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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 more than 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 archives.

Hersh ben Perel Chana, cousin of very close friends of ours, has been confirmed as one of approximately 240 hostages to Hamas in Gaza. The Wall St. Journal featured Hersh and his family in a front page article on October 16. Chabad, OU, and many synagogues recommend psalms (Tehillim) to recite daily for the safety of our people. May our people in Israel wipe out the evil of Hamas, protect us from violence by anti-Semites around the world, and restore peace for our people quickly and successfully – with the help of Hashem.

Aviv and Liat Atzili, and their three children, are among the hostages from Kibbutz Nir Oz, abducted on October 7. Aviv ben Telma is the father. I do not have the other Hebrew names. Please include them in prayers for safe return of hostages.

Since the cruel attack of Hamas on our people five weeks ago, the focus of my remarks each week has been on evil and hatred of Jews in each Torah portion. I had already decided to focus on Yitzhak's experiences with the Philistines, very similar to those of Avraham a generation earlier, as a prime example of early anti-Semitism and evil – a preview of the hatred of Hamas and other Arabs in the countries surrounding Israel. Then I read Rabbi Jonathan Sacks' Dvar Torah on Toldot from five years ago (reprinted several pages below). Rabbi Sacks makes this connection, with extensive documentation, better than anyone else. He follows the hatred of Jews to Paro in Egypt, the world of the pogroms in Russia and surrounding countries, Dreyfus in France, and Hitler. If he were alive today, Rabbi Sacks would certainly add Hamas. We Jews find it difficult to comprehend how so few people (14 million Jews in the world) can be the focus of so much hate by the billions of non-Jews in the world.

Since October 7, anti-Semitic incidents have exploded in number all over the world. The Los Angeles Times reported on November 16 that police have arrested and charged a computer science professor at Moorpark College (Ventura County) with involuntary manslaughter after eye witnesses saw him strike a local man (who subsequently died) during a protest. In addition to striking and causing the death of an older man, the Arab professor posted frequent anti-Semitic statements on social media. The Washington Post the same day carried a story about a Bethesda, MD middle school teacher of diversity and world studies who is apparently under investigation and on paid leave after numerous protests from parents for actively posting about the Israel-Gaza situation on social media. This teacher's writings deny that Hamas or Gaza citizens have burned babies, violated women, or attacked people at a music festival in Israel. She also alleges that Palestinians are being killed and that their organs are being sold (presumably implying that Israel is behind these crimes). The west valley (Los Angeles and Ventura counties) and Bethesda, MD are both heavily Jewish neighborhoods where hatred of Jews would normally not be expected.

Turning more to the parsha, Rabbi David Fohrman reports the reaction of his son (then five years old) to hearing the story of Yaakov and Esav with respect to the birthright (and the same later with respect to Yaakov pretending to be Esav to obtain his father's bracha.) His son asked whether Yaakov (or Esav) was a good guy or a bad guy. I suspect that many of us find Yaakov's behavior troubling. Are we to emulate a man who deceives his brother and father to obtain what he wants? Going back to Rabbi Fohrman's son's question, the correct answer could be "Yes," "no," or "maybe." During the time when both boys live at home, both sons have aspects of good, bad, and inconsistent qualities. Rabbi Haggai Resnikoff follows stories about Esav in the Midrash and shows that he is not all bad – especially that he is a prime example of a man showing love and honor to his father. Beth Lesch, a writer for alephbeta.org, closely follows the text of the Torah and shows that Esav works hard as an adult to reform his personality, to marry a granddaughter of Avraham, and to repair relations with his brother. Esav starts by treating his brother as his enemy, but the adult Esav turns out to be a much better person.

While Esav reforms as an adult, the same is not true of his descendants. One grandson is Amalek – one whose legacy is hating Jews over generations and attacking the weak and unprotected among our people. Is there a better description of Hamas? (However, Hamas is an Arab group, thus related to Ishmael rather than Esav.) Another descendant of Esav is Edom (later Rome), another group who went out of their way to attack Jews. How might one generalize Esav's descendants? My attempt is to say that the seeds of anti-Semitism are there, and these tendencies erupt from time to time. We see these eruptions many times over history, and the eruptions have become more and more frequent in the past few decades.

In one day, I found two ugly examples of anti-Semitic hatred involving teachers – one in my home town (Los Angeles) and the other six miles from my adult home. There are similar stories from the past few weeks all over the world, including New York City (home to 1.6 million Jews), Brandeis University, UCLA, and many others. Growing up and through graduate school, I cannot identify any anti-Semitic incidents that touched me. This hatred is all over and in the open today. According to the Torah, our enemies will always be at our gates even while we control the land that Hashem gave to us. While we can wish for better, is that realistic?

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

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 and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Hersh ben Perel Chana (Hersh Polin, hostage to terrorists in Gaza); Eliezer Tzvi ben Etta (Givati infantry brigade, lead IDF force in Gaza); Aviv ben Telma (and family, hostages in Gaza);Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Arye Don ben Tzivia, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Rena bat Ilsa, Leah bas Gussie Tovah, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,

Toldos: The Worst from the Best

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5765

> *The children (yisrotzatzu) agitated within her, and she said, "If so, why is this to me?" And she went to inquire of HASHEM.* (Breishis 25:22)
>
> *Agitated: Our sages learned that this is an expression of running (rotz). When Rivkah passed the house of Torah of Shem and Eber, Yaakov ran and struggled to go out, and when she passed by a house of idolatry Essau ran to break out.* (Rashi)

Poor Essau had the cards of life stacked against him. From the early moments of his existence in this world, even from within the womb, he had a predisposition for the wrong things. It's no wonder he became an infamous personality, a poster child for corruption. Was it his fault? On the surface it seems as if he was set up for failure, while Yaakov was predestined for success. Why should he be heralded as a hero? Where in this equation is there room for free will? Where is the fairness of the system?

Psychologist and parents too debate, "Which is the dominant force that shapes our personalities -- 'nature' or 'nurture'?" Nature is the stuff we enter the world with and nurture is what the world around us does to us. Essau had a coarse personality, naturally, but who in life ever had a more envious spiritual environment? Look who he had for parents: Yitzchok and Rivkah! See who his grandfather was for the first almost thirteen years of his life: Avraham! His brother was Yaakov. He was surrounded by the three patriarchs of the Jewish Nation and his mother was one of the four famous Matriarchs! Wow!

What went wrong? Maybe he was irredeemably wicked! The Rambam writes in the Laws of Teshuvah that although many things in a person's life are determined, whether or not a person will be righteous or wicked is entirely up to that individual. The Vilna Gaon is quoted in Evan Shleima, "A man should not go completely against his nature even if it is bad, for he will not succeed. He should merely train himself to follow the straight path according to his nature. For example: Someone who has an inclination to spill blood should train himself to be a ritual slaughterer or a mohel." Our Sages say, "One who is greater than his friend has a greater inclination for evil" (Sukkah 52). It is worth contemplating how great Essau might have become had he sublimated all that brute force and genius.

The third and most crucial factor that makes the man is the man himself. Hillel used to say, "If I am not for me, who will be for me?" Rabbeinu Yona explains that a person is ultimately responsible for himself. If I don't produce me who will? If I don't inspire myself who else can? I can have the greatest parents and teachers in the universe and still remain deaf to their message if I choose.

Yaakov had a good nature and a rich spiritual surrounding. He sure looks set up for success! Where was his challenge? Who did he have for a brother? He was parked in proximity to one of the master deceivers of all time, yet he managed to remain good and not become corrupted by his influence.

Maybe now we can estimate what was going on in Yitzchok's mind when he said, "The voice is the voice of Yaakov and the hands are the hands of Essau!"(Breishis 27:22) He was getting a mixed message. Who did he think it was standing before him? He was hopeful to the very end that Essau would adjust, his tone would soften, and that his heart might accept what his head had always known. It was less likely that Yaakov would change his appearance and it was desirable if not probable that Essau would finally make him self a worthy candidate.

Avraham grew up in the worst environment and found his way to HASHEM! Adam was put in an ideal place and invited ruin. All depends upon choice. Some make the best of a bad situation. Others manage to make the worst from the best.

https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5765-toldos/

Toldot 5784

by Rabbi Haggai Resnikoff
Rebbe and Director of Community Learning, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah.

