horav Aryeh Leib Heyman, zl*, explains the significance of *kevurah*, burial, in accordance with Yaakov *Avinu's hashkafah*, outlook, as opposed to Eisav's "could-care-less" attitude concerning burial. We find Avraham *Avinu's* overriding concern to bury Sarah *Imeinu* in the *Me'oras Ha'Machpeilah*. This cave would serve as the burial place for the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, as well as Adam and Chavah. It was the first parcel of land purchased in the Holy Land. Yaakov *Avinu* made Yosef swear that he would see to it that he (Yaakov) not be buried in Egypt. He, too, wanted to be interred in the Cave of *Machpeilah*. Yosef also saw to it that he, too, would be interred in *Eretz Yisrael*. This teaches us that the burial place of a *tzaddik*, righteous person, plays an important role in his spiritual *weltanschauung*. For Yaakov, *bechorah* and *kevurah*, birthright and burial, went hand-in-hand, since they are both connected with the world of the spirit. Following his passing from this world, one who merits to live spiritually on this world will merit a special place in the world of the spirit. It is, therefore, only proper that the body which "facilitated" such an admiral spiritual life receive an appropriate burial in preparation for its eventual resurrection.

Rav Heyman adds a caveat concerning the *yom ha'zikaron, yahrzeit*, anniversary of one's passing. Every day of the week has within it a reflection and remembrance of the original days of Creation. The *moadim*, festivals, also represent the events that took place – events which catalyzed the festival and its spiritual properties. Indeed, every calendar date of personal and collective significance spurs memories, underscores significant lessons, and provides opportunities for spiritual advancement based upon the unique spiritual essence and character of that date. If so, what is the importance of memorializing the day of one's passing? What can be derived from the loss, other than to serve as an opportunity for surviving family members to honor and perpetuate the memory of a loved one? This is all for the living. What about the deceased – if no one is "living" to perpetuate his/her memory?

We now have a new perspective on how to view the *yom ha'petirah*, day of death, and its anniversary. The day of death underscores the continuation of the life one led on this world. Yaakov *Avinu* taught us that life should be lived with constraints, restrictions, discipline and commitment to a higher, loftier ideal. He imbued his physical existence with spirituality. Thus, death was for him a continuation of "life," a reward for a life well-lived. For Yaakov, and his descendants who follow in his perspective, the day of death is also the birthdate of the *neshamah's* homecoming! Death is the beginning of complete spiritual life. Eisav spurned all of this. He would rather have had a bowl of red lentils than have taken a "chance" on executing the birthright. To each his own.

Spirituality gives one's being a purpose. Sadly, some would rather wallow in self-gratification and self-preservation, but then we would be no better than animals. Intellect might elevate us cognitively over the animal world, but, if we defer to our base instincts and desires, we remain far from elevated. One who achieves spirituality, who rises above the physical/material "self"-dominated world, thus becoming G-dly in nature, truly achieves the purpose of creation. *Va'yipach b'apav nishmas ruach chaim,* "And He blew into his nostrils a soul of living spirit" (*Bereishis* 2:7) describes not only the creation of man, but, I think, his Divine purpose: to be and act like a soul derived from the very breath of Hashem; to be G-dly in nature; to be a living spirit distinct from the nature of animals.

What is the litmus test for defining spirituality – or a spiritual person? A human being's response to pain and suffering demonstrates his true mettle: Is he enveloped in self-gratification, or does he live on a higher plane, with loftier objectives? While some may adapt to and accept their suffering, it does not necessarily mean that they have achieved stability. They just happen to be stoic, strong and resolute. A spiritual person rejoices in the knowledge that he fulfills Hashem's will. Thus, if Hashem's will is that he should suffer, his suffering becomes his service to Hashem, which catalyzes rejoicing. A person who, despite being plagued with privation and adversity, is able to maintain resilience and serve Hashem joyously – is a spiritual person.

We conjure up in our minds an image of the spiritual person as someone who personifies holiness, studies Torah with its esoteric commentaries all the time; prays for hours, and subsists on practically no material sustenance. While this may be true, spirituality is not exclusively the domain of the outwardly pious and saintly. Some spiritual people are simple Jews whose wholesomeness and innocence have elevated them to a *tzaddik*, righteous, level of observance. Their unquestioning attitude reflects a faith in Hashem that is unequivocal and unperturbed.

Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski, zl, writes about Reuven, a member of his father's *kehillah*, congregation, in Milwaukie, Wisconsin. Reuven was a spiritual man; he was never seen in a bad mood, always presenting himself as serene and happy. *Shabbos* morning Reuven would come to *shul* two hours before *Shacharis* to recite *Tehillim* in

his sweet melodious voice. He was not a learned man, although he attended all the *shiurim*, classes, given by the *Rebbe*. He had been orphaned as a child, and, as a result, he had never received a proper, formal Jewish education. He knew how to read and was versed in the popular Hebrew and Yiddish aphorisms.

Reuven had emigrated to America in the early 1900's. In order to provide for what had then been his large family, he sold rags from a pushcart. I mention his family because it was the source of his grief. In his home, Reuven had proudly displayed a family picture: Reuven, his wife, and eight sons and daughters. All but two children had predeceased him. Reuven was totally blind in one eye and wore a thick lens over his other eye. He told people that he had become blind as a result of the incessant weeping, the profuse tears that he shed over the deaths of his young wife and six children. He no longer cried, but the pain and suffering were still present. Nonetheless, his suffering did not interfere with his joy in serving Hashem.

For a person whose life is governed by self-gratification – "it's all about me," Reuven's life was far from gratifying. He had every reason to be depressed. He did not, however, measure life on the barometer of physicality. He was not a card-carrying member of the "me" generation. It was all about "Him." He lived a life of purpose, a life of spirituality, a life of devotion to Hashem. Reuven was not bitter, although he had suffered tremendously. He had his *Tehillim*; he had his *shiurim*; he had Hashem. He was a spiritual man.

לזכות ולרפואה בעד יעקב בן פריידא

prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

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subject: **Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein**

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog
Weekly Parsha TOLDOT 5782

This week's Torah reading begins with the recounting of the generations of Abraham and Isaac. It is titled "Toldot," which literally means the children, as it relates to genealogy, and generations. The Torah reading of a few weeks ago also recounted for us the genealogy and generations of Noah and his sons. But that portion of the Torah was titled "Noach" and not "Toldot." The opening verse in both instances is practically identical, but the names of the Parshiyot are different. Is there any reason why the previous Torah reading should be called based on the name of person involved, and our Torah reading this week should be called based on the generations and genealogy being described? The Torah reading of this week should have been titled Yitzchak, like the Torah reading of Noach.

Although this is hardly the most pertinent observation regarding this week's Torah reading, it has bothered me for several years, and I have found relatively few explanations from the great commentators, who usually have many observations in answer to obvious questions such as this in our eternal Torah. I gave the matter some concentrated thought this past week, and as is usual when one concentrates upon a Torah subject, a glimmer of understanding concerning this matter came to me. It is this idea that I wish to share with you in this week's article regarding the weekly Torah reading.

There is an inherent difference between the generations and genealogy of Noach and that of Yitzchak. Both are survivors of great events of danger and trauma. It would be impossible to survive seeing the entire world destroyed, as in the case of Noach, or being sacrificed willingly by one's own father, as was the case with Yitzchak, without these events having a lasting impact upon the survivors who witnessed and experienced them. But it is the reaction itself that differentiates between these two righteous people.

Noach, as a survivor, attempts to wipe out the memory of what happened from his conscious mind and behavior. That is why he plants a vineyard, produces wine (to possibly,) becomes drunk, and is shamed and violated by his own progeny. It is understandable that he would want to forget what happened and what he witnessed, and not burden future generations with the memories of the trauma that remains buried within his subconscious. The key to further survival is to forget the past and not transmit it to the later generation. Therefore, the Torah reading involving his life is called only by his name, since there is no intention to transmit to future generations what transpired and why it occurred. In addition, since Noah's shame came specifically through his children and grandchildren, his "toldot," it would have been improper to call the Parsha by their name, calling attention to Noah's trauma.

However, in the case of Yitzchak, far from attempting to forget his being bound on the altar by his father, he desires to transmits that memory and trauma to his descendants, the Jewish people, until this very day. We revere the experience of our father Yitzchak, and his willingness to sacrifice himself for the sake of the God of Israel. This experience has become a hereditary hallmark of Jewish life, and we remember it as a symbol of continuity of generations, and not just as the experience of one individual, no matter how great that individual may have been.

Shabbat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

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A Layman's Guide to Marriage
Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1:
"A friend's son in Yeshiva in Israel got engaged to a local girl, and my friends were told that there will be a tena'im. I thought only chassidishe families do this."

Question #2:
"I was told that I should not include quotations from pesukim on my daughter's wedding invitation. Yet, I see that 'everyone' does! Could you please explain the halacha?"

Question #3:
"I wish someone could walk me through all the halachic steps that we need in planning our daughter's wedding. I am afraid I'll forget to take care of something."

From the engagement to the wedding

Mazel tov!! Mazel tov!! Your daughter just became engaged to an amazing yeshivah bachur from a wonderful family. You are in seventh heaven!

Virtually everyone plans some type of formal celebration when his or her child becomes engaged. Some call it a "lechayim," others a "vort," still others a "tena'im," and in Eretz Yisroel today it is usually called an "erusin." Since these differences are not inherently halachic, I am going to note only one point about this part of the simcha: does one sign a tena'im shortly after announcing the engagement? In chassidishe circles, and, in Eretz Yisrael, even among "Israeli Litvishe" families, it is accepted that one finalizes the engagement by signing tena'im, which is an agreement between the two sets of parents as to what each will provide to their child before the wedding and to conduct the wedding before a certain agreed-upon date. The climax of the engagement celebration is when this document is signed, parts of it are read aloud, and the two mothers break a plate together. The halachic authorities discuss why we break a plate at a tena'im and a glass at the chupah (see Pri Megadim, Mishbetzos Zahav 560: 4; Keser Rosh, #114).

In "American," non-chassidishe circles, these arrangements are more informal, and the two parties usually do not sign any formal tena'im. Some sign a type of a tena'im at the wedding, prior to the chupah.

Invitations

There are, actually, some halachos germane to invitations. One may not quote any pesukim in invitations and, according to most authorities, the lettering of an invitation should not use kesav ashuris, the Hebrew writing used for Sifrei Torah, Tefillin and Mezuzos (Shu"t Rav Pe'alim, Yoreh Deah 4:32). This is because kesav ashuris has sanctity and should not be used for mundane matters (Shu"t Radbaz 1:45; Rema, Yoreh Deah 284:2; Pischei Teshuvah, Yoreh Deah 283:3). We should note that the Kesav Sofer writes that his father, the Chasam Sofer, permitted using kesav ashuris in wedding invitations and did so himself, contending that, since making a wedding is a mitzvah, the invitation to the seudas mitzvah is not considered a mundane use. Nevertheless, the Kesav Sofer concludes that it is better not to use kesav ashuris for invitations (Shu"t Kesav Sofer, Even Ha'ezer #22 at end).

Shomrim

Why do the choson and kallah require shomrim? From what time do the choson and kallah require shomrim?

The Gemara says that three people require a shomer: an ill person, a choson and a kallah Berachos 54b). Although many people have the custom of providing shomrim from the ufruf Shabbos, technically the choson and kallah require shomrim only from the wedding through the week of sheva berachos. The prevalent practice is that this includes only when they leave their house. This means that during sheva berachos week, the choson may attend minyan only if someone escorts him from his house, although some hold that a choson can go to shul without a shomer (told to me in the name of Rav Moshe Feinstein).

It is common practice to provide them with shomrim on the day of the wedding also.

Things to bring to the wedding

The following can function as a useful checklist of items that should be brought to the wedding:

(1) Kesubah

From personal experience, I suggest bringing not only the kesubah one intends to use, but also several blank extra forms.

(2) Kittel

If the choson will be wearing a kittel under the chupah, remember to bring it.

(3) Candles and matches

Four candles for the shushbinin, who are the two couples that will escort the choson and kallah, and matches with which to light the candles. The matches are also useful in the creation of ashes that will be placed on the choson's forehead before he walks to the chupah.

(4) Wine

Many deliberately bring a bottle of white wine, a position that I advocate, to avoid concerns of red wine staining a white wedding dress. (I am aware of some poskim who prefer that one use red wine at a chupah. However, I prefer white wine, since it spares the worry of a stained gown.)

(5) Berachos

Cards, or something similar, with all the berachos for the various honorees.

(6) Ring

The wedding ring. This should be a ring without a precious stone (Even Ha'ezer 31:2). Some rabbonim prefer that it have no design at all. It is important that the ring be the property of the choson. In other words, the choson must either purchase it with his own money, or whoever purchased it must give it to the choson as a gift and the choson must pick it up to acquire it. So, if the bride wants to use her late great-grandmother's wedding ring, they should make sure that the current, rightful owner of that ring gives it to the choson, with no strings attached, prior to the wedding.

(7) Glass

A well-wrapped glass that will be broken. (Note that the Rema [Even Ha'ezer 65:3] states that the choson should break the glass that was used to hold the wine of the wedding beracha. Although I have seen this actually practiced, it is definitely not the common, contemporary custom.)

(8) Key

Make sure that someone has the key to the yichud room!

Wow!! We have actually gotten all the way to the wedding! What happens next?

The choson tish

If the tena'im were not performed earlier, some people make a tena'im now. If the tena'im will take place at the wedding, then one should also have a plate that one intends to break.

The kesubah is filled out and signed at the choson tish. (In Eretz Yisrael, many follow the practice of not signing the kesubah until the choson and kallah are under the chupah.)

At this point, we will introduce the mesader kiddushin, the talmid chacham who is honored with making certain that the halachic aspects of the wedding are performed correctly.

Kabalas kinyan

Following the instructions of the mesader kiddushin, the choson lifts up a pen, handkerchief, or other item as a means of kinyan in the presence of two witnesses. By doing this, he assumes the financial responsibilities of a husband and future father.

Should we use the same witnesses?

There are two prevalent practices regarding the witnesses, usually dependent on the preference of the mesader kiddushin. The more common American practice is that each part of the ceremony -- the signing of the kesubah, the kiddushin itself, and the yichud -- are witnessed by different sets of witnesses, in order to honor more people. In Eretz Yisrael, the common practice is to have one set of witnesses for all the stages. The Tashbeitz (2:7) explains that once one honored someone with performing a mitzvah, we encourage that he perform the rest of the mitzvah (hamaschil bemitzvah omrim lo gemor). Other reasons for this custom are provided by the Eizer Mikodesh (end of Even Ha'ezer 42) and Rav Shelomoh Zalman Auerbach.

Signing of kesubah

After the choson makes the kabbalas kinyan, the witnesses carefully read through the kesubah and then sign it (Rema, Even Ha'ezer 66:1 and Choshen Mishpat 45:2). If they are attesting to something by signing, they must know what it is.

Choson signing kesubah

Many have the practice that the choson also signs the kesubah, beneath the witnesses' signatures. This practice dates back to the times of the rishonim and demonstrates that the choson approves what the witnesses are signing (Rashba, Bava Basra 175; Eizer Mikodesh 66:1 s.v. hayah ta'us).

Bedeken

The choson, escorted by the two fathers and accompanied by the celebrants, now goes to badek the kallah, by pulling the veil over her head. At this point, the kallah's father and perhaps others bless her. The celebrants then proceed to the chupah.

The Chupah

The chupah itself should, ideally, be open on all four sides (Eizer MiKodesh). This is reminiscent of the tent of Avraham Avinu and Sarah Imeinu, whose tent was accessible from all four directions of the globe, so as not to inconvenience any potential guests. We are conveying blessing upon the bride and groom that the house they build together be as filled with chesed as the house of Avraham and Sarah was.

Immediately prior to walking to the chupah, the mesader kiddushin places some ashes above the choson's forehead. The ashes are placed where the choson wears his tefillin, and are immediately removed, and serve to remind the choson that even at this moment of tremendous joy, he should remember that our Beis Hamikdash lies in ruins. This, literally, fulfills the verse in Yeshayah (61:3), To place on the mourners of Zion and to give them splendor instead of ashes, where the Navi promises that in the future we will replace the ashes that currently remind us of the churban (Even Ha'ezer 65:3).

Chupah under the Stars

The prevalent Ashkenazic practice is that the chupah is conducted outdoors or under an open skylight, in order to provide a beracha for the marrying couple that their descendants be as numerous as the stars (Rema, Even Ha'ezer 61:1). However, if a couple prefers to hold their chupah under a roof, the mesader kiddushin should still perform the wedding ceremony for them, since there is no violation to perform the chupah this way (Shu"t Igros Moshe, Even Ha'ezer 1:93).

Jewelry at the Chupah

There is a common custom that the kallah removes all her jewelry before she goes to the chupah. Some explain that this custom is based on the Mishnah that after the churban of the Beis Hamikdash, Chazal decreed that the choson and kallah should no longer wear the crowns that they were accustomed to wearing before that time (Sotah 49a). Although removing jewelry may be associated with this idea, most authorities contend that this is only a custom borrowed from this idea, but is not required. If it were required, then wearing jewelry would be prohibited from the night before the wedding, until the end of sheva berachos (see Mishnah Berurah 560:17).

Accepted practice is to prohibit only silver, gold or jewelry of precious stones that are worn on the kallah's head, and only at the chupah (Mishnah Berurah 560:17, quoting Pri Megadim). However, some authorities prohibit a kallah from wearing any silver or gold jewelry the entire sheva berachos week (Yam shel Shelomoh, Gittin 1:19).

Wearing a Kittel

The common practice among Eastern European Jews is that the choson wears a kittel at the chupah. The reason for wearing the kittel is tied closely to the wedding day as his personal day of atonement, and is to encourage the choson to do teshuvah on this day.

When does he put on the kittel? There are two common practices: some have the choson wear the kittel folded up under his suit jacket, whereas others have the kittel placed on top of his suit as soon as he stands under the chupah, and remove the kittel either immediately after the chupah or in the cheder yichud.

The accepted practice is that the shushbin places the kittel on the choson. His "dressing" the choson reinforces the idea that the wedding day is a day of teshuvah and atonement – it should remind the choson, when he puts on the kittel for the first time, of the day when he will be wearing his kittel for the last time (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 147:4).

Who walks them down?

The choson and kallah are escorted by two couples, called the shushbinin, who are usually their parents. There was an old custom that the shushbinin should both be couples who are married in their first marriage (cited by Eizer Mikodesh 68:2, who says that he is uncertain of the origin of this custom). Some have a custom that a woman who is visibly pregnant should not serve as a shushbin (Shearim Hametzuyanim Bahalacha 147:12). Since these practices are custom and not halacha, when following them may create a dispute, shalom is more important.

There are two common practices as to who, specifically, escorts the choson and who escorts the kallah. Some have the custom that the choson is escorted by the two male shushbinin, and the kallah by the two female shushbinin, whereas others have each escorted by a couple. To decide what to do, I quote a well-known practice of Rav Yaakov Kamenetski, who at three of his children's marriages had the shushbinin walk as couples and at the other three had the fathers escorting the choson and the mothers escorting the kallah. His rule: I did whatever the mechutan preferred.

Kallah on the Right

Based on a verse in Tehillim (45:10) that teaches that the place of honor for a princess is to be stationed on the right, the kallah stands to the right and the choson to the left.

Standing at the Chupah

In America, the guests usually sit throughout the chupah ceremony, whereas, in Eretz Yisrael, the standard practice is that everyone stands throughout the chupah. The latter

practice, or, more specifically, that everyone stands while the sheva berachos are recited, is quoted in the name of the Zohar (see Shu"t Ha'elef Lecha Shelomoh, Even Ha'ezer #115).

Erusin and Nesuin

There are two stages to a Jewish wedding. The first stage is called kiddushin or erusin (not to be confused with the Modern Hebrew word erusin, which means "engagement"), and is focused on the choson giving the wedding ring to the kallah. The second step is called nesuin. In Talmudic times, these two stages were conducted separately – often as much as a year apart. After kiddushin, the couple is married, but do not yet live together.

Today, the two stages are conducted as one long ceremony.

Is the Kallah's face covered?

The Rema (31:2) cites an old Ashkenazic custom that the kallah's face is covered at her chupah. The Rema does not say how thick the veil is, although we find a dispute among later authorities about this. Some authorities object strongly to the kallah wearing a veil that is so thick that the witnesses cannot identify her (Mabit, quoted by Pischei Teshuvah 31:5). Others rule that it is not problematic for the veil to be this thick, and, therefore, in many places the custom is that the kallah wears a very thick veil.

The mesader kiddushin recites the beracha of borei pri hagafen on behalf of the choson and the kallah. They should have in mind to be included in his beracha and not to interrupt before they drink the wine (see Afikei Yam 2:2). According to some opinions Shu"t Noda Beyehuda, Even Ha'ezer #1), the choson should also have in mind to be included in the birchas erusin¸ but most contend that he is not required to recite this beracha (see Shu"t Har Tzvi, Orach Chayim #44, who quotes this from the Tevuos Shor, Rabbi Akiva Eiger, and several other authorities). The choson and kallah then sip from the cup. The most common practice is that the mesader kiddushin gives the choson to drink, and then hands the cup to the kallah's mother, who gives her to drink. The choson and kallah need to drink only a small sip of the wine (Be'er Heiteiv, Even Ha'ezer 34:6; Amudei Apiryon page 71).

Yichud Eidim

On behalf of the choson, the mesader kiddushin appoints the two witnesses, and then asks the witnesses, within earshot of the kallah, whether the ring is worth a perutah, which is worth only a few cents. The reason for this strange conversation is so that the kallah agrees to be married, even if the ring is worth so little (Rema, Even Ha'ezer 31:2).

According to many authorities, the witnesses must see the choson place the ring on the kallah's finger (Shu"t Harashba 1:780; Rema, Even Ha'ezer 42:4). Although most authorities rule that this is not essential, the accepted practice is to be certain that the witnesses see the actual placing of the ring on the kallah's finger (Pischei Teshuva, Even Ha'ezer 42:12).

Reading the kesubah

At this point, the kesubah is read to interrupt between the erusin and the nesuin, and then the sheva berachos are recited. Although some authorities question how one can divide the sheva berachos, the accepted practice is to divide them among six, and in some places seven, honorees (Shu"t Igros Moshe, Even Ha'ezer #94; cf. Har Tzvi).

Out of order

One should be careful to make sure that each person being honored knows which beracha he is supposed to recite. If the berachos are recited out of order, one should not repeat a beracha, but recite the skipped beracha and then proceed to recite the remaining berachos. Similarly, if the honoree began reciting the wrong beracha, including Hashem's Name, he should complete the beracha he has begun, after which the remaining berachos are recited. If someone began reciting either the beracha of Sos tasis or Samayach tesamach, which do not begin with Hashem's Name, out of order, he should stop and the correct beracha should be recited (Amudei Apiryon page 76).

Putting his foot down

After the sheva berachos are completed, the choson smashes a glass (Rema, Even Ha'ezer 65:3). (According to an alternative practice, the choson smashes the glass earlier in the ceremony, immediately after the kiddushin are completed.) Many have the custom that prior to breaking the glass, the choson or the audience sings the pasuk, "im eshkacheich Yerushalayim… ." This custom has sources in rishonim (Sefer Hachassidim #392).

The choson and kallah are then escorted with music and dancing to the yichud room. Two witnesses, called the eidei yichud, make sure that there is no one else in the yichud room, and then remain posted outside for the amount of time that the mesader kiddushin instructs them.

Conclusion

Having studied the basic customs of our weddings, let us examine an observation of the Noda Biyehudah germane to the priorities people use for checking out shidduchin: "I am astonished that most people have no concern about marrying their daughter to a halachic ignoramus, notwithstanding the words of Chazal about the importance of marrying her to a Talmudic scholar… yet they are concerned about having her marry someone whose name is the same as her father's, which has no Talmudic basis or source" (Shu"t Noda Biyehudah, Even Ha'ezer 2:79). Thus, we see what factors are significant in a marriage: The chosson should be a Torah scholar, and his bride, a ye'rei'ah Shamayim.

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https://oukosher.org/halacha-yomis/

Halacha Yomis

What is mayim achronim (washing hands at the end of the meal) and is it obligatory?

At the conclusion of a bread meal, there is a mitzvah to wash one's fingers before Birkas Hamazon. This mitzvah is called mayim achronim (the final waters, as opposed to netilas yadayim when we wash our hands at the beginning of the meal). We find two separate reasons for this mitzvah in different sections of the Talmud. In Chulin (105b) we learn that mayim achronim was instituted to wash off melech Sedomis (salt from Sedom) which may have adhered to the fingers during the meal. Melech Sedomis is a very strong variety of salt, and if a person would touch his eyes after the meal with soiled fingers, melech Sedomis could possibly cause blindness. According to this reason, we wash mayim achronim as a matter of safety. However, the Gemara Berachos (53b) finds an allusion for mayim achronim in the verse "V'hiyisem Kedoshim", and you shall be holy (Vayikra 11:46). Mayim achronim promotes holiness because we cannot recite berachos when our hands are not clean. Since it is common for hands to be soiled at the end of a meal, Chazal instituted a uniform requirement to wash our hands before we bentch.

Initially, Shulchan Aruch (181:1) writes that mayim achronim is obligatory. However, at the end of the same chapter, Shulchan Aruch (181:10) states that some do not observe the custom of mayim achronim. The opinion of Tosfos is that mayim achronim is no longer required because Sedomis salt is not common, and most people are not finicky about the cleanliness of their hands. Still, the Mishnah Berurah cites many poskim who maintain that mayim achronim is mandatory today as well. In addition, there are Kabbalistic reasons to fulfill this mitzvah. The Aruch Hashulchan (181:5) strongly advocates to wash mayim achronim, first because many poskim disagree with Tosofos and maintain that V'hiyisem Kedoshim is still relevant. Furthermore, the position of Tosofos that we no longer have Sedomis salt is debatable, as it may be that sea salt has traces of such potent salt mixed in. In fact, it may be that Tosofos recognized this possibility as well, and only sought to be milamed zechus (to offer justification) for those people who did not wash mayim achronim.

It thus appears that while there is some rationalization to be lenient, it is clearly preferable to wash mayim achronim.

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PARSHAT TOLDOT - ' the chosen son'

Are Yitzchak are Rivka playing 'favorites'? Indeed, a cursory reading of Parshat Toldot certainly leaves that impression.

Furthermore, why does Yitzchak choose to bless only **one** of his children? Would it have been so terrible had he planned to bless both Esav and Yaakov?

In the following shiur, we search for the deeper meaning of these events by considering the distinction between what we will refer to as 'bechira' and 'beracha'.

INTRODUCTION

Our shiurim thus far on Sefer Breishit have focused on its theme of "bechira" - i.e. God's designation of Avraham and his offspring to become His special nation. We made special note of the numerous times that God had promised Avraham that his offspring ('zera') would become a great nation in a special land ('aretz'). Even though each promise added a unique dimension to Avraham's destiny, they all shared an element of the same phrase:

"le-ZAR'ACHA natati et ha-ARETZ ha-zot...
- to your OFFSPRING, I have given this LAND."
[See 12:7, 13:15, 15:18, 17:8]

However, despite these numerous blessings suggesting that this nation will emerge from **all** of Avraham's offspring, God later informs Avraham that specifically Sarah's son - Yitzchak - to the exclusion of all other offspring - has been chosen to fulfill this destiny:

"For it is [only] through Yitzchak that there shall be called for you ZARA [your offspring]." (21:12)

Parshat Toldot opens as God Himself confirms this blessing to Yitzchak, when He forbids him to leave the land during a famine:

"Reside in this land and I will bless you... for I will assign all this LAND to YOU and to YOUR OFFSPRING." (26:2-5)

What will happen when Yitzchak has children? Will only ONE of his children be chosen, as was the case with Avraham, or will ALL his offspring be chosen?

Considering that the reason for God's 'bechira' (selection) of Avraham was for his offspring to become a NATION (see 12:1-2), obviously this 'filtering' process of choosing only ONE son over the others could not continue forever. Should only one 'favorite son' be chosen in each generation, a nation could obviously never develop. Sooner or later, this 'filtering process' must end, and an entire family must be chosen.

Thanks to our 20/20 hindsight, we know that this process ends after THREE generations (Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov). However, the Avot themselves may have been unaware of when this 'bechira' process was to end.

Let's consider this possibility in regard to Yitzchak.

ALL IN THE FAMILY

A priori, Yitzchak has no reason to assume that only ONE son would be chosen and the other rejected. Unlike Yitzchak and Yishmael, who had DIFFERENT mothers, both Yaakov and Esav are born from the same mother. What more, they are twins! Therefore, it is only logical for Yitzchak to assume that BOTH Yaakov and Esav will join the 'chosen family'.

Furthermore, even if there is some divine reason to choose only one son, it should be GOD's choice and NOT Yitzchak's! After all, God alone had been involved in this BECHIRA process heretofore. He had chosen Avraham and He alone had chosen Yitzchak over Yishmael. Without a specific divine command, why would Yitzchak even consider making such a bold decision?

Thus, Yitzchak most likely believed that both Yaakov and Esav were included within the divine promise to Avraham's progeny. So why does Yitzchak intend to bless only ONE of them?

'BRACHA' OR 'BECHIRA'?

To answer this question, we must differentiate between TWO basic types of blessings found in Sefer Breishit. For the sake of convenience, we will refer to one as BECHIRA and the other as BRACHA. Let's explain:

BECHIRA*

We use the term BECHIRA (selection) to describe God's blessing of 'ZERA va-ARETZ' to the Avot, the privilege of fathering God's special nation. BECHIRA implies that only one son is chosen while the others are rejected. As we explained, this process began with God's designation of Avraham Avinu and continued with His choice of Yitzchak over Yishmael. It is not clear, however, when this bechira process will end.

'BRACHA'

We will use the name BRACHA to describe a father's blessing for the personal destiny (e.g. prosperity, power) of his sons. Noach, for example, bestows a BRACHA on each of his three sons (9:24-27). He does not choose one son over the others to become a special nation. Rather, he blesses (or curses) each son based on his individual potential.