As political and social discourse have become increasingly polarized across the world over the last several years, I have become polarized myself. Certain buzzwords will trigger an anger response in me, to the point where I find it impossible to trust in the goodwill or joint interests of people who, unapologetically, hold a position that is different from mine. The tragedy of Simchat Torah this year and the war in Israel that has followed it, have only increased the number of issues that make me shut down, shut out, and shut off any position that challenges (read threatens) my own. This polarization of my personal discourse is not a positive or even a neutral development. It is clear to me that it is a failing that must be rectified. Yet, I don't feel motivated to take steps to correct myself. I suspect that this conundrum may resonate with other people.

The Rabbis despise Esau. They despise him as a character and as a stand-in for their oppressors, the Roman army and government. A survey of the sixty fifth chapter of Bereshit Raba, which deals parashat Toldot, reveals the following midrashim:

> *After living a life of unbridled licentiousness, Esau's marries at 40, seeking to emulate his righteous father* (to a woman named Yehudit, no less)*. The Rabbis compare this to a pig who, while wallowing in filth, extends its cleft hooves, as if to say, 'Look! I'm kosher!'*
>
> *God makes Isaac go blind so that he will be spared from walking out in public and hearing people say, 'There goes the father of that Rasha.'*
>
> *Isaac may refer to Esau as his "greater son" (b'no hagadol) but God knows that Esau and the nations spawned by him are nothing more than the "least of nations."*

In the midst of this flurry of criticism and disgust, a midrash appears that treats Esau differently (65:15):

> *Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said: I attended my father all my days, and I did not attend him one one-hundredth of what Esau attended his father. When I would attend my father, I attended him with dirty garments, but when I would go out on the road, I would go out with clean garments. But Esau, when he would attend his father, he would attend him only with royal garments. He said: 'It is not in keeping with Father's honor to attend him in anything other than royal garments.'*

Without pause, the Rabbis then return immediately to a criticism of Esau's wives.

What does it mean to discover that in the midst of our disagreement on our most basic values, we find that we have something in common. Esau honored his father. Romans honor their parents. We could trivialize this single redeeming quality: *"Esau might have honored his father but it doesn't change his essential character."* It doesn't seem that the Rabbis take this tack. In the Talmudic discussion of honoring one's parents (Kiddushin 31a) they tell the following story:

> *How far must one go to fulfill the mitzva of honoring one's father and mother? Rav Ulla said to them: Go and see what one gentile did in Ashkelon, and his name was Dama ben Netina. Once the Sages sought to purchase merchandise [perakmatya] from him for six hundred thousand gold dinars' profit, but the key for the container in which the merchandise was kept was placed under*

his father's head, and he was sleeping at the time. And Dama ben Netina would not disturb his father by waking him, although he could have made a substantial profit.

The Rabbis actually make the Romans their models for best practices in honoring one's parents.

Is this enough to end the polarization that I feel whenever I encounter people who disagree with me on certain key issues in American and Israeli politics? Is finding a common value enough to let me see through my fear and rage to the human being behind the opinion? It doesn't seem to have been enough for the Rabbis. Their distrust and disgust of Esau and the Romans never dissipates, despite having acknowledged the excellence of the Roman parental honor.

I think, though, that it might be enough for me. I feel less angry and distrustful of Esau having seen that he, like I, value his father. I feel motivated to think about his character is a different, more generous way. I don't know how far that extends towards my feelings about the Romans. But maybe step by step is the way forward. First recognize shared values with people I disagree with, even about the most fundamental things. Next, allow that recognition to motivate me to open lines of communication. Once I can see some common ground, maybe I can work towards appreciating larger groups as well. Maybe that's the way out.

https://library.yctorah.org/2023/11/toldot5784/

The Plight of Rebecca: Thoughts for Parashat Toledot

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

"And Isaac sent away Jacob; and he went to Paddan-aram to Laban, son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebeccah, mother of Jacob and Esau" (Bereishith 28:5).

The verse identifies Rebeccah as mother of Jacob and Esau, a fact we already knew. The great commentator, Rashi, is puzzled by the redundancy and writes: *"I don't know what this teaches us."* Many have noted the intellectual honesty and humility of Rashi to publicly record that he didn't understand a phrase in the Torah. He didn't have to make any comment at all; after all, he didn't comment on many passages in the Torah.

It is intriguing to try to come up with an explanation for why the Torah once again reports that Rebeccah is the mother of Jacob and Esau. Rabbi Eliyahu Benamozegh, in his commentary Eim LeMikra, (cited by Nehama Leibowitz in her commentary) suggests that this passage is connected to a previous verse in which Rebeccah expresses fear lest Esau murder Jacob, *"why should I be bereaved of both of you in one day?"* Rabbi Benamozegh explains that she feared that the two brothers would fight, one murdering the other. She then would be bereaved of both: the murdered son is dead, and the murderer son would become hateful in her eyes. The Torah reminds us: she is the mother of both of them, she is concerned about both of them.

Interestingly, the problematic passage refers to Rebeccah as mother of Jacob and Esau…putting Jacob first even though he was the younger son. If we look at the literary structure of the entire Torah portion, we find a poignant circular pattern. Here is part one, at the beginning of the Parasha:

Rebeccah is childless

She gives birth to twins, Esau is first born

Jacob is second born

But in part two, at the end of the Torah portion, the details are reversed:

Jacob is listed first

Esau is listed second

Rebeccah is "childless" again

Rebeccah's son Jacob leaves home and she has no clear expectation of when, if ever, she will ever see him again. But she not only has lost Jacob's presence, she also has totally alienated herself from Esau. He certainly realizes that she conspired to get Isaac's blessing transferred to Jacob rather than to him. Rebeccah's relationship with Esau is irreparably damaged, exacerbated by the fact that Esau took wives who caused her (and Isaac) much bitterness.

According to this analysis, the Torah reminds us that Rebeccah is mother of both Jacob and Esau, but that she is now "childless" again. She is a mother isolated from her favored son, Jacob, but also from Esau. She is very much alone. Isaac is an old, blind man who had preferred Esau to Jacob and whose wife deceived him into blessing Jacob instead of Esau. Rebeccah fades away; we hear no more about her after this story.

The Torah presents a sad story of a troubled family…parental favoritism, sibling rivalry, marital discord, deception, lack of communication. These negative examples are vivid reminders to us of problematic behaviors that we should avoid.

The Torah often teaches by overt prescription and commandment. But it also teaches by presenting problematic individuals and circumstances. In this week's Parasha, the Torah's literary imagery speaks louder than words.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. Please share this Angel for Shabbat column with your family and friends, and please visit our website jewishideas.org for many articles that foster an intellectually vibrant, compassionate and inclusive Orthodox Judaism.

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https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3182

Thoughts on the Teachings of Martin Buber

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Martin Buber (1878-1965), born in Vienna, was one of the great Jewish philosophers of his time. In 1938, with the rise of Nazism, Buber relocated to Jerusalem, where he became a brilliant Israeli voice for a wiser and more understanding humanity.

In his famous book, *I and Thou*, Buber pointed out that human relationships, at their best, involve mutual knowledge and respect, treating self and others as valuable human beings. An I-Thou relationship is based on understanding, sympathy, love. Its goal is to experience the "other" as a meaningful and valuable person. In contrast, an I-It relationship treats the "other" as an object to be manipulated, controlled, or exploited. If I-Thou relationships are based on mutuality, I-It relationships are based on the desire to gain functional benefit from the other.

Buber wrote: *"When a culture is no longer centered in a living and continually renewed relational process, it freezes into the It-world, which is broken only intermittently by the eruptive, glowing deeds of solitary spirits" (I and Thou,* p. 103). As

we dehumanize others, we also engage in the process of dehumanizing ourselves. We make our peace with living in an It-world, using others as things, and in turn being used by them for their purposes.

The line between I-Thou and I-It relationships is not always clear. Sometimes, people appear to be our friends, solicitous of our well-being; yet, their real goal is to manipulate us into buying their product, accepting their viewpoint, controlling us in various ways. Their goal isn't mutual friendship and understanding; rather, they want to exert power and control, and they feign friendship as a tactic to achieve their goals.

Dehumanization is poisonous to proper human interactions and relationships. It is not only destructive to the victim, but equally or even more destructive to the one who does the dehumanizing. The dehumanizer becomes blinded by egotism and power-grabbing at any cost. Such a person may appear "successful" based on superficial standards but is really an immense failure as a human being.

I-It relationships are based on functionality. Once the function no longer yields results, the relationship breaks. I-Thou relationships are based on human understanding, loyalty and love. These relationships are the great joy of life. Buber is fully cognizant of the fact that human beings live with I-Thou and I-It realities. *"No human being is pure person, and none is pure ego; none is entirely actual, none entirely lacking in actuality. Each lives in a twofold I. But some men are so person-oriented that one may call them persons, while others are so ego-oriented that one may call them egos. Between these and those true history takes place"* (Ibid., p. 114).

Buber speaks of another relationship beyond I-Thou and I-It: the I-Eternal Thou. Human beings not only stand in relationship to each other, but to God. *"One does not find God if one remains in the world; one does not find God if one leaves the world. Whoever goes forth to his You with his whole being and carries to it all the being of the world, finds him whom one cannot seek. Of course, God is the mysterium tremendum that appears and overwhelms; but he is also the mystery of the obvious that is closer to me than my own I"* (Ibid., p. 127).

Buber views the relationship with God as a human yearning, an imperfect search for ultimate Perfection. Faith is a process; it fluctuates; it is not something that, once attained, can be safely deposited in the back of one's mind. "Woe unto the possessed who fancy that they possess God!" (Ibid., p. 155). Elsewhere, Buber elaborates on this point: *"All religious expression is only an intimation of its attainment….The meaning is found through the engagement of one's own person; it only reveals itself as one takes part in its revelation" (The Way of Response,* p. 64).

Buber was attracted to the spiritual lessons of the Hassidic masters who refused to draw a line of separation between the sacred and the profane. Religion at its best encompasses all of life and cannot be confined to a temple or set of rituals. *"What is of greatest importance in Hasidism, today as then, is the powerful tendency, preserved in personal as well as in communal existence, to overcome the fundamental separation between the sacred and the profane" (Hasidism and Modern Man,* p. 28). The goal of religion is to make us better, deeper human beings, to be cognizant of the presence of God at all times. *"Man cannot approach the divine by reaching beyond the human; he can approach Him through becoming human. To become human is what he, this individual man, has been created for. This, so it seems to me, is the eternal core of Hasidic life and of Hasidic teaching"* (Ibid., pp. 42-43).

Buber finds inspiration in the Jewish religious tradition. The biblical heroes *"do not dare confine God to a circumscribed space of division of life, to 'religion.' They have not the insolence to draw boundaries around God's commandments and say to Him: 'up to this point, You are sovereign, but beyond these bounds begins the sovereignty of science or society or the state'" (The Way of Response,* p. 68). Israel's genius was not simply in teaching that there is one God, *"but that this God can be addressed by man in reality, that man can say Thou to Him, that he can stand face to face with Him….Only Israel has understood, or rather actually lives, life as being addressed and answering, addressing and receiving answer….It taught, it showed, that the real God is the God who can be addressed because He is the God who addresses"* (Ibid., p. 179).

A central goal of religion is to place a human being in relationship with the Eternal Thou. Yet, Buber notes with disappointment: *"The historical religions have the tendency to become ends in themselves and, as it were, to put*

themselves in God's place, and, in fact, there is nothing that is so apt to obscure the face of God as a religion" (A Believing Humanism, p. 115). The "establishment" has become so engaged in perpetuating its institutional existence that it has lost its central focus on God. *"Real faith…begins when the dictionary is put down, when you are done with it" (The Way of Response,* p. 61). The call of faith must be a call for immediacy. When faith is reduced to a set of formulae and rituals, it moves further from face to face relationship with God.

People are greatly in need of a liberating religious message. We yearn for relationship with our fellow human beings; we reach out for a spiritual direction to the Eternal Thou. Our dialogues are too often superficial, inauthentic. It is not easy to be a strong, whole and self-confident I; it is not easy to relate to others as genuine Thous; it is a challenge to reach out to the Eternal Thou. Yet, without these proper relationships, neither we nor our society can flourish properly.

Buber's writings had a powerful impact on many thousands of readers, including the Swedish diplomat, Dag Hammarskjold (1905-1961), who served as the second Secretary General of the United Nations, from April 1953 until his death in a plane crash in September 1961. These two remarkable men met at the United Nations not long after Buber had given a guest lecture at Princeton University in 1958. Hammarskjold had written to tell Buber *"how strongly I have responded to what you write about our age of distrust."*

Buber described his meeting with the Secretary General of the U.N. where both men shared a deep concern about the future of humanity. Will the nations of the world actually unite in mutual respect and understanding? Or will they sink into a quagmire of antagonisms, political infighting…and ultimately, the possible destruction of humanity through catastrophic wars?

Buber noted: "*We were both pained in the same way by the pseudo-speaking of representatives of states and groups of states who, permeated by a fundamental reciprocal mistrust, talked past one another out the windows. We both hoped, we both believed that….faithful representatives of the people, faithful to their mission, would enter into a genuine dialogue, a genuine dealing with one another out of which would emerge in all clarity the fact that the common interests of the peoples were stronger still than those which kept them in opposition to one another" (A Believing Humanism,* pp. 57-59).

It was this dream that linked Buber and Hammarskjold—a dream that diplomats would focus on the needs of humanity as a whole, and not simply hew to their own self-serving agendas. Indeed, this was the founding dream of the United Nations: to be an organization that would bring together the nations of the world to work in common cause for the greater good of humanity.

In January 1959, Hammarskjold visited Buber in Jerusalem. Again, their conversation focused on the failure of world diplomacy to create an atmosphere of trust and mutual cooperation. There were some steps forward, to be sure; but by and large, the harmony of the nations had not come to pass. "Pseudo-speaking" and "fundamental reciprocal mistrust" continued unabated. The representatives continued to "talk past one another out the windows."

Hammarskjold believed that Buber's teachings on the importance of dialogue needed as wide a following as possible. After Hammarskjold was killed in a plane accident, Buber was informed that the Secretary General of the U. N. was working on a Swedish translation of *I and Thou* on the plane. His last thoughts were about dialogue, mutual understanding, sympathetic interrelationships among human beings.

Hammarskjold died in 1961. Buber died in 1965. Did their dreams for the United Nations and for humanity also die with them? Has the United Nations become a beacon of hope for genuine human dialogue? Do the diplomats work harmoniously for the good of humanity? It would appear that instead of being a bastion of human idealism, the United Nations has become a political battleground where the fires of hatred and bigotry burn brightly.

We justly lament the viciously unfair treatment of Israel at the U.N. We justly deplore the anti-Americanism that festers within the United Nations. But these ugly manifestations of anti-Israel and anti-American venom are symptoms of the real problem: the United Nations has become a central agency for hatred, political maneuvering, and international discord. It

has not lived up to the ideals of its founders; it has betrayed the dreams of Buber and Hammarskjold; it has become a symbol of so much that is wrong in our world.

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

https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3180

Toldos -- Asking a Mentor

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

For many years Yitzchak and Rivka yearned to be parents. It was through them that the legacy of Avraham and Sara would be brought to the next generation. Finally, Rivka became pregnant, but she was very confused.

Rivka yearned that the child she bore would illuminate the world with righteousness. She hoped that he would have a predisposition to all that is good. Indeed, when she passed the Yeshiva of Shem and Eiver she felt movement in utero which she understood to be excitement which the fetus felt. It made sense that the fetus would be excited when they came near a place that represented moral teachings.

Yet, when she passed places of ill repute, she also felt movement in utero, which seemed to indicate an excitement over all that was bad. “Which one is it?” she wondered. She decided to resolve her confusion in the way that would become standard in the lives of her descendants. She decided to pose her question to the sages of her generation.
The response she received surprised her. “You are carrying twins,” she was told. “One has a predisposition for good, the other for evil. This is why you are sensing excitement both when you pass a place of goodness and when you pass a place of evil.”

The approach that Rivka took to resolve her dilemma is an approach that would later be codified in the teachings of Torah both for Halachic questions and for questions of life direction. When in doubt, we don’t just guess. We seek counsel from a mentor who can guide us based on wisdom and life experience.