The classic example of BRACHA (as opposed to BECHIRA) is Yaakov Avinu's blessings to his twelve sons prior to his death, in Parshat Vayechi (see 49:1-28). Clearly, Yaakov does not choose one or several of his children to become God's special nation. Rather, he bestows a blessing of personal destiny upon each son, according to his understanding of each son's individual character and potential (see 49:28).

Thus, according to these definitions - BRACHA is bestowed by a father, while BECHIRA is established by God.

YITZCHAK'S BRACHA TO ESAV

With this distinction in mind, we return to our opening question regarding the kind of blessing that Yitzchak intends to bestow upon Esav. Is it a blessing of BRACHA or BECHIRA?

Considering that Yitzchak has no apparent reason to choose only one son, we should expect that his intended blessing to Esav was one of BRACHA (and not BECHIRA).

To determine if this assumption is indeed correct, lets examine the content of the actual blessing that Yitzchak bestowed - intended for Esav but deceptively seized by Yaakov:

"May God give you of the dew of heaven
and the FAT of the land,
and an abundance of GRAIN and WINE.
Other nations shall SERVE you and bow down to you;
be MASTER over your brother,
and let your mother's sons bow down to you ..."
(27:28-29)

Note how this blessing focuses on prosperity and leadership, and hence would fall under our category of BRACHA. It cannot be BECHIRA, as it does NOT contain the phrase of 'ZERA va-ARETZ'. In fact, this blessing strongly resembles the blessings of prosperity and leadership which Yaakov himself later bestows upon Yehuda (see 49:8) and Yosef (see 49:25-26).

But if indeed if this is a blessing of BRACHA, why does Yitzchak (intend to) bestow this blessing only on Esav? Would it not have made sense had he blessed both sons?

THE RIGHT MAN FOR THE JOB

As we suggested above, Yitzchak expects that both his children will be chosen. Realizing that this nation (that will ultimately evolve from his two sons) will require leadership,

Yitzchak must appoint **one** of his sons to take family leadership. But which son should he choose for this responsiblity?

One could suggest that Yitzchak concluded that Esav - the "ish sadeh" [a man of the world (see 25:27)] - was the more suitable candidate for this job.

Considering that Yaakov & Esav are over sixty years old, note that Esav is married with children, has a job, and can take care of himself and others. Yaakov, on the other hand, is still single and 'living at home'. It is readily understandable, then, why Yitzchak chooses Esav to become the family provider and leader.

We can even presume that Yitzchak has a blessing in store for Yaakov as well - most probably one that involves spiritual leadership. Yaakov - the "ish tam yoshev ohalim," a man of the book (see 25:27) - can provide the family with spiritual guidance.

> [This 'theoretical blessing' to Yaakov resembles the ultimate responsibility of shevet Levi (see Devarim 33:10).] However, without FIRST establishing a nation (with the help of Esav), there would be no one around for Yaakov to guide.]

The fact that Yitzchak had called upon Esav to receive his blessing FIRST, does not rule out the possibility that he may have intended to bless Yaakov afterward. Note that in Parshat Vayechi, Yaakov FIRST blesses Yosef before proceeding to bless all twelve children.

So what went wrong? Why does Rivka intervene? Why must Yaakov 'steal' Esav's BRACHA? Or, to put it more bluntly, is Rivka simply standing up for her 'favorite son' or did she perceive the situation differently?

To answer this question, we must return to the beginning of the Parsha.

RIVKA KNOWS BEST

Apparently, Rivka knows something that Yitzchak doesn't. Recall that Rivka suffered from an unusually difficult pregnancy and seeks God for an explanation (see 25:22).

Note how God's answer to HER (and not to Yitzchak!) already alludes to the fact that the BECHIRA process has not yet ended:

> "And God answered HER saying: There are TWO NATIONS in your womb, and TWO SEPARATE PEOPLES shall issue from your body. One people shall be mightier than the other, and the older shall serve the YOUNGER." (25:23)

Rivka here learns that her twins are destined to become TWO NATIONS, and as such, only ONE - the younger one (see 25:23, "ve-rav ya'avod tza'ir") - can be chosen. Thus, Rivka knows that YAAKOV is destined to receive the BECHIRA, and not Esav. Yitzchak, however, is unaware of this prophecy. [Note 25:23: "va-yomer Hashem LAH" - to HER, and not to him!]

It is unclear why Rivka never informs Yitzchak of this prophecy. She may assume that Yitzchak also knows, and only later realizes that he doesn't (see Ramban 27:4). Alternatively, she may have thought that God specifically wants ONLY HER to know, and NOT Yitzchak. Whatever the reason may be, each parent has a different perception of their children's destiny as they grow up. Yitzchak ASSUMES that both Yaakov and Esav are chosen, while Rivka KNOWS that it will only be Yaakov.

RIVKA'S DILEMMA

After overhearing Yitzchak's intention to bless Esav (27:5), Rivka now faces a serious dilemma:

* Does Yitzchak plan to bless Esav with the BECHIRA (or that God should grant him the BECHIRA)? If so, she must act quickly, as the future of "Am Yisrael" rests on her shoulders.
* Does Yitzchak think that BOTH children are chosen? Is he giving a BRACHA of leadership to Esav? The result of this blessing could be disastrous!
* Can Rivka just tell Yitzchak that he is making a mistake? Is it too late? Will he listen? Would he be willing now, after so many years, to change his perception?

Rivka has limited time to act, yet feels responsible to the prophecy she had received and hence obligated to rectify the situation. In her eyes, this may have been the very reason why God had originally granted her this information. Unfortunately, however, Rivka must resort to trickery to ensure that Yaakov receives the blessing.

Now that we have explained Rivka's course of action, we must explain Yitzchak's, as the plot thickens.

YITZCHAK'S BLESSINGS

After Yitzchak grants Yaakov (whom he thought was Esav) a BRACHA of prosperity and leadership, the real Esav arrives and begs his father for another blessing (see 27:34,36). Yitzchak's initial response is that the special blessing intended for Esav (prosperity and power) had already been given to Yaakov (27:35,37). Hence, Esav cannot receive any other BRACHA, since the BRACHA of spirituality, originally intended for Yaakov, is unsuitable for Esav. However, after Esav pleads with him, Yitzchak grants Esav a different BRACHA of prosperity. In fact, in light of our explanation, this second blessing is quite understandable. Let's explain why.

Review this blessing of: "tal ha-shamayim u-shmanei ha-aretz" (27:38-39), noting how it also speaks of prosperity in a manner very similar to the first blessing. This makes sense, because 'prosperity' can be shared by both brothers. However, the second half of the original blessing - that of political leadership ("hevei gvir le-achicha - see 27:29) - can only be given to one son. Yitzchak therefore blesses Esav that - should Yaakov's leadership falter - he shall take his place (see 27:40).

At this point of the story, it appears that Yitzchak still understands that both sons will be chosen. When does he find out the 'truth' that the 'bechira' process is not over yet?

CLEARING THE AIR

Even though the Torah never reveals the details, it would be safe to assume that Rivka must have finally explained her actions to Yitzchak after the incident of the 'brachot'. Upon hearing the details of God's earlier prophecy to Rivka, Yitzchak finally realizes that only ONE son, Yaakov, is to be chosen. To his dismay, he must now accept the fact that the BECHIRA process must continue into yet another generation.

This explains the final blessing that Yitzchak grants Yaakov, before he embarks on his journey to Padan Aram (in search of a wife). Review this blessing, noting how it obviously relates directly to the blessing of BECHIRA:

> "May God grant the BLESSING OF AVRAHAM [i.e. BECHIRA] to you and your OFFSPRING, that you may inherit the LAND which Elokim has given to Avraham..." (28:4).

Note once again the key phrase - "zera va-aretz" - of the BECHIRA blessing! In contrast to the BRACHA of prosperity and power discussed earlier, this blessing involves the familiar concept of God's special NATION inheriting a special LAND. Clearly, Yitzchak now understands that the 'bechira' process is not over yet.

Note as well that Yitzchak does not actually grant this blessing to Yaakov, rather he blesses him that **God** should grant him the 'bechira' - "**ve-Kel Sha-kai** yevarech otcha..." (28:4). As we explained earlier in our shiur, the 'bechira' process is God's decision. Yitzchak is now 'rooting' for Yaakov that he receive the BECHIRA, but that decision must ultimately be confirmed by God - and that's exactly what takes place a few psukim later, at the beginning of Parshat Vayetze!

MA'ASEH AVOT, SIMAN LA-BANIM

Despite our 'technical' explanation for Yitzchak and Rivka's behavior in this Parsha, a more fundamental question remains: Why must the BECHIRA process be so complex? In other words, why is it that at the very inception of our national history, trickery must be employed for us to arrive to our divine destiny?

Although this is a very difficult question to answer, one could suggest that this entire episode may carry an important message concerning how the spiritual goals of our nation relate to the necessities of entering the physical world and prosperity and political leadership.

Indeed, to become a nation, there are times when the 'aggressive' qualities of an Esav type individual are needed. However, there is a popular notion that these physical responsibilities should be delegated to the 'ish sadeh', the son who is expert in the physical realm, but ONLY in that realm [the 'chiloni' son]. Similarly, the spiritual realm should be delegated to the Yaakov type individual, the delicate 'ish tam' who knows only how to study in the tents of Torah [the 'dati' son].

Yitzchak's original intention to bless Esav may reflect this notion, as Esav will be the provider, 'serve in the army', and enter the political realm; while Yaakov will dedicate his life immersed in the tents of Torah. Separating these responsibilities between two sons may reflect the notion that spirituality cannot be found in the physical world of establishing a nation.

To negate this notion, despite its simplicity and logic, the Torah presents it as Yitzchak's original plan. However, the other option (possibly Rivka's original plan), that Yaakov - the 'ish tam' - alone can manage both realms remains equally unacceptable.

At the time of these 'brachot', Yaakov himself is not yet ready to take on the responsibilities of the 'ish sadeh', but sooner or later it will become incumbent upon him to do so. To establish God's special nation, there are times when it is necessary for the 'ish tam' to take on the responsibilities of the 'ish sadeh'.

To solve this 'dialectic', it was necessary for Yaakov to first don the 'hands of Esav', i.e. to pretend to act like Esav, but not actually become an Esav. It remains significant that the primal character of Am Yisrael is that of Yaakov, the 'ish tam'.

[Note that later in his own life (upon his return to Eretz Yisrael), Yaakov must finally confront the 'angel of Esav', this time without trickery, to prove that he is indeed worthy of that leadership task.]

Even though many situations in our history will arise when we must don the 'hands of Esav' - i.e. when we must act as an 'ish sadeh' - our dominant trait must always remain that of an 'ish tam'. For when God provides Am Yisrael with prosperity and political leadership, it is towards the purpose that they serve mankind with personal example and spiritual guidance.

Throughout our history, even though we must periodically 'don the hands of Esav', our voice must always remain 'the voice of Yaakov' [see 27:22]!

shabbat shalom
menachem

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FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. See Ramban (on 27:4), noting how he would bascially disagree with the entire approach presented in the above shiur. From the very beginning, he understands that Yitzchak's intention is to bless Esav with the BECHIRA.

1. How does Ramban understand why Rivka doesn't tell Yitzchak about her nevua? How, if at all, does this affect his understanding of the entire parsha?
2. With which basic assumption of the above shiur does Ramban disagree?
3. Does Ramban (see 27:28) find any hint to "zera va-aretz" in Yitzchak's first bracha to Yaakov/Esav?
4. How does Rashi understand this sugya?
5. Try to relate this issue to the klal of MA'ASEH AVOT, SIMAN LA-BANIM. [Iy"H, this will be the topic of a future shiur.]
6. See also Radak on 27:4, noting how he explains that Yitzchak knew all along that Yaakov would receive the 'bechira'. Nonetheless, he still wanted to grant Esav a 'bracha'.

B. Towards the beginning of the Parsha, Esav sells his birthright to Yaakov and makes a striking statement:

"Hinei anochi holeich lamut, ve-lama zeh li bchora?"

Esav seems very practical. He sees no reason to have the 'bchora', as he lives only for the present with no dreams or goals for the future.

1. Relate this to the above shiur and the reason why Esav is rejected.

2. Could it be that this attitude, a lack of appreciation of his destiny and purpose, leads to his ultimate rejection?

3. Can this explain why Yaakov is interested in buying the birthright?

4. Does Yitzchak know about this incident? If so (or even if not), how may this affect the blessing that he later intended to give his children?

C. The blessing of BECHIRA to Yaakov in 28:3-5 contains several key phrases found in earlier blessings to Avraham Avinu. Try to find these parallels.

1. Are most of them from the parsha Brit Mila? (see Breishit 17:1-10).

If so, can you explain why? [What additional message did Avraham receive after Brit Mila?]

2. When did Hashem actually confirm this blessing? (See 35:9-13!)

PARSHAT TOLDOT - shiur #2

What mitzvot did the Avot keep? Rashi, commenting on a pasuk in this week's Parsha, claims that the Avot kept the entire Torah - even the Oral Law and later Rabbinic prohibitions. Most other commentators disagree.

In Part One, we discuss this pasuk by delving into a little 'parshanut appreciation'. In Part Two, we'll take the Seforno's commentary on this pasuk as a point of departure to discuss the signficance of 'digging wells' in life of the Avot.

INTRODUCTION

Recall that during a time of famine, God had instructed Yitzchak to stay in Eretz Canaan (rather than leaving to Egypt / see 26:1-5). At that time, God also affirmed His promise that Yitzchak would be the 'chosen son of Avraham ["bechira"], and then concluded His remarks with a brief explanation concerning why Avraham was chosen. Let's take a look at this closing pasuk, noting God's lengthy description of Avraham Avinu's obedience:

"ekev asher shama Avraham b'koli... - because Avraham had listened to Me, and he kept: MISHMARTI, MITZVOTEI, CHUKOTEI, v'TORATEI." (see 26:5)

When reading this pasuk, the obvious question arises: What is the precise meaning of each of these words (that describe how Avraham obeyed God)? I.e. what is the specific meaning of:

a) SHAMA B'KOLI
b) MISHMERETI
c) MITZVAH
d) CHUKAH
e) TORAH

As we should expect, each of the classical commentators contemplates this question, but to our surprise, each commentator presents a very different answer. Hence, an analysis of the various

commentaries to this pasuk will provide us with an excellent opportunity for an insight into the exegetical approach of each commentator.

As usual, before we turn to the commentaries, let's first consider what we should expect to find.

THREE APPROACHES

To identify the meaning of these five words (in the above pasuk), one can take one of three basic approaches:

1) One to one correspondence – a 'word match'

This is the simplest approach. We simply assume that each of these words relates to a specific act of Avraham Avinu. To determine what each word means, we look for that specific word within the story of Avraham Avinu in Chumash.

2) One to correspondence – a match by 'topic'

This is a similar approach, but instead of looking for the specific word in the life of Avraham, we first define the concept behind that word based on its usage elsewhere in all of Chumash. Based on that understanding of the word, we then look for an act of Avraham Avinu that fits within the category of that concept.