In a Halachic sense, the Torah guides us to follow the rulings of the sages of our generation. In the time of the Beis Hamikdash, if there was a disagreement between sages it was settled by the Sanhedrin)Devorim 17:8(. The Torah instructs us that a Torah scholar is to be respected; we treasure his wisdom.)Vayikra 19:32(Regarding the wisdom of history and life experience, the Torah states openly, “Ask your father and he will tell you.”)Devorim 32:7(

The Mesilas Yesharim)Chapter 3(illustrates the importance of asking questions by describing the maze garden that used to be common among aristocrats. If a person was in the midst of the maze and was unsure which way to turn to get out, it was only logical that he turn to someone who had reached the platform above the maze and ask for guidance. Someone who had already navigated the maze and could see things clearly from his vantage point above was well suited to give helpful guidance.

Similarly, as we make decisions in life to turn this way or that, it makes sense to check in with someone who has lived a bit longer than we and can assess our decision-making process to make sure that we are prioritizing our values properly.

In Halacha, we can try to do it on our own. But that might lead us to take a more stringent or lenient approach than necessary. A good and caring advisor might well advise us more precisely. If we feel the need for a lenient approach because of a difficult situation, a sensitive advisor might assist us — not simply with a ruling — but in guiding us through a difficult time. Similarly, if we feel that we must be stringent, a wise advisor might assist us in clarifying if such a stringency is warranted and if it is well balanced.

It is common for parents to want to be advisors for their children, but this doesn't always happen. As parents, it is not possible to dictate who our children will choose as mentors. But we can guide them that they should have mentors. The way we raise our children will influence how likely they will be to seek out mentors and how smooth and trusting that relationship will be. If in our own lives we turn to mentors and Rabbis, praising and treasuring their advice, then our children will likely do the same. If, however, we ridicule leadership as we always feel that we know better, then our children will likely learn to do the same.

I am familiar with a Rabbi who was asked to speak to a congregant's wayward son, in the hope that the Rabbi could intervene and bring the son back to proper behavior. The Rabbi replied, "I will certainly try. But you do realize that after years of you criticizing me at your Shabbos table, it is hard to imagine that your son will trust me and value what I have to say."

Personally, I treasure the gift of having had a Rebbe/ mentor every stage of my life. It wasn't always the same person. But the person who served that role in each stage of my life has morphed into one being, known as "Rebbe." It was the person I could turn to to understand what I was dealing with and advise and encourage me through. "Rebbe" was always someone who knew better, and I trusted. It was a person whom I was willing to listen to even if I did not quite agree.

Seeking counsel in law, medicine, accounting, and car or home repair is a normal thing to do. Even if we happen to know a lot about the topic, there are situations where it is wise to consult with someone who is even wiser. This is especially true in how we conduct our lives. When we do seek counsel, we can share with our children the joy and reverence that we feel at the good fortune of having someone we can consult. In this way we emulate Rivka in the earliest generation of our people. When she had a question, she sought counsel from the sages of her generation.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos.

* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are www.care-mediation.com and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

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.

* Savannah Kollel; Congregation B'nai Brith Jacob, Savannah, GA. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer will become Rosh Kollel next year.

Toldot

By Rabbi Herzl Hefter *

]Note: Rabbi Hefter was unable to send me a Dvar Torah this week. As with all Israelis, Rabbi Hefter's first priority is the safety of his family and students in Israel. Please think of the Har-el Beit Midrash for donations during this time of war against our people.[

* Founder and dean of the Har'el Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. Rabbi Hefter is a graduate of Yeshiva University and was ordained at Yeshivat Har Etzion. For more of his writings, see www.har-el.org. To support the Beit Midrash, as we do, send donations to America Friends of Beit Midrash Har'el, 66 Cherry Lane, Teaneck, NJ 07666.

Toldot

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *

]Rabbi Ovadia has spent considerable time recently on missions in Israel for Torah VeAhava. He did not submit a new Dvar Torah for Toldot. Watch this space for further insights from Rabbi Ovadia.[

* Torah VeAhava. Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan)Potomac, MD(and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school(. **New: Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets** . The Sefaria article includes Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

Toldot: Two Jews and Diverse Opinions

by Rabbi Moshe Rube*

The statement, "Two Jews, Three Opinions" probably comes from our Torah portion where we encounter two Jews from the same family with vastly different outlooks and personalities. I speak here of Isaac and Rebecca's children, Jacob and Esau.

Esau is an outdoorsman. He is a hunter, a camper, a tramper, an adventurer and a charismatic people person. A born leader of men who spends every waking moment out in the world. Jacob, though, is a "man of tents." He stays inside in quiet scholarly contemplation whilst doing work in the home.

I cannot imagine the job Isaac and Rebecca must have had trying cater to both of their children. Our portion speaks of the many conflicts which arose between Jacob and Esau over who would inherit the spiritual mantle of the Jewish people. Which son would lead the Jewish people, and which one would be the follower? Since Esau was born first, he would have had the first right to the leadership position as firstborn. However, when Esau was hungry after a day in the fields, Jacob bought the rights to the firstborn for a bowl of lentils. Esau later regretted this sale and blamed Jacob for taking advantage of his hunger.

When Isaac sought to give his main spiritual blessings to Esau, Rebecca told Jacob to dress up as Esau so Isaac would give him the blessing instead as she thought Jacob was the better candidate for the blessing. When Esau found out what Jacob did, Esau sought to kill Jacob forcing Jacob to flee.

Despite all their conflicts, Jacob and Esau make peace in a later Torah portion. Somehow they found a way to get along and live together in peace. Our Sages use the relationship between Esau and Jacob as a metaphor of the relationship between Jews and the rest of the world. Despite all the conflicts between Jews and our fellow nations, we must maintain faith that there will be a time when we find a way to live together in peace and harmony.

Let us pray for that day to come soon.

Shabbat Shalom,
Rabbi Rube

* Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation, Remuera)Auckland(, New Zealand. Formerly Rabbi, Congregation Knesseth Israel)Birmingham, AL(.

Rav Kook Torah
Toldot: Jacob Rescued Abraham

According to an intriguing Midrash)Tanchuma Toldot 4(, Abraham would not have made it out of his hometown of Ur Casdim alive were it not for the intervention of his grandson Jacob. King Nimrod ordered Abraham to be thrown into a fiery furnace because of Abraham's rejection of idolatry. But Jacob came to the rescue, as it says:

> *"So said God to the House of Jacob who redeemed Abraham: Jacob will not be ashamed, nor will his face become pale."*)Isaiah 29:22( ]The simple reading of the verse interprets the phrase "who redeemed Abraham" to refer back to God, not to Jacob.[

Even given the poetic license of Midrashic literature, Jacob could not have literally rescued his grandfather in an incident that took place before Jacob was born. Rather, the Sages wanted to teach us that Abraham was saved due to some special merit or quality his grandson Jacob possessed. What was this quality?

Two Paths of Change

There are two paths of spiritual growth that one may take. The first path is one of sudden, radical change, usually the result of some external catalyst. One example of such a transformation may be found in the story of King Saul. The prophet Samuel informed Saul that he would meet a band of prophets playing musical instruments. This encounter, the prophet told Saul, will be a turning point in your life. *"The spirit of God will suddenly come over you, and you will prophesize with them. And you will be transformed into a different person"*)I Samuel 10:6(.

The second path is one of slow, deliberate growth. We attain this gradual change through our own toil; it does not require an external stimulus and thus is always accessible.

But why are there two different paths of change available to us? If God provided us with two paths, then clearly both are needed. We should first prepare ourselves and advance as much as possible through our own efforts. After we have attained the highest level that we are capable of reaching, we may then benefit from unexpected inspiration from the inner recesses of our soul.

Abraham was a spiritual revolutionary, initiating a revolt against the idolatry of his generation. Abraham is the archetype of radical change. The defining moments of his life were dramatic events of astonishing dedication and self-sacrifice, such as his brit milah)circumcision(at an advanced age, and the Akeidah, the Binding of Isaac. In the merit of Abraham's far-reaching spiritual a his descendants inherited those soul-qualities which foster sudden transformation.

Future generations, however, cannot rely solely on Abraham's style of radical change. As a normative path for all times, we need the method of gradual spiritual growth. The model for this type of change is Jacob. Unlike his grandfather, Jacob never underwent sudden transformations of personality or direction. Rather, the Torah characterizes him as *"a quiet, scholarly man, dwelling in tents"*)Gen. 25:27(. Jacob's place was in the tents of Torah. He worked on himself step by step, growing through perseverance and diligence in Torah study.

Two Names for Jerusalem

The Midrash teaches that the name Jerusalem is a combination of two names, indicating that the holy city possesses qualities represented by both names. Abraham called the city 'Yireh,' while Malki-Tzedek called it 'Shalem.' Not wanting to offend either of these righteous men, God combined both names to naming the city 'Yerushalayim' — "Jerusalem")Breishit Rabbah 56:10(.

What does the name 'Yireh' mean? The holy city, particularly the Temple, had a profound impact on all who experienced its unique sanctity. This profound spiritual encounter is described as a form of sublime perception — *"Your eyes will see*

your Teacher")Isaiah 30:20(. This elevated vision inspired visitors to reach beyond their ordinary spiritual capabilities. Due to the spiritual transformation effected by perceiving Jerusalem's holiness, Abraham named the city 'Yireh' — *"he will see."*

Malki-Tzedek, on the other hand, referred to the city's qualities which assist those who seek to perfect themselves in a gradual fashion. Jerusalem is a place of Torah and ethical teachings, *"For Torah shall go forth from Zion"*)Isaiah 2:3(. Therefore, Malki-Tzedek named the city 'Shalem')perfection(, referring to this incremental approach towards achieving spiritual perfection.

Jacob to the Rescue

Returning to our original question: how did Jacob rescue his grandfather from Nimrod's fiery furnace? In what way will Jacob *"not be ashamed"*?

The Kabbalists explain that the goal of humanity — the reason why the soul is lowered into this world — is so that we may perfect ourselves through our own efforts. This way, we will not need to partake of nehama dekisufa)*the "bread of shame",* a metaphor for benefiting from that which we did not earn.

While this explanation fits the path of gradual change, it would appear that the path of radical transformation is an external gift that we do not deserve. Is this not the undesired nehama dekisufa that we should avoid?

Not necessarily. If we are able to take this unexpected gift and use it to attain even greater levels of spiritual growth through our own efforts, then there is no shame in accepting it. We can compare this to a father who gave his son a large sum of money. If the son simply lives off the money until it is finished, then the father's gift is nehama dekisufa, an embarrassment for the son, reflecting no credit upon him. If, however, the son uses the money to start a new business, and through his efforts doubles and triples the original investment, then the son has certainly pleased his father and brought honor to himself.

This is exactly the way that Jacob *"rescued"* his grandfather Abraham. Left on his own, the most natural path for Abraham — whose revolutionary soul called for sudden, drastic change — would have been to achieve complete and absolute self-sacrifice in Nimrod's fiery furnace. It was Jacob's trait of gradual change that saved Abraham from the fate of martyrdom. Abraham adopted the path of measured spiritual change which his grandson Jacob exemplified. Abraham left the furnace, and over the years worked diligently to attain the spiritual elevation that he had relinquished inside Nimrod's furnace.

Why bother with the slower path? *"Jacob will not be ashamed."* By growing slowly through our own efforts, the spiritual gifts of radical change are no longer an embarrassing nehama dekisufa, but an honorable gift which we have utilized to the fullest.

)Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Midbar Shur, pp. 289-292.(

https://www.ravkooktorah.org/TOLDOT_65.htm

The Courage of Persistence (5779)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.*

There is a strange passage in the life of Isaac, ominous in its foreshadowing of Jewish history. Like Abraham, Isaac finds himself forced by famine to go to Gerar, in the land of the Philistines. There, like Abraham, he senses that his life may be in danger because he is married to a beautiful woman. He fears that he will be killed so that Rebecca can be taken into the harem of King Avimelech. The couple pass themselves off as brother and sister. The deception is discovered,

Avimelech is indignant, explanations are made, and the moment passes. Genesis 26 reads almost like a replay of Genesis 20, a generation later.

In both cases, Avimelech promises the patriarchs security. To Abraham he said, *"My land is before you; live wherever you like"*)Gen. 20:15(. About Isaac, he commands, *"Anyone who molests this man or his wife shall surely be put to death"*)Gen. 26:11(. Yet in both cases, there is a troubled aftermath. In Genesis 21 we read about an argument that arose over a well that Abraham had dug*: "Then Abraham complained to Avimelech about a well of water that Avimelech's servants had seized"*)Gen. 21:25(. The two men make a treaty. Yet, as we now discover, this was not suffIcient to prevent further difficulties in the days of Isaac. Isaac planted crops in that land and the same year reaped a hundredfold, because the Lord blessed him. The man became rich, and his wealth continued to grow until he became very wealthy. He had so many flocks and herds and servants that the Philistines envied him. So all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the time of his father Abraham, the Philistines stopped up, filling them with earth.

Then Avimelech said to Isaac, *"Move away from us; you have become too powerful for us."*

So Isaac moved away from there and encamped in the Valley of Gerar and settled there. Isaac reopened the wells that had been dug in the time of his father Abraham, which the Philistines had stopped up after Abraham died, and he gave them the same names his father had given them.

> Isaac's servants dug in the valley and discovered a well of fresh water there. But the herdsmen of Gerar quarrelled with Isaac's herdsmen and said, *"The water is ours!"* So he named the well Esek, because they disputed with him. Then they dug another well, but they quarrelled over that one also; so he named it Sitnah. He moved on from there and dug another well, and no one quarrelled over it. He named it Rechovot, saying, *"Now the Lord has given us room and we will flourish in the land."* Gen. 26:12–22

There are three aspects of this passage worthy of careful attention. The first is the intimation it gives us of what will later be the turning point of the fate of the Israelites in Egypt. Avimelech says, *"you have become too powerful for us."* Centuries later, Pharaoh says, at the beginning of the book of Exodus, *"Behold, the people of the children of Israel are greater in number and power than we are. Come on, let us deal wisely with them, lest they multiply and it come to pass, when there befall any war, that they join also with our enemies and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land"*)Ex. 1:9–10(. The same word, atzum, "power/ powerful," appears in both cases. Our passage signals the birth of one of the deadliest of human phenomena, antisemitism.

Antisemitism is in some respects unique. It is, in Robert Wistrich's phrase, the world's longest hatred.[1] No other prejudice has lasted so long, mutated so persistently, attracted such demonic myths, or had such devastating effects. But in other respects it is not unique, and we must try to understand it as best we can.

One of the best books about antisemitism, is in fact not about antisemitism at all, but about similar phenomena in other contexts, Amy Chua's *World on Fire.*[2] Her thesis is that any conspicuously successful minority will attract envy that may deepen into hate and provoke violence. All three conditions are essential. The hated group must be conspicuous, for otherwise it would not be singled out. It must be successful, for otherwise it would not be envied. And it must be a minority, for otherwise it would not be attacked.

All three conditions were present in the case of Isaac. He was conspicuous: he was not a Philistine, he was different from the local population as an outsider, a stranger, someone with a different faith. He was successful: his crops had succeeded a hundredfold, his flocks and herds were large, and the people envied him. And he was a minority: a single family in the midst of the local population. All the ingredients were present for the distillation of hostility and hate.

There is more. Another profound insight into the conditions that give rise to antisemitism was given by Hannah Arendt in her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*)the section has been published separately as *Anti-Semitism(*.[3] Hostility to Jews becomes dangerous, she argued, not when Jews are strong, but when they are weak.

This is deeply paradoxical because, on the face of it, the opposite is true. A single thread runs from the Philistines' reaction to Isaac and Pharaoh's to the Israelites, to the myth concocted in the late nineteenth century, known as *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion.4* It says that Jews are powerful, too powerful. They control resources. They are a threat.They must be removed.