3) Generalization

In this approach, we don't expect that each word necessarily relates to a specific act. Instead, we understand this pasuk as a general description of Avraham's entire way of life.

WOULDN'T IT BE NICE...

Ideally, if we could find an example of each one of these words in the Torah's description of Avraham's life from Parshat Lech L'cha through Chaya Sarah, then the first approach would work best.

However, a comprehensive search only provides us with specific examples for the first three of these words, i.e. "shama b'kol", "mishmeret", and "mitzvah"]; but not for the last two words: "chukah" and "torah".

Hence, to explain this pasuk, we have one of two options: We can either employ the 'word match' for the first three words, and then the 'topic match' approach to explain "chukah" and "torah". Alternately, we can assume that if the 'word match' approach doesn't work for each word, then we must use 'topic match' approach for the entire pasuk.

With this in mind, let's take a look at what each of the "parshanim" have to say.

RASHBAM - 'simple' pshat

Rashbam presents what we refer to as 'simple' pshat. As we explained above, his approach will be to search for each word within the Torah's presentation of the story of Avraham Avinu.

For the first three words, Rashbam is quite 'successful', for we find a precise 'match' for each word:

a) SHAMA B'KOL - at the Akeyda

"...EKEV asher shamata b'koli" (see 22:18)

b) MISHMERET - to perform BRIT MILAH

"v'ata et briti TISHMOR... himol kol zachar" (see 17:9)

c) MITZVAH - The BRIT MILAH of Yitzchak on the EIGHTH day

"And Avraham circumcised Yitzchak his son when he was eight days old - ka'asher TZIVAH OTO ELOKIM" (see 21:4)

However, for the last two words - CHUKAH & TORAH he is less successful, for there is no 'exact match'. Therefore, Rashbam employs a more general definition for "chukah" and "torah", understanding that they refer to all of the 'ethical' mitzvot that Avraham most certainly have kept. Even though God did not command these mitzvot explicitly, it is quite implicit from Chumash that God expected Avraham (and all mankind) to act in an ethical manner (see Breishit 18:18-19!).

Let's quote the Rashbam, noting how he defined this as "ikar pshuto shel mikra":

"CHUKOTEI V'TORATEI: According to IKAR PSHUTO [simple pshat], all of the 'obvious mitzvot' [i.e. ethical laws] like stealing, adultery, coveting, justice, and welcoming guests; these applied BEFORE Matan Torah, but were renewed and expounded in the covenant [of Matan Torah]." (Rashbam)

Note how Rashbam understands CHUKIM & TORAH as general categories for the ethical mitzvot, without providing a more precise definition. However, because according to 'pshat' CHUKIM & TORAH must include specific mitzvot that AVRAHAM himself had kept - Rashbam is 'forced' into this more general definition.

[Note however that each of his examples of ethical mitzvot actually relates to a specific event in the life of Avraham:
stealing - "asher GAZLU avdei Avimelech (see 21:25!!)
adultery & coveting / Pharaoh & Avimelech taking Sarah
justice - w/ Melech Sdom & Shalem, after war of 5 kings
welcoming guests - the 3 angels & story of Lot & Sdom!]

CHIZKUNI - even 'better' than Rashbam

As we noted above, in his attempt to find a specific example for each word, Rashbam is only '3' for '5'. However, Chizkuni doesn't give up so quickly, and attempts to identify '5' for '5'!

After quoting the same first three examples as Rashbam, Chizkuni also finds specific examples for CHOK & TORAH as well, but to do so, he must employ some 'textual' assistance from Sefer Tehilim. In other words, he will identify a commandment that Avraham Avinu fulfills, that is later referred to as either a CHOK or TORAH in Sefer Tehillim. Let's take a look:

In regard to CHUKAH (d), Chizkuni claims that this refers to keeping BRIT MILAH for all future generations, based on 'word match' with a pasuk in Tehillim:

"zachar l'OLAM BRITO... asher karat et Avraham... v'yamideha l'Yaakov l'CHOK, l'Yisrael BRIT OLAM..." (see 105:8-10 /or "hoydu" in Psukei d'zimrah!)

Considering that at Brit Milah, Avraham is commanded: "v'hayta briti b'vsarchem l'BRIT OLAM" (see 17:13), Chizkuni concludes that "chukotei" in 26:5 refers to yet another aspect of "brit milah".

In regard to TORAH (e), Chizkuni claims that this refers to God's opening commandment to Avraham of "lech l'cha". Once again, Chizkuni bases his conclusion on a 'word match' with a pasuk in Tehillim: "askilcha v'ORECHA b'derech zu TAYLECH" (see Tehilim 32:8). In that pasuk we find the verb "orecha" which stems for the same root as "Torah", and the word "telech" which stems form the same root as "lech l'cha"!

This attempt by Chizkuni to identify a specific 'word match' for each word is simply ingenious, however he himself admits that he is 'stretching' pshat a bit too much (by going to Tehillim to find the match). Therefore, he concludes his commentary by suggesting that a more simple "pshat" for "mitzvotei chukotei v'toratei" would be to include the seven laws given to the children of Noach, which Avraham himself also kept.

[How these seven mitzvot break down according to these three categories of "mitzvot", "chukim", and "torot" will be discussed by Radak & Ramban.]

IBN EZRA - a different brand of "pshat"

Ibn Ezra, himself a strict follower of "pshat", takes a very different approach. Unlike Rashbam & Chizkuni, he makes no attempt to find a specific example to match each of the five words. Instead, Ibn Ezra follows the generalization approach, explaining that MISHMERETI is a general category that includes three sub-categories of MITZVOTEI CHUKOTEI and TORATEI; and they themselves can also be understood as general categories (that he will explain their nature later on in his pirush of Chumash).

In closing, Ibn Ezra 'admits' that it may be possible to identify a specific example in Avrahram's life for each of these sub-categories:

c) MITZVAH = "Lech L'cha..." i.e. Avraham's ALIYA

d) CHUKAH = Avraham's 'way of life' ('engraved' in his heart)

e) TORAH = Fulfilling the mitzvah of Brit MILAH

Note that Ibn Ezra makes no attempt to find a 'word match' for each word in this pasuk. This is quite typical of his approach to "pshat", as he often takes into consideration the 'bigger picture'.

RADAK - 'widening the pool'

Radak's approach is quite similar to Ibn Ezra's, for he also understands each of these words as general categories. However, Ibn Ezra seems to limit his examples to those mitzvot that Avraham himself was commanded, while Radak 'widens the pool' by including ALL of the mitzvot of Bnei Noach (assuming that Avraham was commanded to keep them). Then, within this pool of mitzvot, Radak differentiates between "mitzvot", and "chukim" etc. based on the definition of these categories later on in Chumash (e.g. "mitzvotei" refers to the "mitzvot sichliyot" [the laws that man can arrive at using his own intellect - like stealing and killing etc.].

RASHI - The Midrashic approach

Next, read Rashi, noting how he employs the second approach, but in a very special way. Not only does Rashi define each word based on its usage later on in Chumash, he also claims that these words refer to those very same mitzvoth. Therefore, Rashi concludes (from this pasuk) that Avraham have kept all of the mitzvot of the entire Torah (even though it had not been given yet)!

Hence, Rashi categorizes these different words based on their definition later on in Chumash, and cites an example for each word from the entire spectrum of Halacha, from the Written Law, to the Oral Law, and even to later Rabbinic ordinations.

a) SHAMA B'KOL - when I tested him (at the Akeyda/ 22:18)

b) MISHMERET - Rabbinic laws that protect the Torah laws

c) MITZVAH - the 'logical' and ethical laws of the Torah

d) CHUKOT - the Torah laws that have no apparent reason

e) TOROT - the Oral law, and "halacha l'Moshe m'Sinai

[Rashi can explain in this manner, for he maintains that the Avot kept the entire Torah.]

One could suggest a reason in "pshat" why Rashi may prefer this more "midrashic" type approach. The fact remains that we find in this pasuk specific categories of mitzvot that are never mentioned in Sefer Breishit (such as CHUKIM & TOROT), yet are found after Matan Torah! This leads Rashi to assume that these two words must refer to mitzvot that Chumash itself later describes as "chukim' & "torot" after Matan Torah. [See Yomah 67b & 28b.] [This is typical of Rashi's approach, quoting a Midrash that itself is based on a solution to a problem that arises in pshat.]

RAMBAN

As usual, Ramban begins his pirush by taking issue with Rashi. Realizing that Rashi's interpretation implies that the Avot kept the entire Torah, Raban begins by questioning this very assumption. After all, if the Avot kept the entire Torah, how did Yaakov marry two sisters, and erect a MATZEYVA, etc.?

Ramban first attempts to 'patch' Rashi's interpretation, by explaining that when Chazal say that the Avot kept the entire Torah, they refer merely to the fact that the Avot kept SHABBAT. [This is based on another Midrashic statement that the mitzvah of Shabbat is equal in value to keeping all the mitzvot of the Torah.]

Hence, Avraham kept the mitzvah of shabbat as well as the seven mitzvot of Bnei Noach. From this 'pool' of Avraham's mitzvot, Ramban goes on to explain how each word in the pasuk relates to a category of mitzvot within this pool.

Note that Ramban also follows the second approach, understanding each word as a topic, as will be defined later on in Chumash. He simply identifies them from a wider pool of examples including the seven Noachide laws, and not only from God's special commandments to Avraham Avinu.

[Afterward, Ramban returns to Rashi's Midrashic interpretation [adding his usual dose of 'zionism']. He resolves the original problem that he raised, explaining the Avot's obligation to follow the ('future') laws of the Torah applied ONLY in Eretz Yisrael.]

Ramban concludes his pirush employing once again the second approach, but this time bringing examples only from Avraham's own life. As God is speaking to Yitzchak, explaining to him why his father was chosen, it would make more sense that each word would relate to Avraham's special 'way of life' or to a specific event during his lifetime, i.e.:

b) MISHMERETI - Preaching and teaching his belief in God [including "likro b'shem Hashem"].

c) MITZVOTEI - every specific commandment by God e.g. "Lech L'cha", the Akeyda, sending Hagar away...

d) CHUKOTEI - acting in God's way, being merciful & just

e) TOROTEI - actual mitzvot, e.g. Brit Milah & Noachide laws

Note how Ramban's approach is most comprehensive, attempting to tackle pshat, while taking serious consideration of the Midrash, and looking for overall thematic significance.

SEFORNO

We conclude our shiur with Seforno, as his approach is quite unique, and it also will serve as an introduction to Part Two.

Seforno, like Ramban & Radak, understands these words as general categories relating to the "seven mitzvot of Bnei Noach". However, Seforno adds that not only did Avraham keep these laws, he also taught them to others. God is not proud of Avraham for any specific mitzvah, but rather praises him for his daily 'way of life'! Why does Seforno take this approach?

Seforno, unlike the other commentators thus far, takes into consideration the primary theme of Sefer Breishit, as well as the local context of this pasuk, i.e. the story that follows! Let's explain how.

Note how our pasuk (i.e. 26:5) does not conclude a 'parshia'; rather, it introduces a set of stories in which Yitzchak must deal with Avimelech (see 26:6-33/ note how 26:1-33 is all ONE 'parshia', thus implying a thematic connection between all of its psukim).

Seforno understands that this pasuk serves as a bit of "musar" [rebuke/ or at least encouragement] to Yitzchak. God explains to Yitzchak that being blessed with the "bechira" is a two-way street. After Avraham was chosen, he spent his entire life preaching and teaching God's laws - calling out in God's Name, and setting a personal example by pursuing "tzedek u'mishpat". [See also Ramban & Seforno on 12:8!]

However, up until this point in Chumash, Yitzchak himself had note yet done so. However, God now expects that he should take an example from his father, and begin to become a bit more 'active'!

In this manner, Seforno explains why Yitzchak suffered so much strife with Avimelech and his servants in the story that follows (i.e. the arguments at "esek" & "sitnah"). However, later in this same 'parshia', we find that Yitzchak himself finally "calls out in God's Name" (see 26:25-29). From that time on, Yitzchak becomes successful, and develops a positive relationship with his neighbors. God is finally with him, but only after he fulfills his responsibilities.

As usual, Seforno's pirush is the thematically significant, as it focuses both on overall thematic "pshat" as well as the "musar" that we can learn from.

With this in mind, we continue in Part Two with a discussion of that confrontation between Yitzchak & Avimelech.

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PART TWO - WHAT'S IN A WELL

Before we begin, a short explanation of the difference between a "bor" (pit or cistern) and "be'er" (well) which will help us understand the story of Yitzchak and the Plishtim.

There are two basic methods of water storage in ancient times:

I. THE "BOR"

The most simple method was to dig a "bor" - a cistern - into the bedrock to collect the rain water as it falls (or flows in from the surrounding hills). To increase its efficiency, the "bor" must be covered with "sid" [plaster] to stop the water from seeping out.

II. THE "BE"ER:

A "be'er" (a well) is quite different, for instead of collecting rainwater (from above), it taps the underground water table (from below). To reach that level [better known as an aquifer] one must dig a hole into the ground to reach it. Once opened, the well will supply water as long as water remains in the aquifer. [The aquifer receives its water from accumulative rainfall that seeps through the ground until it reaches a non-porous rock level.]

So what does any of this have to do with Torah?

AN ANCIENT 'WATER FIGHT'

This background explains the quarrel between Yitzchak and the Plishtim over the "be'erot" (see 26:17-26). Since ancient times there have always been disputes concerning the rights to the underground water table. For example, Avraham dug wells and thus staked his claim to their water supply. After his death, the Plishtim plugged those wells and opened their own tap to that same water supply (see 26:18). Yitzchak attempted to re-open the same wells that his father had dug. Upon doing so, the Plishtim protested claiming that the water belonged to them (26:20-21). [See Ramban 26:17-18!]

[Btw, this argument continues until this very day. According to the Oslo accords, a special committee is set up to reach an agreement over conflicting claims to the rights to the valuable water table that stretches under most of Yehuda & Shomron.]

Instead of fighting, Yitzchak tries again and again until he finally opens a well that no one else has a claim to - naming it "Rechovot" (see 26:22).

So why does the Torah discuss such mundane issues?

PEACE & THE MIKDASH

Ramban on 26:20-22 asks this very same question! He claims that if we follow only the "pshat" of these stories, they appear to carry very little significance. Instead, Ramban claims that this story represents FUTURE events of Am Yisrael's history in regard to the first, second, and third Temples. ["maase Avot siman l'banim/ see Ramban inside.]

One could suggest that the story that follows provides additional support for Ramban's approach.

Note that immediately after this incident, Yitzchak ascends to Be'er Sheva, God appears unto him, and once again promises him that he will continue the blessing of Avraham (see 26:23-24), but again for the 'sake of Avraham'. In response to this "hitgalut", Yitzchak builds a MIZBAYACH and CALLS OUT in God's Name (compare with similar act by Avraham in 12:8, 13:4 at Bet-el and 21:33 at Be'er Sheva).

Recall our explanation in Parshat Lech L'cha how 'calling out' in God's Name' reflected the ultimate purpose for God's choice of Avraham Avinu [note "ba'avur Avraham avdi" in 26:24!]. Now, for the first time, Yitzchak himself accomplishes this goal in a manner very similar to Avraham Avinu.