Yet, says Arendt, antisemitism did not become dangerous until they had lost the power they had once had:

> *When Hitler came to power, the German banks were already almost Judenrein)and it was here that Jews had held key positions for more than a hundred years(and German Jewry as a whole, after a long steady growth in social status and numbers, was declining so rapidly that statisticians predicted its disappearance in a few decades.5*

The same was true in France:

> *The Dreyfus affair exploded not under the Second Empire, when French Jewry was at the height of its prosperity and influence, but under the Third Republic when Jews had all but vanished from important positions.6*

Antisemitism is a complex, protean phenomenon because antisemites must be able to hold together two beliefs that seem to contradict one another: Jews are so powerful that they should be feared, and at the same time so powerless that they can be attacked without fear.

It would seem that no one could be so irrational as to believe both of these things simultaneously. But emotions are not rational, despite the fact that they are often rationalised, for there is a world of difference between rationality and rationalisation)the attempt to give rational justification for irrational beliefs(.

So, for example, in the twenty-first century we can find that)a(Western media are almost universally hostile to Israel, and)b(otherwise intelligent people claim that the media are controlled by Jews who support Israel: the same inner contradiction of perceived powerlessness and ascribed power.

Arendt summarises her thesis in a single, telling phrase which links her analysis to that of Amy Chua. What gives rise to antisemitism is, she says, the phenomenon of *"wealth without power."* That was precisely the position of Isaac among the Philistines.

There is a second aspect of our passage that has had reverberations through the centuries: the self-destructive nature of hate. The Philistines did not ask Isaac to share his water with them. They did not ask him to teach them how he)and his father(had discovered a source of water that they – residents of the place – had not. They did not even simply ask him to move on. They *"stopped up"* the wells, *"filling them with earth."* This act harmed them more than it harmed Isaac. It robbed them of a resource that would, in any case, have become theirs, once the famine had ended and Isaac had returned home.

More than hate destroys the hated, it destroys the hater. In this case too, Isaac and the Philistines were a portent of what would eventually happen to the Israelites in Egypt. By the time of the plague of locusts, we read:

> *Pharaoh's officials said to him, "How long will this man be a snare to us? Let the people go, so that they may worship the Lord their God. Do you not yet realise that Egypt is ruined?"* Exodus 10:7

In effect they said to Pharaoh: you may think you are harming the Israelites. In fact you are harming us.

Both love and hate, said Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, *"upset the natural order"*)mekalkelet et hashurah(.7 They are irrational. They make us do things we would not do otherwise. In today's Middle East, as so often before, those intent on destroying their enemies end by doing great harm to their own interests, their own people.

Third, Isaac's response remains the correct one today. Defeated once, he tries again. He digs another well; this too yields opposition. So he moves on and tries again, and eventually finds peace.

How fitting it is that the town that today carries the name Isaac gave the site of this third well is the home of the Weizmann Institute of Science, the Faculty of Agriculture of the Hebrew University, and the Kaplan hospital, allied to the Medical School of the Hebrew University. Israel Belkind, one of the founders of the settlement in 1890, called it Rechovot precisely because of the verse in our parsha: *"He named it Rechovot, saying, Now the Lord has given us room and we will flourish in the land."*

Isaac is the least original of the three patriarchs. His life lacks the drama of Abraham or the struggles of Jacob. We see in this passage that Isaac himself did not strive to be original. The text is unusually emphatic on the point: Isaac *"reopened the wells that had been dug in the time of his father Abraham, which the Philistines had stopped up after Abraham died, and he gave them the same names his father had given them."* Normally we strive to individuate ourselves by differentiating ourselves from our parents. We do things differently, or even if we don't, we give them different names. Isaac was not like this. He was content to be a link in the chain of generations, faithful to what his father had started. Isaac represents the faith of persistence, the courage of continuity. He was the first Jewish child, and he represents the single greatest challenge of being a Jewish child: to continue the journey our ancestors began, rather than drifting from it, thereby bringing the journey to an end before it has reached its destination. And Isaac, because of that faith, was able to achieve the most elusive of goals, namely peace – because he never gave up. When one effort failed, he began again. So it is with all great achievements: one part originality, nine parts persistence.

I find it moving that Isaac, who underwent so many trials, from the binding when he was young, to the rivalry between his sons when he was old and blind, carries a name that means, *"He will laugh."* Perhaps the name – given to him by God Himself before Isaac was born – means what the Psalm means when it says, *"Those who sow in tears will reap with joy*")Ps. 126:5(. Faith means the courage to persist through all the setbacks, all the grief, never giving up, never accepting defeat. For at the end, despite the opposition, the envy and the hate, lie the broad spaces, Rechovot, and the laughter, Isaac: the serenity of the destination after the storms along the way.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Robert Wistrich, *Anti-Semitism: The Longest Hatred*)New York: Schocken, 1991(.

2. Amy Chua, *World on Fire: How Exporting Free Market Democracy Breeds Ethnic Hatred and Global Instability*)New York: Anchor Books, 2004(.

3. Hannah Arendt, *Anti-Semitism*)part one of *The Origins of Totalitarianism(*,)Harcourt Brace and Company, 1979(.

4. *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was a forgery, produced by a Russian journalist at the end of the nineteenth century, claiming that there was a Jewish conspiracy to achieve world domination. The classic work on the subject is Norman Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide: The Myth of the Jewish World-Conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*)New York: Harper & Row, 1966(. See also Hadassa Ben-Itto, *The Lie That Wouldn't Die: The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*)London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2005(.

5. Ibid., 4.

6. Ibid., 4–5.

7. Bereishit Rabbah 55:8.

https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/toldot/the-courage-of-persistence/

Why Isaac's Wells Lasted, and Abraham's Did Not

By Aharon Loschak * © Chabad 2023

One of the most popular English language Chassidic songs in the early 80s, sung by Mordechai Ben David, speaks of a Jew who visits the Western Wall for the very first time on a Shabbat evening. It describes the scene:

The Western Wall on Friday night, his first time ever there
Strapped into his knapsack with his long and curly hair
He stood there for a while, then broke out with a smile
Emotion overwhelming joy with tears.

The men were dancing there, their hearts so full of love
They sang such happy tunes to thank the One above
For showing them the way, for giving them the day
To rest, rejoice with peace of mind, to pray.

If you've ever been to the Wall on a Friday night, you know what this is about. There's a sense of ecstatic love for G d that rolls around that open-air plaza, with Jews of every stripe)some of them literally wearing stripes(, their faces beaming with the sanctity and purity of incoming Shabbat. People are swaying in one corner, some are dancing, others are blessing fragrant spices and leaves, while others are deep in study or thought.

The love and joy is so tangible, it's contagious. It is a beautiful scene.

Re-Dug Forever

Curiously, the portion of Vayera tells us about Abraham's efforts to dig wells, and a major part of the narrative about Isaac's life in the portion of Toldot details his excavation projects. One prominent detail in the story of these wells is that the Philistine neighbors weren't excited about the idea. This cantankerous bunch stuffed up Abraham's wells not once, twice, but three times.

And all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines stopped them up and filled them with earth.1

It wasn't until a generation later that Isaac was able to excavate the wells his father had dug and successfully keep them up and running.

But why? How did Isaac succeed where his father did not? What was his secret?

Abraham the Extrovert; Isaac the Introvert

The Kabbalists taught that our forefathers weren't isolated figures in history with great storylines, rather they were archetypes that serve as a source of inspiration, instruction, and empowerment for all time. More specifically, each of the three forefathers typified something unique, a particular "brand" that was thereafter permanently imprinted into the Jewish DNA.

What are the "brands" of Abraham and Isaac?

Abraham is the archetype of chesed, commonly translated as “kindness/love.” Isaac, by contrast, is the archetype of gevurah, commonly translated as “restraint/discipline.”2 The true “source” of these traits is as they exist in the supernal image of G d Himself, and from there, they are represented in the human condition. So G d’s supernal trait of chesed is embodied in Abraham, whereas His supernal trait of gevurah is embodied in Isaac.

Now, as anyone with a beating heart will know, kindness and love are very different from discipline and restraint. In fact, they’re essentially opposites. To be kind and loving is to open your heart, to reach out and give freely. A loving person is typically extroverted, always seeking to bring more people into his or her embrace.

Discipline and restraint couldn’t be more different. It’s when you’re feeling personal and introverted, discriminate and discerning, hesitant to share with others and eager to percolate within yourself.