What took Yitzchak so long to act in a manner similar to Avraham? As we mentioned above, Seforno explains that once Yitzchak 'called out in God's Name', the Plishtim no longer quarreled with him (see Seforno on 26:25). In fact, immediately after Yitzchak builds his mizbayach, another well is dug without a quarrel (26:25), and afterward Avimelech himself offers to enter a covenant with Yitzchak, thus ending all future quarrels.

According to Seforno, by fulfilling his divine purpose, Yitzchak reached a level of 'peace and security' with his neighbors. The first two disputes began because Yitzchak had not done so

earlier! [See also Seforno 26:5]

[There remains however a small problem with Seforno's pirush. The first time Yitzchak achieves peace is when he digs the well of RECHOVOT - which took place BEFORE he calls out in God's Name. According to Seforno, must we understand this 'pre-mature' success simply an act of God's "chessed" that Yitzchak may not really have deserved!]

WHAT COMES FIRST?

One could suggest a slightly different reason why Yitzchak did not 'call out in God's Name' until after digging his third well. Recall, that even before the incidents with the wells the Plishtim and Yitzchak did not get along so well. [See 26:6-14, especially 26:14 - they became jealous of Yitzchak and his wealth.]

Because the first two wells led to serious disputes, under those conditions, Yitzchak was not able to 'call out in God's Name', for most likely - no one would listen! It is only after Yitzchak digs a third well, and this time without any dispute with his neighbors, does he ascend to Be'er Sheva to build a mizbayach and follow his father's legacy of 'calling out in God's Name' to those who surround him.

We can infer from these events that before Am Yisrael can fulfill its ultimate goal of building a Mikdash open for all mankind, it must first attain a certain level of stability and normalized relations with its neighbors. This 'prerequisite' can be inferred as well from the Torah's commandment to build the Bet Ha'mikdash as described in Sefer Devarim:

"... and you shall cross the Jordan and settle the land... and He will grant you safety from your enemies and you will live in security, THEN you shall bring everything I command you to HA'MAKOM ASHER YIVCHAR HASHEM - the place that God will choose to establish His NAME [i.e. the Bet ha'Mikdash]" (See Devarim 12:8-11)

This prerequisite is actually quite logical. If one of the purposes of the Mikdash is to provide a vehicle by which all nations can find God (see I Melachim 8:41-43!), then it should only be built once we achieve the status of a nation that other nations look up to. [See also Devarim 4:5-8!]

[Of course, Bnei Yisrael need to have a MISHKAN - for their own connection with God - immediately after Matan Torah. However, the move from a Mishkan to a Mikdash only takes place once Am Yisrael is ready to fulfill that role.]

In the history of Bayit Rishon [the first Temple], this is exactly the sequence of events. From the time of Yehoshua until King David, there is only a Mishkan, for during this time period, Am Yisrael never achieved peace with their enemies, nor did they establish a prosperous state that other nations could look up to. Only in the time of David did Am Yisrael reach this level of prosperity, peace, and security - and this is exactly when David ha'melech asks to build the Mikdash. God answers that indeed there is an improvement, but Am Yisrael must wait one more generation until a fuller level of peace and stability is reached - only once Shlomo becomes king and both internal and external peace is achieved. [Read carefully II Shmuel 7:1-15, especially 7:1-2 - "acharei asher haniyach Hashem m'kol oyveyhem m'saviv".]

[The popular reason given for why David could not build the Temple - because he had 'blood on his hands'- is not found in Sefer Shmuel, rather in Divrei Ha'yamim in David's conversation with Shlomo - but this is a topic for a later shiur. That reason also reflects a certain lack of stability in David's time, due to both the civil wars and external wars. See I Divrei Ha'yamim 17:1-20, & 22:2-15!]

In summary, we have shown how the sequence of events between Yitzchak and the neighboring Plishtim may not only 'predict' what will happen in Am Yisrael's history, but can also serve as guide for us to understand how to prioritize our goals.

shabbat shalom
menachem

Masters and Servants – The “Chaff” of the Avot, Part I

by Rabbi Yitz Etshalom

I. "I AM ESAV YOUR ELDEST"

One of the seminal stories in B'resheet occupies the latter half of this week’s Parashah: Ya'akov's successful "masquerade" by which he gains Yitzhak's primary blessing, the one which he (apparently) intended to grant to Esav.

There are many profound and significant issues raised in this narrative, including (but not limited to):

a) Why did Yitzhak only "have" one B'rakhah to give, such that when the real Esav showed up, he seemed to be "out of B'rakhot";

b) Why does a B'rakhah given to the "wrong person" have any validity;

c) Was Yitzhak really unaware of who the recipient was,

d) Why did Yitzhak request venison, prepared according to his taste, in advance of the B'rakhah?

e) What are we to make of the exclamation: "The voice is the voice of Ya'akov but the hands are the hands of Esav"

f) What is the relationship between the pair of B'rakhot relating to the "fat of the land" (27:28-29 and 27:39-40) and the Avrahamic blessing clearly intended for Ya'akov (28:3-4).

We will not investigate any of these (except, perhaps, tangentially); instead, we will focus on both the roots and the results of Ya'akov's masquerade (including Rivkah's role in this deception). When Ya'akov dressed up in hairy clothes, brought goat-meat seasoned (by Rivkah) to taste like venison and declared "I am Esav, your eldest", he successfully received the blessing which was evidently intended for Esav. This act of cunning (*Mirmah*) had both early roots in the Avrahamic family - and significant and powerful ramifications within the Ya'akovian clan.

In this analysis, we will endeavor to discover the origins of this type of behavior (and various analogues), along with identifying the difference between appropriate (and morally justified) utilization of these traits and the unacceptable excesses which are found in some of the less savory characters in Sefer B'resheet.

By way of introduction, I'd like to pose a question on a well-known - but not well-understood - Midrash.

At the beginning of the Bikkurim recitation, the worshipper avows: "My father was a wandering Aramean" (D'varim 26:56). All "p'shat-driven" commentaries identify this "father" as either Avraham or Ya'akov; both of whom were wanderers and both came from Aram (although Ya'akov was not born there, that was the terminus of his wandering). The well-known Midrash which introduces one of the two core sections of the Haggadah, identifies this "Aramean" as Lavan, Rivkah's brother and Ya'akov's father-in-law. (In order to do this, the Midrash must change the grammatical sense of *Oved*, but we'll save that for another essay).

What is the connection between our wandering father (Avraham or Ya'akov) and Lavan? Why would we possibly want to substitute Lavan for one of the Avot?

In order to answer this, we'll have to investigate the chain of events leading up to - and resulting from - Ya'akov's successful deception of Yitzhak.

II. *MIRMAH* IN AVRAHAM'S FAMILY

What is the earliest example of deception in Avraham's family? Although the Midrash suggests such behavior on the part of Haran in Avraham's pre-Aliyah days (see B'resheet Rabbah 38:13) , the T'nakh itself presents the first episode near the beginning of the Avraham narrative:

[as Avraham and Sarah are about to enter Egypt:] "Say, I beg you, that you are my sister; that it may be well with me for your sake; and my soul shall live because of you." (12:13)

This scene is, of course, repeated in Avraham's later sojourn to Philistine territory:

And Avraham said of Sarah his wife, "She is my sister"; and Avimelekh king of Gerar sent, and took Sarah. (20:2)

Unlike his interaction with Pharaoh, Avraham provides a defense for his misleading Avimelekh:

"And yet indeed she is my sister; she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said to her, 'This is your kindness which you shall show to me; at every place where we shall come, say of me, "He is my brother".' " (20:12-13)

Avraham held that deception in such a case was not only ethically defensible - it was a moral obligation (in order to preserve life - his own). This position was validated by God Himself in the interaction with Sarah regarding her reaction to the tidings of the miracle birth of Yitzhak:

Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, "After I am grown old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" (18:12)

[yet, when God raises this with Avraham, He only says:] And Hashem said to Avraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I indeed

bear a child, now that I am old ' ? " (v. 13)

The Gemara is sensitive to this shift and notes:

One may modify a statement in the interests of peace...at the School of R. Yishma'el it was taught: Great is the cause of peace. Seeing that for its sake even the Holy One, blessed be He, modified a statement; for at first it is written, "My lord being old", while afterwards it is written, "And I am old". (BT Yevamot 65b)

In other words, God Himself misled Avraham, omitting Sarah's concerns about his age, in order to maintain peace in the household (*Shalom Bayit*). If so, it was certainly appropriate for Avraham to mislead Pharaoh and Avimelekh - in order to protect himself - about the nature of his relationship with Sarah. [I refer to this as "misleading" or "deceptive" as opposed to "lying" since, as we see from Avraham's defense, his story was not untrue - it was just (significantly) incomplete].

We find one more instance of "modifying words" in the Avraham narrative - although it isn't Avraham himself who does so.

III. CHAPTER 24: WHAT HAPPENED...AND ELIEZER'S VERSION

Chapter 24, the longest chapter in B'resheet (and the core of last week's Parashah), is the story of Eliezer's mission to find a wife for Yitzhak.

[Although the text does not refer to him by name, instead calling him "the slave of Avraham" - which is relevant to our analysis, Rabbinic tradition identifies him with the Eliezer mentioned in 15:2. For the sake of brevity, we will utilize this identification here.]

This story is presented in a loquacious manner; first we are told about Avraham's oath, administered to his slave (vv. 2-9); then we hear about the servant's journey to Aram and his prayer at the well (10-14); immediately, Rivkah comes out and proves to be the realization of that prayer (15-25). Subsequently, the slave is brought to her house (26-33) and he retells the entire story, beginning with some background about himself, Avraham, Sarah and Yitzhak (34-36), repeating the terms of the oath (37-41), retelling the story of his prayer (42-44), and retelling Rivkah's kindness to him and his animals (45-47).

Why is this story repeated? Rashi (v. 42), quoting the Midrash (B'resheet Rabbah 60:8), notes that "the idle chatter of the slaves of the Patriarchal homes is dearer than the Torah of their children", but does not explain why this is the case.

Nearly all classical commentators (Acharonim as well as Rishonim - including Rashi himself), note the repetition of Avraham's oath and of the interaction between the slave and Rivkah at the well, pointing to one or more of the variations between the versions. For example, Rashi notes that even though the slave gave her the jewelry before finding out her name or family:

And it came to pass, as the camels finished drinking, that the man took a golden ear ring of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets for her hands of ten shekels weight of gold; And said, "Whose daughter are you?" (vv. 22-23; note, however, Ramban at v. 22);

The report was a bit different:

"And she hurried, and let down her water jar from her shoulder, and said, 'Drink, and I will give your camels drink also'; so I drank, and she made the camels drink also. And I asked her, and said, 'Whose daughter are you?' And she said, 'The daughter of Betu'el, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bore to him'; and I put the ear ring on her face, and the bracelets on her hands." (vv. 46-47)

Rashi explains that Eliezer modified his words so that the wouldn't "catch him in his words, saying 'Why did you give these to her before you knew who she was?' ".

[Interested readers are directed to the Netziv and Malbim for fascinating analyses of the variations between the Torah narrative and Eliezer's version.]

In sum, we find that Avraham (and members of his household), utilized their words judiciously when there was a life-threatening situation or when there was an overriding interest at stake - which was not self-directed. According to the Midrash, Eliezer was interested in the failure of his mission, as he wanted to have his own daughter marry Yitzhak; in any case, it wasn't his own interests which were being promoted via his altered statements.

Perhaps this is why the slave is referred to, throughout Chapter 24 (where he is one of the two central figures) as *Eved Avraham*, rather than by name (which we don't ever learn - see last week's posting); it is truly his ability to utilize this skill learned in Avraham's household which assists in the success of his mission.

IV. BACK TO YA'AKOV

In addressing the focal story of our Parashah - the "masquerade", we have to take two things into account:

1) Rivkah, who was the force behind the deception, was privy to information about her sons which, evidently, she did not share with Yitzhak:

And the children struggled together inside her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to inquire of Hashem. And Hashem said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples shall be separated from your bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger." (25:22-23) Ya'akov was destined to rule over Esav - to which end she wanted to ensure that he received the preferred blessing. (Again, it is beyond the scope of this essay to analyze the role of these blessings in family position and power).

2) Rivkah was the sister of Lavan, the master deceiver. Note how the Midrash comments on her identification, at the beginning of our Parashah, as

"the daughter of Betu'el the Aramean of Padan-Aram, the sister to Lavan the Aramean":

This teaches that her father was a deceiver (a play on the close relationship between the word *Rama'i* meaning "deceiver" and *Arami* - "Aramean"), her brother was a deceiver and the people in her locale were like that, and this righteous woman came out from there. (B'resheet Rabbah 63:4)

It is not surprising that Rivkah utilized this talent to ensure that the Divine Mandate - Ya'akov receiving the favored blessing - took place. This was certainly not a case of self-interest, as the result of this deception was Ya'akov's forced exile for twenty years; according to the Midrash, Ya'akov never saw his beloved mother again (see Rashi at 35:8).

It is prudent to point out that Yitzhak also engaged in this type of behavior - once:

And Yitzhak lived in Gerar; And the men of the place asked him about his wife; and he said, "She is my sister"; for he feared to say, She is my wife; lest, said he, the men of the place should kill me for Rivkah; because she was pretty to look upon. (26:6-7)

Although Yitzhak was prepared to act deceitfully in a situation similarly dangerous to those of his father, Rivkah was still able to mislead him (twice - look carefully at 27:42-46). Why wasn't Yitzhak more attuned to guile?

V. *VAYAGOR* AND *VAYESHEV*

In Avraham's defense of his misleading Avimelekh, there is a phrase which may clarify something about the Avot and those rare circumstances when they were prepared to act deceptively:

And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said to her, 'This is your kindness which you shall show to me; at every place where we shall come, say of me, "He is my brother".' ";

In other words, Avraham was only willing to act this way when he was in a state of wandering. The natural vulnerability experienced by the stranger necessitates the occasional use of deception to survive (witness the thousands of Jews who were saved by forged papers, sham marriages, made-up adoptions etc. while escaping the horrors of the Sho'ah).

Note that roughly half of Avraham's post-Lekh-L'kha life was lived "on the run" (see our shiur on Parashat Vayera regarding the journey's of Avraham); nevertheless, the only two incidents of deception were in specific "traveling" situations - in Egypt and G'rar. Similarly, Avraham's elder slave was a stranger in Aram when he spoke so "carefully" - and this was the case with Yitzhak, who only deceived once: When he was in G'rar and afraid for his life.

Once Yitzhak - who was the only one of the Avot who was "settled" during most of his life - was back home, there was no need to operate in this fashion.

It took Rivkah, who, like Avraham, (see our shiur on Hayyei Sarah) was a transplant in K'na'an and who had the inside information on Ya'akov and Esav, to set up the necessary circumstances to successfully deceive Yitzhak into giving Ya'akov the blessing.

VI. LATER ON...

Let's take a quick look at several later incidents of *Mirmah* in the family of Ya'akov:

1) Ya'akov's entire relationship with his uncle and father-in-law was one of deceit - Lavan cheated Ya'akov out of his promised wife (Rachel) and then, changed his salary ten times:

"Thus have I been twenty years in your house; I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your cattle; and you have changed my wages ten times." (41:31) (There is much more for us to investigate regarding the nature of their relationship and the claim of "20 years" - but we'll leave that for another year)

Yet, our Rabbis note that there is an affinity between Lavan and Ya'akov:

And Ya'akov told Rachel that he was her father's brother, and that he was Rivkah's son; (29:12) - In deception, "he was her father's brother"; In righteousness, "he was Rivkah's son". (B'resheet Rabbah 70:13)

The Rabbis take this affinity even further and note that Lavan's behavior was something of a "payback" to Ya'akov for his deception:

...all night Ya'akov called "Rachel" and Leah responded; in the morning: "Behold she was Leah". He said to her: "O deceptive one daughter of a deceptive one: All night didn't I call Rachel and you responded?" Leah answered: "Is there a barber without students? (i.e. even the best barber needs a student who will cut his hair; likewise:) Didn't your father cry out 'Esav' and you responded?" (ibid. 70:19) (more on this a bit later)

2) When Ya'akov returns to Eretz K'na'an, following Avraham's footsteps, his first stop is Sh'khem. The terrible events which occurred there can be found in Chapter 34 - but note how Ya'akov's sons (all born in Aram!) respond:

And the sons of Ya'akov answered Sh'khem and Hamor his father deceitfully (*b'Mirmah*, and said, [because he had defiled Dinah their sister]; And they said to them, "We can not do this thing, to give our sister to one who is uncircumcised; for that would be a reproach to us; But in this will we consent to you; If you will be as we are, that every male of you be circumcised; Then will we give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters for us, and we will live with you, and we will become one people." (34:13-16)

The problems inherent in this Parashah are many; note, however, Ya'akov's protest against his sons' behavior:

And Ya'akov said to Shim'on and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me to make me odious among the inhabitants of the land, among the K'na'ani and the P'rizi; and I being few in number, they shall gather together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house." (34:30)

In other words, acting deceitfully as a tactic - when justified - is only acceptable when in a temporary place (e.g. Egypt, G'rar, Avraham's slave in Aram or Ya'akov at Yitzhak's knee); but you must maintain a reputation for forthrightness among the inhabitants of the land

(*Yoshev ha'Aretz*).

Although space limitations mitigate against continuing here, I'd like to use the information presented up to this point to suggest an answer to our question about the Midrash on *Arami Oved Avi* -

When Avraham and Ya'akov were wandering (the "pshat" meaning of the verse), they had to utilize a survival tactic which was morally correct and ethically justified - but only for those circumstances. That behavior - deceit - was personified in one Biblical character - Lavan. Whereas Avraham and Ya'akov (and, in one case, Yitzhak) utilized deceit, Lavan WAS deceit.

Hence, Lavan is the truest example of *Arami Oved Avi* - even in the comfort of home, even when faced with nothing more than the possible gain of a few dollars, he behaved in a way only acceptable for survival - and, then, only when wandering.

VII. There are two additional points relating to this issue which we must address:

a) How do we understand the unpleasant (to say the least) consequences of "justified deceit" which weave their way through the rest of Sefer B'resheet (and, in a more Midrashic vein, through the rest of Jewish History)? If Ya'akov was justified in masquerading as Esav in order to deceive Yitzhak and gain the premier B'rakhah, why does it bear such a heavy personal and historic cost (as we will see further on)?

b) How is it that Lavan is related to Ya'akov? How can Esav be the son of Yitzhak? In other words, why do the great and grand Patriarchs and Matriarchs of our holy nation give birth to such antagonistic characters and have the dubious honor of kinship with the likes of Lavan?

VIII. THE "TRAIL OF DECEPTION"

The Mishna (Sotah 1:7) states: "According to one's behavior, they (Heaven) behave with him." This kind of retribution is known as *Midah k'Neged Midah* (measure for measure).

This is nowhere exemplified as clearly and consistently in our literature as in the book of B'resheet. The same Lavan who fooled Ya'akov into marrying Leah and then working another 7 years for Rachel was fooled by that same Rachel when she stole his idols. The same Ya'akov who deceived his father in the dark was deceived in the dark when he thought that his new bride was Rachel. Note the comment of the Midrash cited above

...all night Ya'akov called "Rachel" and Leah responded; in the morning: "Behold she was Leah". He said to her: "O deceptive one daughter of a deceptive one: All night didn't I call Rachel and you responded?" Leah answered: "Is there a barber without students? (i.e. even the best barber needs a student who will cut his hair; likewise:) Didn't your father cry out 'Esav' and you responded?" (B'resheet Rabbah 70:19)

I'd like to outline the "trail of deception" which dogs the family of Ya'akov throughout Sefer B'resheet. Since we already dealt with the "modified words" of Avraham, his servant and his son, Yitzhak in part I (last week), we'll begin with Ya'akov himself:

a. Yitzhak is deceived by Ya'akov who is prompted and aided by Rivkah (Ch. 27)

b. Yitzhak is deceived by Rivkah, who claims that she wants to send Ya'akov away for marriage purposes (when it's really to save his life - 27:46)

c. Lavan fools Ya'akov into marrying Leah before Rachel - thus getting her married off and gaining 7 more "free" years of labor from Ya'akov (29:23-27)

d. Rachel lies to her father about the idols she stole from his house (31:19)

e. Lavan manipulates Ya'akov's wages "ten times" (31:41)

f. Ya'akov misleads Esav about his plans to join him in Se'ir (33:14)

g. The sons of Ya'akov dupe the citizens of Sh'khem into a mass circumcision - and then pillage the town in revenge for the rape of Dinah (34:13)

h.The brothers fool their father into thinking that Yoseph has been killed by an animal (37:31)

i. Tamar fools Yehudah into thinking that she is a *K'deshah* (38:14-15)

j. Potiphar's wife lies to her husband, getting Yoseph thrown into the court jail (39:14-20)

k. Yoseph maintains his disguise with his brothers, not revealing their relationship until Yehudah's bold stand (44:18-34)

l. Yoseph (evidently) has his brothers lie to Pharaoh about their livelihood (46:33-34)

m. The brothers (apparently) lie to Yoseph about Ya'akov's deathbed wishes (49:17)

IX. "MEASURE FOR MEASURE"

In the spirit of the Midrash quoted above - and following the notion of *Midah k'Neged Midah*, it seems clear that at least some of these episodes of deception are causally interrelated. As promised in last week's essay, we will find that the impact of some of these acts was felt well beyond the chronological parameters of B'resheet - to the furthest ends of Biblical history:

" 'When Esav heard his father's words' (27:34): R. Hanina said: Anyone who claims that God totally forgoes debts will himself be lost; rather, He waits patiently and collects that which is His. In recompense for the one cry that Ya'akov caused Esav to cry out, as it says:

'When Esav heard his father's words, he cried out', he was punished. Where was he punished? In Shushan, as it says: 'And [Mordechai] cried a great and bitter cry' (Esther 4:1) (B'resheet Rabbah 67:4)

Before examining the reason behind this causal relationship, I'd like to demonstrate that that relationship indeed exists within these particular instances within Sefer B'resheet.
a) We have already seen that Ya'akov's masquerade was linked, in the Midrash, to Lavan's successful deception regarding his daughters. Besides the additional, far-reaching impact felt in the days of Mordechai and Esther, this seems to have set Ya'akov up for not properly recognizing the nature of the relationships between his sons, leading to the Yoseph tragedy. Note how the same animal used to fool Yitzhak into thinking he was eating venison ("for the taste of goat meat is similar to that of venison" - Rashi at 27:9) is used to replicate human blood on Yoseph's tunic ("[goat's] blood is similar to that of a human" Rashi at 37:31).

[Parenthetically, and this is an important caveat for the whole topic, we see the Yoseph story as tragic - even though it is not necessarily tragic from every perspective. As Yoseph himself states: "But as for you, you thought evil against me; but God meant it to good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive." (50:20) In other words, even though the sale of Yoseph was a tragedy from an internal family perspective, it was a component of salvation and necessary history from the Divine perspective. See B'resheet Rabbah 85:1 - "the tribes were engaged in the sale of Yoseph, Yoseph was engaged in his sackcloth and fasting, Re'uven was engaged in his sackcloth and fasting, Ya'akov was engaged in his sackcloth and fasting, Yehudah was engaged in finding himself a wife - and haKadosh Barukh Hu was engaged in creating the light of the anointed king (David).]

b) The direct result of Rivkah's "official version" of the reason to send Ya'akov away (to find a wife) is that Esav married into Yishma'el's family (28:8-9). Note Rashbam's comments here: "Esav thought that it was on account of his marrying K'na'ani daughters that Ya'akov successfully stole the blessing of Avraham from me. He married the daughter of Yishma'el from the family of Avraham, thinking that now he will merit the legacy of Avraham." In other words, Rivkah's misleading statement regarding the reason for sending Ya'akov away motivated Esav to erroneously think that he could get the favored blessing by following that directive in his next marriage.

c) This one is somewhat obvious: By fooling Ya'akov into marrying Leah, The order of Shivtei Kah was inverted so that the eldest was not the son of Rachel, which led to all of the inter-fraternal troubles in Ya'akov's family (especially regarding Yoseph).

The Midrash explicit links the deception of that fateful night with the deception practiced by the brothers on their father regarding Yoseph's "disappearance". (B'resheet Rabbah 84:10).

In addition, this one night of deception (in which both Rachel and Leah were complicit) also kept Ya'akov from returning to K'na'an for anywhere between 7 and 13 years (7 which he worked for Rachel and 6 which he worked to make his own fortune).

d) Rachel's lie to her father regarding the idols: Note how Ya'akov unwittingly curses his beloved Rachel: "With whom you will find your gods, let him not live. Before our brothers point out what is yours with me, and take it with you. For Ya'akov knew not that Rachel had stolen them." (31:32). Rashi (ad loc.) cites the Midrash which points to this statement as the curse which led to Rachel's tragic death.

e) This is actually the "odd man out" on the list; whereas the other instances are exactly that - instances - this is a record of ongoing behavior.

f) Ya'akov implies that he will follow Esav to Se'ir (although note Ramban's approach at 33:14). Hazal seem to be bothered by this promise, as it is clear that Ya'akov didn't intend to go to Se'ir at all. As such, they interpret it as a "long-range" promise; Ya'akov will fulfill it in the messianic era: "And saviors shall ascend Mount Tziyyon to judge the Mount of Esav; and the kingdom shall be Hashem's." (Ovadiah 21) There doesn't seem to be a negative repercussion to this misleading statement anywhere throughout B'resheet or later Biblical history.

g) The deception of Sh'khem has implications both forward and backward in history. The first place where Avraham set up an altar when he entered the Land was Sh'khem (12:6); Rashi notes that he prayed there for the welfare of his great-grandchildren who would fight at that place. More significantly, Sh'khem is the location where the brothers cast Yoseph into the pit, which is (as noted above) an act tied up in deception. (Note BT Sanhedrin 102a where this connection is made, albeit linked to the rape, not the deception).

h) The deception of Ya'akov by his sons, which, as we have pointed out, is the consequence of Ya'akov's deception, becomes the next causal link in the chain: When the brothers sent Yoseph's tunic, covered with goat's blood, to father Ya'akov, they declared: "This have we found; *Haker Na* (discern, I beg you) whether it is your son's coat or not" (37:32).

When Yehudah (generally assumed to be the one who engineered that deception; see 37:26-27) was fooled by Tamar, she revealed herself with that selfsame phrase: "When she was brought out, she sent to her father-in-law, saying, 'By the man, whose these are, am I with child; and she said, *Haker Na* (Discern, I beg you), whose are these, the signet, and bracelets, and staff.' " (38:25)

The Gemara ties these two together in the context (and within the discussion of) *Midah k'Neged Midah*:

" 'Discern, I pray thee'. R. Hama b. Hanina said: With the word 'discern' [Yehudah] made an announcement to his father, and with the word 'discern' an announcement was made to him. With the word 'discern' he made an announcement : 'Discern now whether it be thy son's coat or not'; and with the word 'discern' an announcement was made to him : 'Discern, I pray thee, whose are these'." (BT Sotah 10b)

i) Tamar's successful deception actually bears fruit (pun intended) which is all positive - but, keep in mind that Yehudah being fooled in this story is the result (as the Midrash attests) of his role in an earlier deception.

j) Although this is not, strictly speaking, within the context of the Ya'akovan family, there is an interesting consequence to Mrs. Potiphar's duplicitous behavior: Yoseph, whom she so desired, marries her daughter (41:45). Although one could argue that this is the "next best thing" for her - at least her daughter is married to Yoseph - from a perspective of T'nakh law, it is the one marriage which renders a future relationship with Yoseph out of reach. By lying and sending Yoseph to jail, she catalyzed a sequence of events which led to his marriage to her daughter - and her permanent relegation to the role of mother-in-law.

k) The Midrash Tanhuma (Vayyigash #3) makes a startling observation: All of Yoseph's glory was overshadowed by Yehudah (ultimately, "Mashiach ben Yoseph" will be outlived and overshadowed by "Mashiach ben David" from Yehudah). The Midrash seems to

link this with the comparison of Yoseph's deception as against Yehudah's forthright stand in his plea for Binyamin. In any case, at this point in B'resheet, most of the episodes are on the "result" end of the chain and Yoseph's behavior is the direct outgrowth of the brothers' deception of their father as noted above.

l) This ploy had an unintended but tragic result: By convincing Pharaoh that the brothers were all shepherds, he located them together in Goshen. This was, admittedly, Yoseph's goal - to keep the family together. Several generations later, however, this made the Egyptian oppression that much easier to enforce: The children of Ya'akov were now identifiable as "them" (as against "us") - and their "Goshen ghetto" conditions certainly didn't help in this regard.

m) This last lie is an interesting one. Although not clearly bound within the causal chain which we have identified, it is enlightening and informative from another perspective. The Midrash (D'varim Rabbah 5:14) comments:

Resh Lakish said: Great is peace, for the Torah reported false words in order to establish peace between Yoseph and his brothers. When their father died, they became afraid lest Yoseph take vengeance from them. What did they say? "Your father commanded, before his death, saying: 'Thus shall you say to Yoseph [Forgive, I beg you now, the trespass of your brothers, and their sin; for they did to you evil]; '" and we never find that Ya'akov commanded this, rather, Scripture stated false words for the sake of peace.

In other words, here we find a second example of Divine validation of the questionable behavior which sits at the core of this analysis. As noted last week, God Himself reported inaccurate information to Avraham in order to spare his feelings - and, here, at the end of B'resheet, we find that the Torah validates untrue words which, again, come to promote *Shalom Bayit*.

SUMMARY

We have noted an intricate series of deceptions orchestrated by or against members of Ya'akov's family. We have pointed to Midrashic or scriptural connections which seem to bind them together in a causal sequence.