True to his extrovert nature, Abraham’s love was unbridled and unrestrained. His love was so passionate and indiscriminate, it was contagious and highly attractive. It explains why he had a huge following.

It’s also why he was always moving around, sharing awareness of G d: He was in love with the G d he had discovered, and he “needed” others to experience the same joy.

Isaac was the polar opposite. He was just as passionate as his father, but from a place of discipline, restraint, and awe. That was his nature, and it manifested in his relationship with G d and his relationships with others. Isaac’s approach was more internal, cerebral, and deliberate.

Of course, Isaac’s path isn’t nearly as popular as Abraham’s, and Isaac didn’t have a huge following. Unlike his father, he didn’t really budge from his home, preferring to stay in one place and deal with a more selective audience who took things seriously.

That’s not to say that Isaac rejected his father’s approach. He just interpreted it in different terms. He took that passion and love for G d, the world, and humanity and filtered it into something he felt was “real.”

That’s why Abraham and Isaac both dug wells: They engaged in the activity of exposing water — which represents life, energy, and goodness — beneath everything. Abraham’s approach was far broader, whereas Isaac’s was more deliberate, but it was the same pursuit: to dig beneath the surface and find goodness.

Sustainability

Now here’s the question: Which is more sustainable? Whose approach lasts longer?

Surprisingly, Isaac’s!

Unrestrained love and passion seem great at first blush, but are so easily corrupted. Just ask anyone who was around during the 60s.

That’s the trick with that elusive and marvelous thing we call “love”: it needs discipline. Love needs work. Love needs guidance, boundaries, respect, and a lot of selflessness. If it’s free-wheeling and happy-go-lucky with no boundaries, it very quickly becomes hedonistic, self-serving, and perverse.

So many young, starry-eyed youth think that love is some magic potion you drink and miraculously works forever. But it doesn’t work that way. Maybe for a month, a year, or two. But certainly not forever.

Abraham’s wells were very exciting, but eventually, they got stuffed up. Isaac’s deliberate restraint is what defines love, puts parameters and guidelines to that love — and makes it last forever.

So love, love freely, and most of all … love wisely.3

FOOTNOTES:

1. Genesis 26:15.
2. Jacob represents the third trait of "tiferet — beauty/synthesis/empathy." That's a discussion for another time.

3. This essay is based on *Likkutei Sichot,* vol. 15, pp. 118-121.

* Writer, editor, and rabbi; editor of Jthe Jewish Life Institute's popular Torah Studies program.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5691872/jewish/Be-the-Best-You.htm

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Toldot: Showing Respect Respectfully

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

Esau hated Jacob for receiving Isaac's blessings instead of him, and resolved to murder him as soon as Isaac would die. Prophetically sensing this, Rebecca convinced Isaac to send Jacob to Aram in order to find a wife. When Esau saw that his parents disapproved of Canaanite wives, he married one of the daughters of his uncle Ishmael.

> *Esau went to Ishmael and married Machalat, the daughter of Abraham's son Ishmael.* Genesis 28:9

Esau's respect for his father was exemplary. He waited on his father dressed in special garments. When he decided to kill Jacob, he refrained from doing so despite his raging anger in order not to pain his father. As soon as he heard that his Canaanite wives displeased his parents, he lost no time in marrying his cousin.

Nevertheless, Esau's reverence for his father did not prevent him from speaking to Isaac disrespectfully, saying, *"My father, arise."* In contrast, his brother Jacob courteously asked Isaac to *"Please arise."* Similarly, Esau later referred to his father's death harshly, saying, *"The days of mourning for my father will soon be here."*

We can learn from Esau's coarse behavior that an essential facet of doing what is right is doing it in a kind and considerate way. For example, the words we speak should not only be meaningful and free of any prohibited types of talk)falsehood, gossip, slander, etc.(; they should also be refined and delicate, as were Jacob's. *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5697, p. 232.

— from *Daily Wisdom*

May G-d grant a swift, miraculous and complete victory over our enemies.

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

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Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

A Father's Love

In this week's sedra, we see Isaac as the parent of two very different sons. "The boys grew up. Esau became a skilful hunter, a man of the outdoors; but Jacob was a mild man who stayed at home among the tents. Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebecca loved Jacob." Gen. 25:27-28

We have no difficulty understanding why Rebecca loved Jacob. She had received an oracle from God in which 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

Jacob was the younger. Rebecca seems to have inferred, correctly as it turned out, that it would be he who would continue the covenant, who would stay true to Abraham's heritage, and who would teach it to his children, carrying the story forward into the future.

The real question is, why did Isaac love Esau? Could he not see that he was a man of the outdoors, a hunter, not a contemplative or a man of God? Is it conceivable that he loved Esau merely because he had a taste for wild game? Did his appetite rule his mind and heart? Did Isaac not know how Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of soup, and how he subsequently "despised" the birthright itself (Gen. 25:29-34). Was this someone with whom to entrust the spiritual patrimony of Abraham?

Isaac surely knew that his elder son was a man of mercurial temperament who lived in the emotions of the moment. Even if this did not trouble him, the next episode involving Esau clearly did: "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. 26:34-35

Esau had made himself at home among the Hittites. He had married two of their women. This was not a man to carry forward the Abrahamic covenant which involved a measure of distance from the Hittites and Canaanites and all they represented in terms of religion, culture, and morality.

Yet Isaac clearly did love Esau. Not only does the verse with which we began say so. It remained so. Genesis 27, with its morally challenging story of how Jacob dressed up as Esau and took the blessing that had been meant for him, is remarkable for the picture it paints of the genuine, deep affection between Isaac and Esau. We sense this at the beginning when Isaac asks Esau: "Prepare me the kind of tasty food I like and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my blessing before I die." (Gen. 27:7) This is not Isaac's physical appetite speaking. It is his wish to be filled with the smell and taste he associates with his elder son, so that he can bless him in a mood of focused love.

It is the end of the story, though, that really conveys the depth of feeling between them. Esau enters with the food he has prepared. Slowly Isaac, and then Esau, realise the nature of the deception that has been practiced against them. Isaac "trembled violently." Esau "burst out with a loud and bitter cry." (Gen. 27:33-34)

It is difficult to convey the power of these descriptions: much is lost in translation. The Torah generally says little about people's emotions. During the whole of the trial of the Binding of Isaac we are given not the slightest indication of what Abraham or Isaac felt in one of the most suspenseful episodes in Genesis. The text is, as Erich Auerbach said, "fraught with background," meaning, more is left unsaid than said.[1] The depth of feeling the Torah describes in speaking of Isaac and Esau at that moment is thus rare and almost overwhelming. Father and son share their sense of betrayal, Esau passionately seeking some blessing from his father, and Isaac rousing himself to do so. The bond of love between them is intense. So the question returns with undiminished force: why did Isaac love Esau, despite everything; his wildness, his mutability, and his outmarriages?

The Sages gave an explanation. They interpreted the phrase "skilful hunter" to mean that Esau trapped and deceived Isaac. He pretended to be more religious than he was.[2]

There is, though, quite a different explanation, closer to the plain sense of the text, and very moving. Isaac loved Esau because Esau was his son, and that is what parents do. They love their children unconditionally. That does not mean that Isaac could not see the faults in Esau's character. It does not imply that he thought Esau the right person to continue the covenant. Nor does it mean he was not pained when Esau married Hittite women. The text explicitly says he was. But it does mean that Isaac knew that a father must love his son because he is his son. That is not incompatible with being critical of what he does. But a parent does not disown their child, even when the child disappoints their expectations. Isaac was teaching us a fundamental lesson in parenthood.

Why Isaac? Because he knew that Abraham had sent his son Ishmael away. He may have known how much that pained Abraham and injured Ishmael. There is a remarkable series of midrashim that suggest that Abraham visited Ishmael even after he sent him away, and others that say it was Isaac who effected the reconciliation.[3] He was determined not to inflict the same fate on Esau.

Likewise, he knew to the very depths of his being the psychological cost on both his father and himself of the trial of the Binding. At the beginning of the chapter of Jacob, Esau and the blessing the Torah tells us that Isaac was blind. There is a Midrash that suggests that it was tears shed by the angels as they watched Abraham bind his son and lift the knife that fell into Isaac's eyes, causing him to go blind in his old age.[4] The trial was surely necessary, otherwise God would not have commanded it. But it left wounds, psychological scars, and it left Isaac determined not to have to sacrifice Esau, his own child. In some way, then, Isaac's unconditional love of Esau was a tikkun for the rupture in the father-son relationship brought about by the Binding.