At this point, we are, perhaps, more aware of the tangled web which is woven throughout the Sefer - but are no wiser as to how to understand it. Our two original questions remain unanswered:

a) If Ya'akov's behavior in following his mother's advice and masquerading in order to gain the B'rakhah intended for Esav was justified, why are there such horrible and far-reaching consequences? [If it was not justified, then we have to understand how God could reward and support a blessing gained under the shadow of a crime. We will take the position that his behavior was just and justified - and perhaps leave the other lemma for another discussion.]

b) How do we distinguish between Lavan and Ya'akov? Why are we proud to carry the names of *Beit Ya'akov* and *B'nei Yisra'el*, yet shudder at the name of Lavan?

X. JUSTIFIED, BUT NEVERTHELESS...

Regarding our first question, we can find the answer in a broad area of Halakhah: Hilkhot Sh'gagot. The Torah mandates that if a person sins unknowingly, in such a manner that he either wasn't aware of all of the facts (this really is a piece of *Helev*) or of the law, he must, upon finding out that it was a violation, bring an expiation offering - a Korban Hatat. Why must he bring such an offering? We find an even further expression of this: A person who is guilty of manslaughter, with absolutely no harm intended, is obligated to go into exile at one of the cities of refuge. The Gemara (BT Makkot 10b) understands that this exile is a form of expiation - but from what evil act does he need cleansing?

A full treatment of this issue is well beyond the space allotted for this shiur; suffice it to say that Rabbinic literature, Talmudic as well as post-Talmudic, addresses this issue comprehensively. The many answers are all forms of saying the same thing: That which we do, even unintentionally, leaves a stain on who we are. By way of example, a person could be kidnapped and kept in seclusion with dastardly people for a number of months - clearly against his will. Nevertheless, the time that he spends in the company of these criminals will almost assuredly affect him - his values, how he spends his time, his language and so on. Even though he never meant to share the space of these felons, the reality is that the environment they generate is noxious - and he must, perforce, breathe that same poisonous air.

An example of this is the Halakhah (BT Berakhot 32b) that a Kohen who commits manslaughter may never again perform the Birkat Kohanim, based on the verse: "Your hands are full of blood" (Yeshaya 1:15).This holds even if the killing was unintentional - his hands are stained, nonetheless.

When Ya'akov deceived his father, he was following his mother's advice, based on a prophecy she received about his destiny. Although his act was justified (see above), it left its mark. He was forced to dip into the world of deception in order to gain what was his by Divine fiat; yet, that descent left its mark and the consequences were felt for the ages. In other words, just because an act is permissible or, better yet, the proper response to a given situation, does not absolve the actor of the consequences of that act. Ya'akov continued the justified and successful manipulation of the truth within the family - but he paid a dear price for it for many years.

XI. YA'AKOV AND LAVAN

And now we come to our final question - how do we distinguish between Ya'akov and Lavan? What gives Ya'akov a higher moral ground?

Perhaps the Midrash, once again, will enlighten and help resolve:

" 'And Haman said in his heart (Esther 6:6)' Wicked people are enslaved to their hearts; 'Esav said in his heart' (B'resheet 27:41)...but the righteous are the masters of their hearts, as it says: 'And Hannah was speaking to her heart' (Sh'muel I 1:13)...and they are similar to their Creator: 'Hashem said to His heart'. (B'resheet 8:21)" (Esther Rabbah 10:3)

When we note all of the instances where Avraham, his servant, Yitzhak, Rivkah, Ya'akov and Yoseph lied - it was always for an overriding cause, one which was not motivated by self-interest. Ya'akov had more to lose (his life) by deceiving his father to gain the B'rakhah; Yoseph had much to gain by immediately revealing himself to his father etc. Those instances where we understand the act to

be morally justified are when a righteous person, in control of his own moral rudder, utilizes deception to promote an overriding good (such as preservation of life, Shalom Bayit or the fulfillment of a prophecy).

Lavan is a very different creature; he is not just "more deceptive"; as pointed out last week, he _is_ deception. In other words, whereas Ya'akov is a free man, able to use deception when warranted, Lavan is shackled by his own deceiving heart.
How do we know the difference? What is the litmus test of "appropriate" deception?

Note that the Avot never used it for self-promotion or gain; Lavan's deception was always for his own financial benefit. Just as the moral high ground is claimed by the one who has the least to gain from the argument, so it is held by he who knows how to lie, but will never do so for his own self-promotion. He will only manipulate words to promote the greater good, be it familial, communal, national or universal.

Parshat Toldot: Ya'akov the "Smooth Man"

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

First, some questions we will not answer:

1. Our parasha records many events in the life of Yitzhak which closely parallel or exactly duplicate events in the life of his father. This link between father and son is made explicit in the Torah, which not only records these events, but also notes that Avraham engaged in the same activities (and promises Yitzhak good things in the merit of his father). Perhaps Yitzhak never emerges from the long shadow of his father to accomplish new goals, yet the Torah takes the trouble to repeat all of these events for our edification. What is Yitzhak all about, and what does he teach us?

2. In the same verse in which the Torah tells us that Yitzhak and Rivka are unable to bear children, and that they turn to prayer (25:21), the Torah also tells us that Hashem responds and grants them children. How long does it take Hashem to respond? What does this teach us?

Questions we will answer:

1. Our parasha introduces Ya'akov and Eisav, who battle each other in the womb, conduct commerce for the rights of the first-born, and compete for their father's blessing.

2. What kind of person is Ya'akov? What does the Torah's description of him, "Ish tam, yoshev ohalim" (25:27), mean?

3. Is it proper for Ya'akov to demand the rights of the first-born from the hungry Eisav, in return for the stew Ya'akov has made? And what are these rights of the first-born anyway?

4. Ya'akov's mother, Rivka, comes up with the scheme for her son Ya'akov to lie and trick Yitzhak, his father, into giving him the blessing meant for Eisav. Why does Rivka advise Ya'akov to do something dishonest? Is Ya'akov right to follow her instructions and deceive Yitzhak?

5. Yitzhak, we know, prefers Eisav to Ya'akov. Could Eisav truly be worthy of this preference, or has he fooled Yitzhak into admiring him? What does Yitzhak admire about Eisav anyway?

6. We would expect Yitzhak to be furious once he realizes Ya'akov has tricked him by taking the berakha (blessing) meant for Eisav. If so, why does Yitzhak give Ya'akov yet ANOTHER blessing shortly before Ya'akov runs away to escape Eisav's wrath? Also, since Yitzhak has already blessed Ya'akov (mistakenly), why bless him again?

INTRODUCTION:

Until Parashat Toledot, some of the narratives we have seen have been clear and some subtle, but by and large we have been able to find coherent solutions to our questions. This week's parasha is the most challenging so far, since the evidence available for solving our problems is so scanty or contradictory. All stories in Tanakh have certain gaps which must be filled, but sometimes that task is particularly hard. On the other hand, one of the most rewarding activities in learning Torah is filling these gaps.

Most of the questions above are "local" -- questions about specific events in the parasha. Although we must answer these local questions in order to understand the parasha, one basic question awaits in the background which makes the events of the parasha meaningful as more than just a complex narrative:

One of our the main motifs we encounter as we move through this sefer (book) is the question of who will be chosen to build the the nation to maintain a special relationship with Hashem (God). We have thought a lot about what makes Avraham special, and, among his sons, what about Yishmael makes him unfit for leadership as Avraham's successor. (We have not talked about what makes Yitzhak an appropriate successor; perhaps in the future.) Now we come to Ya'akov and Eisav: what makes Ya'akov better than Eisav? Since the Torah spends so much time unfolding the saga of the relationship between Ya'akov and Eisav, it is clearly one of our jobs to figure out what the difference is between these twins, why one is chosen to found the nation and the other rejected.

One problem with answering this question during this shiur is that we don't yet have a lot of the information we need. Our parasha gives us only our first glimpse of Ya'akov, but Ya'akov is a complex figure whose development stretches over a number of parshiot. We are not yet ready to decide who Ya'akov is, what his strengths are. This limits us to doing what analysis we can and suspending judgment about the rest until we get there.

[I have written an article-type analysis spanning Toledot, VaYetze, and YaYishlah, focusing on the Ya'akov-Eisav relationship. If you are interested, and you have Microsoft Word Hebrew version, drop me a line at emayer@ymail.yu.edu and I will send it to you as an attachment to an email message -- but only on the condition that you send me your comments! If you don't know what an "attachment" is, ask a computer-wiz friend.]

MEET THE BROTHERS:

In the very beginning of the parasha, the Torah introduces the brothers. Eisav is an "ish yode'a tzayyid, ish sadeh," "A man who knows hunting, a man of the field." Eisav is a hunter, comfortable with the physically demanding life of the outdoors, trained to channel his aggression, accustomed to the danger of the hunt, skilled in using weapons.

Ya'akov, on the other hand, is an "ish tam, yoshev ohalim" -- "A 'tam' man, a dweller of tents." "Tam" in Tanakh (the Bible) usually parallels the word "yashar" and means the same thing or something similar -- "straight," "upright," "righteous." It is related to the word "tamim," "perfect," "having no blemish."

***THAT'S* WHAT YOU CALL 'RIGHTEOUS'?!**

The problem with this description of Ya'akov is that just after the description, the Torah tells us that Ya'akov pulls off a deal with his brother to buy the birthright from him for a bowl of soup! Now, let's assume Eisav was stupid enough to agree to this deal: does it seem 'tam' ('righteous') for Ya'akov to take advantage of that stupidity by offering a bowl of soup in exchange for something so important? To make matters worse, later in the parasha Ya'akov lies to his father, tricking Yitzhak into giving him the berakha (blessing) meant for Eisav by impersonating Eisav. Is this what a 'tzaddik' would do? Does this sound 'yashar' to you?

We may have to look for another interpretation of the word 'tam,' since Ya'akov's activities hardly seem 'yashar.' Even if there might be some way to justify his actions, they could hardly be described as "straight"! What else could 'tam' mean?

If you look at the way the Torah describes the brothers, it is clear that the Torah intends to parallel the two brothers so that we can appreciate the contrast between them:

Eisav Ya'akov
A) yode'a tzayyid ----> ish tam

B) ish sadeh ----------> yoshev ohalim

The second pair in this parallel is pretty clear: Eisav is a man of the field, prepared to deal with the outside world, while Ya'akov prefers to be alone among his tents, tending the sheep. What about the first parallel? The Torah contrasts the two brothers: while Eisav has trained his aggressive instincts and has become a 'yode'a tzayyid,' someone who knows how to pursue, confront, and subdue, Ya'akov has not developed these abilities; as Rashi comments, "tam" means he is "not expert in all these." He is not a hunter; his aggressions are untrained. What the Torah is really telling us by using the word 'tam' is not that Ya'akov is a saint, but that he is unaggressive, that he avoids direct conflict. At this point, it is not clear whether this is good or bad, but it sets the stage for many of the events ahead in Ya'akov's life.

['Yoshev ohalim,' by the way, is a phrase we have already come across: we read in Parashat Bereishit that one of Lemekh's wives, Ada, had a son named Yaval, who, the Torah tells us, is "avi kol YOSHEV OHEL u-mikneh," the first to pasture his flock on a sort of nomadic basis, moving his tent to a new pasture whenever the local pasture has been consumed by the flock. So Ya'akov is a nomadic shepherd, moving his tent with the flock (see Rashbam).]

PASS ME THE LENTIL SOUP . . . FOR TOMORROW WE MAY DIE

So Ya'akov buys the birthright from Eisav for some stew. What is the birthright -- to what does it entitle the first-born?

Ibn Ezra and Rashbam suggest that it is the right to collect a double portion of the estate of the father once he has died. (This is clearly the meaning of birthright later in the Torah, when the Torah tells us that a person must give his firstborn son a double portion, but it's not obvious that it means that here.) Ibn Ezra adds that some say that the birthright also entitles the firstborn to the respect and honor of the rest of the brothers. In any event, there is no question that the birthright is of great significance.

If so, how we understand Eisav's willingness to trade the birthright for stew? True, Eisav claims to be so famished that he is "dying," but a careful look shows that Eisav is only exaggerating, as the Torah describes his state as 'ayef,' simply 'tired' -- not quite dying. But if Eisav is not dying, why does he agree to sell the birthright to Ya'akov? What kind of negotiator is this Eisav to sell his birthright for a song (well, for a stew)?

Eisav is a man of action -- but not a man of foresight. He knows how to behave when arrows fly at him, when a mountain lion bares its fangs, when a gazelle leaps across his path. But that is exactly the point: Eisav is a man with a hair trigger, gifted with quicksilver reflexes and jungle-tuned intuition, brave and bold . . . but he's not too subtle. He does not understand (or can't discipline himself to obey) the first principle of investment: delaying enjoyment in the present to guarantee greater enjoyment in the future (i.e., "save up"). You have to forego spending some of your money today so you can invest it and turn into more money. Eisav cares only that he is hungry and that he has a valuable commodity -- his birthright. He focuses on today, on the empty feeling in his belly, ignoring tomorrow, when he will regret having squandered the birthright on something so silly.

But Eisav is no moron; he must rationalize this obviously boneheaded decision, so he exaggerates -- "Here I am dying, what good will the birthright do for me!" Even Eisav knows this is nonsense as he says it, but every one of us has been in Eisav's shoes and can understand his thoughtlessness. [You just started a diet -- green vegetables and tofu -- and some evil tempter offers you ice cream cake. In a flash, your creative faculties proffer ten arguments to justify 'making an exception this time.' A moment's rational thought would shatter the arguments, but with the food right there, the strength of the arguments becomes irrelevant.]

Given Eisav's personality, it does seem wrong for Ya'akov to offer this deal to him. Ya'akov must know that Eisav is a live-for-the-moment kind of person. In fact, that seems to be precisely why he offers Eisav this deal, for who but someone like Eisav would even contemplate Ya'akov's offer? Ya'akov's salesmanship, then, seems underhanded.

Neither brother comes out of this story looking very sympathetic: Ya'akov has gotten the better half of a less-than-fair deal, and Eisav has demonstrated irresponsible impulsiveness. As we go on, we will see that both brothers continue to display these qualities.

RIVKA'S SCHEME:

Rivka commands Ya'akov to do something dishonest: to take advantage of his father Yitzhak's blindness to trick him into blessing him with the blessing meant for Eisav, Yitzhak's favorite. Why doesn't Rivka try to speak to Yitzhak instead of advising Ya'akov to deceive him; more troubling, what justifies the lie she places in Ya'akov's mouth? And is it right for Ya'akov to obey her instructions?

When Rivka was pregnant with Ya'akov and Eisav and felt the two fetuses jumping around inside her, she was worried and consulted Hashem. She was told that two nations were struggling within her, but that "rav ya'avod tza'ir," the elder would serve the younger. Now, to her chagrin, she sees that Yitzhak is planning to give the berakha (blessing) of family leadership to Eisav -- the wrong son, according to what she had been told during her turbulent pregnancy -- so she decides to 'correct' the mistake.

This raises another question: why doesn't Rivka correct the mistake the easy way, by just telling her husband about her prophetic pregnancy? It's not clear, but maybe the next answer to our first question -- what motivates Rivka to plan this trickery -- will answer this as well.

Rivka prefers Ya'akov to Eisav, the Torah tells us, and Yitzhak prefers Eisav; there is a deep conflict between the parents over their affection for their children. This conflict might not be explicit, as Yitzhak and Rivka do not necessarily state which son they each prefer, but people have many ways of communicating their preferences and understanding the unspoken preferences of others. Rivka must have seen Yitzhak often giving preferential treatment to Eisav, so she understands that Yitzhak prefers his elder son. And Yitzhak probably understands the same about Rivka's feelings for Ya'akov. In this context, Rivka may suspect that Yitzhak will not believe her if she tells him of her prophecy that Ya'akov, the younger, will rule over his older brother; Yitzhak might think she is only trying to promote her favorite son. Since she cannot be open with her husband, she feels compelled to trick him in order to follow the prophecy she has received.

"YES, MOTHER":

But does Ya'akov do the right thing in executing his mother's instructions? Why, after all, does he agree to her plan? Perhaps because:

a) . . . his mother commands him to do it; he obeys her without thinking. (This seems unlikely because he does indeed question his mother -- not about whether tricking his father is the right thing to do, but whether it will work -- so he is not blindly obedient.)

b) . . . he knows that his mother has received the prophecy of "rav ya'avod tza'ir," and he sees that since his father prefers Eisav, he himself will never get his father's blessing, never become head of the household, and never rule over his brother. So the only way to make sure that the prophecy comes true is to do something dishonest.

c) . . . he has bought the birthright from Eisav, and one of the privileges of the birthright is that the son who has it receives his father's blessing of riches, along with assuming the leadership of the rest of the family. If so, why does Ya'akov need to trick his father in order to get the berakha? Why not go directly to Yitzhak and tell him straight out that he deserves the berakha because he bought it from Eisav? Well, put yourself in Ya'akov's place: imagine you have taken advantage of your foolishly impulsive brother and gotten him to agree to a ridiculous deal because you know he looks only at what's in front of him and doesn't really plan much for the distant future. How would you feel about going to your dad and telling him about it? "Well, dad, the berakha is really mine because I bought it from Eisav for, uh, well, for some stew." What would your dad think of you and the deal you made? Ya'akov feels he deserves Eisav's blessing since he has bought the privileges of firstborn from Eisav, but he cannot simply tell the story of the sale to his father. Yitzhak would be aghast at Ya'akov's behavior, or worse, he would nullify the deal on the grounds that Ya'akov had taken unfair advantage.

Whatever Ya'akov's reason for doing it, it is difficult to justify his lying and tricking Yitzhak based on any of the above rationales:

Rationale "a": [This possibility was questioned as unlikely in its own right, see above.]

Rationale "b": The Lord can figure out just fine how to make His plan work out, thank you very much! No one has an excuse to break a moral rule in order to take care of Hashem's plan unless they receive a direct command to do so (as in the case of the Akeida, the near-sacrifice of Yitzhak by Avraham). Rivka is never instructed to lift a finger in order to make sure that "rav ya'avod tza'ir." When Hashem wants help, He asks for it. Otherwise, no one is above the law.

Rationale "c": Lying to hide something you've done which would embarrass you is a tough one to justify!

WHAT DO YOU SEE IN HIM, YITZHAK?

The Torah observes without comment or explanation that Yitzhak prefers Eisav over Ya'akov. What is it about Eisav that Yitzhak admires, or which attracts him? What is it that Ya'akov is lacking, that Eisav has? Has Yitzhak been blinded, or has he blinded himself, to Eisav's faults? Doesn't he know that his elder son is the kind of person who will trade the birthright for a bowl of soup? How do we understand his preference for Eisav?

Let's hold these questions for a moment and combine them with the following related questions:

Once Ya'akov has tricked Yitzhak into blessing him with the blessings of the firstborn, and Yitzhak realizes what has happened, he seems very angry with Ya'akov for lying to him and deceiving him. If so, why does he give Ya'akov *another* berakha soon afterward, just before Ya'akov's flight to Haran?! And even if, for some reason, Yitzhak is not angry, what need is there to give Ya'akov a second berakha, if he has already received one through the deception he has just carried out?

Let's first look at Yitzhak's preference for Eisav. The Torah says that Yitzhak prefers Eisav because "tzayyid be-fiv" -- "hunting was in his mouth." Whose mouth is this hunting in? The possibilities:

1) Hunting is in *Yitzhak's* mouth: he likes Eisav best because Eisav brings him all kinds of exotic game to eat! Of course, this interpretation makes Yitzhak seem pretty superficial. Can food really be so important to Yitzhak that he is ready to pass the leadership role to Eisav because Eisav is the best game-catcher and chef? "My kingdom for some good venison"?

2) Hunting is in *Eisav's* mouth: Yitzhak likes Eisav because hunting is instinctive for Eisav; it is a part of him. Later on, in Parashat Nitzavim (in Sefer Devarim), we see this word, "be-fiv," used to mean that something is an integral part of someone's personality or part of his most basic characteristics. In that context, Moshe is winding down his 'pep talk' to Bnei Yisrael, encouraging them to keep the Torah. Lest they despair of their ability to understand and keep the Torah, Moshe urges them to be strong, insisting that "*BE-FIKHA* u-bi-lvavkha la-asoto" -- "It is IN YOUR MOUTH and in your heart to do it." Hunting is in Eisav's "mouth" as observance of the mitzvot of the Torah is in Bnei Yisrael's "mouth."

This second possibility seems intriguing, but how does it explain why Yitzhak prefers Eisav? Let's look a little further at the evidence about Yitzhak's admiration for Eisav, reading the section where Yitzhak, feeling death approaching, instructs Eisav to hunt and prepare food for him. After Eisav presents Yitzhak with this meal, Yitzhak will give Eisav his berakha.

Yitzhak instructs Eisav to "lift your weapons" -- "your quiver and arrows" - and to "go out and hunt game," and prepare the meat for him as he likes it, "so that my sould shall bless you before I die."

Now, if Yitzhak simply wants a good meal, i.e., if the reason he loves Eisav is because Eisav places hunting "in his mouth" quite literally, he really could have left out many of these elements:
1) "tzayyid" - Yitzhak seems to want specifically something hunted; an animal from the sheep-pen will not do, it seems.

2) "keilekha" -- "your weapons" -- "telyekha ve-kashtekha" -- "your quiver and bow." Now, Eisav certainly knows how to hunt and which weapons to take. Why does Yitzhak specify that Eisav should take weapons, even specifying *which* weapons?

Does Yitzhak just want a good meal so he can feel thankful to Eisav for filling his belly and then give him the berakha . . . or is there some more substantial reason why he wants Eisav to use his weapons and hunt something in order to qualify for the berakha?

Let us look a bit further, at the scene where Ya'akov is dressed up in Eisav's clothing. His father asks him to come close, and then Yitzhak smells him to see if he smells like Eisav. When he smells the clothes of Eisav, how does he characterize the smell? "Re'ah beni ke-re'ah SADEH ASHER BERKHO HASHEM" -- "The smell of my son is like the smell of the field, which God has blessed." He smells of the field, the outdoors, which Yitzhak sees as divinely blessed!

What does all this add up to?

Yitzhak seems fascinated by Eisav as a man of trained, channeled aggressive action. He admires Eisav as someone for whom hunting is natural -- "be-fiv." He takes particular pleasure in the weapons Eisav knows how to use, even in the smell of the field, the arena where Eisav is master. Yitzhak doesn't want just any food, he wants *hunted* food to inspire him to transfer the berakhot to Eisav. Why? What does trained and channeled aggression -- hunting skill -- have to do with blessings? To answer this, we need to look at the blessings themselves:

"May Hashem give you from the dew of the heavens and the fat of the land, and much grain and wine. Nations shall serve you, and countries bow to you; be master to your brother, and may the sons of your mother bow to you . . . ."

These are berakhot of physical plenty, leadership, and power. Eisav, master of the physical environment, skilled with weapons, trained to wield power, has exactly the leadership skills necessary to receive these berakhot. His trained aggression can be channeled into controlling the power of leadership and will guarantee the safety and survival of the whole family in a hostile environment. Yitzhak has not been fooled about Eisav's leadership qualities -- Eisav really does have them.

Ya'akov, on the other hand, is the "ish tam," the tent-dweller, who avoids engaging the world and prefers to tend his sheep off by himself. Yitzhak looks at him and knows he may not be able to depend on Ya'akov's ability to confront the family's enemies and its challenges. Instead of facing his challenges, he will try to avoid them. Yitzhak is attracted to Eisav and his face-to-face approach to his challenges.

Yitzhak knows that Eisav is a bit impulsive, that he doesn't always think through his decisions. He knows that Eisav's strength is also his weakness, that his courage in facing his challenges face-to-face also means that he may find it difficult to face a challenge which is not right in front of his face. Eisav is undone by subtlety, his brother's specialty. But Yitzhak doesn't really appreciate the degree of Eisav's shortsightedness and poor judgment until after he discovers Ya'akov's theft of Eisav's blessing. To appreciate this, we need to look at the conversation between Yitzhak and Eisav after Ya'akov has stolen the berakha. Raising his voice bitterly in tearful, anguished complaint, Eisav pauses to curse the subtle Ya'akov: "Is his name indeed 'Ya'akov' [literally, 'heel' or 'trickster']?! He has tricked me ["va-ye-akveini," a play on "Ya'akov"] now twice -- he took my birthright, and now he took my blessings!"

Eisav shoots his mouth off just a little more than he should! Until now, Yitzhak had thought of Eisav as a strong leader, a person of courage who confronts his challenges, if perhaps also a bit hasty, a little impulsive. But now Yitzhak knows about the sale of the bekhora, the sale where Eisav agreed to sell his leadership rights for a bowl of soup when he was hungry! Suddenly, Yitzhak realizes that he has been deeply mistaken about Eisav. No one with real leadership instinct would ever have sold the bekhora, the leadership of the family . . . not for *anything,* and certainly not for a bowl of soup! A person who would do that is a person with little understanding of leadership at all. Suddenly, Yitzhak sees that all the leadership he thought he saw in Eisav was really just aggression; all the courage he saw was really just thoughtless incaution.

A RELUCTANT CHANGE OF HEART:

This brings us to our next question: Why is Yitzhak, who has just been the victim of Ya'akov's deception, willing to give Ya'akov *another* berakha at the end of the parasha? And since Ya'akov has already received a berakha from Yitzhak, why does he need another one?

Let's add another question: we saw that when Eisav shows up and realizes that Ya'akov has stolen his berakha, he becomes distraught. He begs his father to bless him, too; in fact, he begs three times. Yitzhak insists that he has no blessings left, but in the end he gives Eisav a watered-down version of the same berakha he had given to Ya'akov just before. The problem is that Yitzhak does *indeed* have another berakha besides the one he gave to Ya'akov: he still has the berakha which he is going to give to Ya'akov at the end of the parasha. If he has another berakha, why doesn't he give it to Eisav?

To understand the questions surrounding this last berakha, we have to take a look at the berakha itself:

BERESHIT 28:3-4 --
"May Hashem bless you and increase you . . . you shall become a throng of nations. May He give to you the blessing of Avraham your father, to you and your children with you, that you shall inherit the Land in which you dwell, which Hashem gave to Avraham."

How does this compare to the berakhot that Yitzhak had given earlier in the parasha?

This latter berakha is the Birkat Avraham, the promise of the holy land and the promise that Ya'akov will become "a throng of nations." Unlike the berakha meant for Eisav, this is not a berakha of physical wealth or political leadership; this berakha transforms its recipient

into the spiritual heir of Avraham, into the one who will inherit the holy land and found the nation which will have a special relationship with Hashem.

It is now clear why Ya'akov gets this berakha even though he has already gotten a berakha -- the two blessings are as different as can be! The previous berakha was for physical success and temporal leadership, while this berakha grants spiritual leadership.
But isn't Yitzhak still angry at Ya'akov for lying and stealing the previous berakha? How can he be willing to bless Ya'akov (especially as a spiritual leader!) after being tricked by him? And why isn't Yitzhak willing to give this blessing to poor Eisav when Eisav plaintively begs for a blessing? Why does Yitzhak make it seem that he has nothing left to offer to Eisav?

Things are a lot more complex than we thought when we started! We sometimes like to think of characters in the Humash as simple -- he's one of the good guys, he's one of the bad guys. But in our real lives, the people are not simple at all. No one is all good or all evil. The same is true of the Humash, but some of us have been trained to think of the characters of the Humash in simplistic terms.

At the end of his life, Yitzhak faces the reality that neither of his sons is perfect. Eisav has shown that he doesn't have much leadership potential, while Ya'akov has shown that he is less than completely honest. But Yitzhak does have to pass spiritual leadership, the Blessing of Avraham, to someone. He doesn't have any perfect choices: each candidate has serious weaknesses. Ya'akov seems to understand the value of leadership and makes efforts to achieve it, but he has been dishonest. Yitzhak does not know about Eisav's plan to murder Ya'akov, which is nicely in line with Eisav's impulsive, judgment-free nature (he's hungry, he sells the birthright; he's angry, he murders his opponent), but Yitzhak has seen enough to make him even more uncomfortable with Eisav than he is with Ya'akov. Yitzhak does not know what to do. To whom should he give the spiritual leadership of the future nation? Who should get the final berakha? He doesn't know, so he delays by giving Eisav a watered-down version of the physical berakha.

RIVKA SAVES THE DAY:

But then one other element enters the scene and convinces Yitzhak that Ya'akov is his man. This element is supplied by the crafty Rivka.

She knows that Yitzhak still hasn't given anyone the Birkat Avraham, the mantle of spiritual leadership. And she wants Ya'akov to get it. So instead of telling Yitzhak that Eisav is a bum and that he is planning to murder Ya'akov, she does a very sly thing: she pretends to be concerned that Ya'akov will marry one of the local Hittite women, who are clearly evil characters in the Torah's view. (The Hittites are among the Cana'anite nations which the Torah says live lives of abomination and idol worship; they are the people from whom Avraham insisted that a wife not be taken for Yitzhak. In other words, they stand for everything immoral and evil that the morality and monotheism of the Torah come to challenge.) Now, let us remember -- who is it who has already married *two* of these Hittite women? Eisav, of course! And remember that Yitzhak and Rivka, the Torah says, found these women "a bitterness of spirit."

What Rivka is really doing at this crucial moment by accenting her fear that Ya'akov might take a Hittite wife is subtly reminding Yitzhak that his favorite son Eisav is not worthy of spiritual leadership at all. He has married women from a culture which will in time reach such depths of evil that Hashem will consider it nation worthy of destruction at the hands of the Bnei Yisrael as they emerge from Egypt and conquer Israel. This son is simply not an option as a spiritual leader; his marital choices have already spoken volumes for his future as a spiritual leader. In this context, the only choice left is Ya'akov. On the one hand, he has not done much to show that he can be a spiritual leader. And he has been dishonest. But Yitzhak has no better choice, so he chooses Ya'akov.

We will see as we follow Ya'akov through his development that Yitzhak was right. As Ya'akov grows, he proves himself worthy of the spiritual blessings.

[It is also worth noticing that Eisav suddenly wakes up at this point and sees that Ya'akov has been commanded not to marry a native (Cana'anite) woman, and that Ya'akov has therefore received the birkat Avraham. It is too late for him, but Eisav still tries to show he is worthy by taking one of Yishmael's daughters (i.e., a non-Cana'anite woman) as a wife!]

Shabbat Shalom