Thus, though Esau's path was not that of the covenant, Isaac's gift of paternal love helped prepare the way for the next generation, in which all of Jacob's children remained within the fold.

There is a fascinating argument between two mishnaic Sages that has a bearing on this. There is a verse in Deuteronomy (14:1) that says about the Jewish people, "You are children of the Lord your God." Rabbi Judah held that this applied only when Jews behaved in a way worthy of the children of God. Rabbi

Meir said that it was unconditional: whether Jews behave like God's children or they do not, they are still called the children of God. (Kiddushin 36a)

Rabbi Meir, who believed in unconditional love, acted in accordance with his view. His own teacher, Elisha ben Abuya, eventually lost his faith and became a heretic, yet Rabbi Meir continued to study with him and respect him, maintaining that at the very last moment of his life he had repented and returned to God.[5]

To take seriously the idea, central to Judaism, of Avinu Malkeinu, that our King is first and foremost our parent, is to invest our relationship with God with the most profound emotions. God wrestles with us, as does a parent with a child. We wrestle with him as a child does with their parents. The relationship is sometimes tense, conflictual, even painful, yet what gives it its depth is the knowledge that it is unbreakable. Whatever happens, a parent is still a parent, and a child is still a child. The bond may be deeply damaged but it is never broken beyond repair.

Perhaps that is what Isaac was signalling to all generations by his continuing love for Esau, so unlike him, so different in character and destiny, yet never rejected by him – just as the Midrash says that Abraham never rejected Ishmael and found ways of communicating his love. Unconditional love is not uncritical, but it is unbreakable. That is how we should love our children – for it is how God loves us.

[1] Erich Auerbach, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, translated by Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1953).
[2] He would ask him questions such as, "Father, how do we tithe salt and straw?" knowing that in fact these were exempt from tithe. Isaac thought that meant that he was scrupulous in his observance of the commandments (Rashi to Gen. 25:27; Tanchuma, Toldot, 8).
[3] See Jonathan Sacks, Not in God's Name, pp. 107-124.
[4] Genesis Rabbah 65:10.
[5] Yerushalmi Haggigah 2:1.

Shabbat Shaom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

With Whom to Make Treaties

"And they said, we saw indeed that the Lord was with you and we said: let there now be an oath between us, between us and you, and let us make a covenant with you." [Genesis 26:28]

On what basis, and with which type of people, are we encouraged to make treaties? A careful reading of the relationships between Abraham, Isaac and Avimelekh – and especially a study of Chapter 26 in Toldot – provides a significant answer to these questions, which also contains a crucial message for the government of Israel today.

Some background: We first met Avimelekh in Chapter 20 in Vayera, when Abraham wandered over to Gerar, the area where Avimelekh ruled. Gerar was the land of the Philistines, which is part of the divinely promised borders of Israel. Abraham referred to Sarah as his sister, and she was immediately taken into Avimelekh's harem – without anyone asking her or her 'brother's' permission [Gen. 20:2]. Clearly, he was a lascivious and cruel despot, who certainly would have murdered any husband of Sarah. After he was given a dire warning in a dream sent by God, Avimelekh played the innocent victim, asserting that the fault lies with Abraham since he [Avimelekh] acted 'with purity of heart and innocence of hand' [Gen. 20:5]. Abraham correctly explains: '…there is no fear of God in this place, and I would have been murdered because of my wife' [Gen. 20:11].

Chapter 21 proceeds to tell us about the birth of Isaac and the banishment of Ishmael and then returns to describe a meeting between Abraham, Avimelekh and his general, Piẖol. Avimelekh insists that Abraham swear he will not act falsely by taking away his land during the lifetime of his grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Abraham agrees [Gen. 21:24], but then Abraham chastises Avimelekh for having stolen his well. Yet again, Avimelekh plays the innocent victim, remonstrating that 'I didn't know who did this thing, you didn't tell me, and I never heard of it until today' [Gen. 21:26].

Despite Avimelekh's apparent duplicity as a woman-snatcher and well-stealer, Abraham nevertheless makes a treaty with him. Abraham gives him sheep and cattle as well as seven more ewes as a sign that he dug the well at Be'er Sheva (literally 'the well of the oath'). It is remarkable that it is Abraham who does the giving: he receives nothing, although the covenant, the oath, is taken by both of them.

Then with a brief segue 'And it happened after these things…', we read about the terrifying command by God that Abraham offer his only son as a whole burnt offering. Rashbam cites a Midrash suggesting that the sacrifice of Isaac was a punishment to Abraham for his treaty with Avimelekh. Entering into a treaty with a treacherous individual for a number of generations is irresponsible. Abraham has no right to take such a risk and jeopardize his children's lives. More to the point, says Rashbam, Abraham had no right to give away Isaac's patrimony, a por- tion of the promised land of Israel. Hence, concludes this commentary, God commands Abraham to sacrifice his son; if Abraham was willing to 'treaty away' his son's inheritance to a rogue, Abraham apparently does not value his son anyway.

This context brings us to Toldot, where the most important thing we learn from history is that we never learn from history. Now, it is Isaac, Abraham's son, who is forced by famine to go to 'Avimelekh, the King of the Philistines, to Gerar' [Gen. 26:1]. Immediately, the people of the area ask about his wife and – for self-protection – he too refers to Rebecca as his sister. We discover that Avimelekh is also a voyeur; he looks into Isaac's window and sees him 'playing' with his wife! Yet again, Avimelekh feigns innocence, calling Isaac the deceiver. 'What is this that you did to us by claiming she was your sister? One of my people almost slept with your wife!' [Gen. 26:10]

Isaac goes on to amass a vast accumulation of wealth, including cattle, sheep and servants. He is still living in Gerar, 'And the Philistines were jealous of him' [Gen. 26:14]. This is the same Avimelekh and these are the same Philistines with whom Abraham made his covenant. Nevertheless, 'the Philistines stopped up all of the wells which were dug by the servants of his father,' and Avimelekh forces Isaac to move away because 'his wealth was amassed from them' [Gen. 26:16]. Isaac passively leaves, but nevertheless insists upon re-digging the wells of his father which had been destroyed. To add insult to injury, Isaac now digs two new wells in his new location – only to have the Philistines arguing with him over the ownership of the water.

The finale of this incident is difficult to imagine. After all that has transpired, Avimelekh comes to Isaac flanked by his general Piẖol and ahuzat me-re'ehu – a group of friends – in order to sign another treaty with him. Isaac is understandably surprised, seeing that they have 'hated him and exiled him.' The fork-tongued Avimelekh argues, 'we have done only good towards you because we sent you away in peace.' The Philistine king apparently believes that if a Jew is banished – but is permitted to flee with his life intact – the Jew ought be grateful! And, despite Avimelekh's history, Isaac has a feast with him and they swear yet another oath together. Isaac now renames the place Be'er Sheva in honor of this second oath-treaty.

Is the Torah then teaching us to continue to make treaties, even though our would-be partners have a history of duplicity and treachery? I believe the very opposite to be the case. 'The actions of the ancestors are repeated in the lives of their children.' Unfortunately, Jews are always over-anxious to believe that their enemies have become their friends and the leopard has changed his spots. The very next verse in the Torah – the closing of the story of Isaac and Avimelekh but seemingly without any connection to it – reads:

"And Esau was forty years old and he took as a wife Yehudit the daughter of Be'eri the Hittite and Bosmat the daughter of Eglon the Hittite. And this was a bitterness of spirit to Isaac and to Rebecca." [Gen. 26:34–35]

Now, the one clear prohibition insisted upon by the Patriarchs was that their sons not take Canaanite or Hittite wives. I believe that the Torah is telling us that if Isaac makes a treaty with an inappropriate partner, his son will enter into a marriage with an inappropriate partner.

Just as Abraham is punished for his treaty with Avimelekh, so is Isaac punished for his treaty with Avimelekh. The land of Israel is too important and the preservation of a Jewish future is too vulnerable for us to take risks and make treaties with unconscionable and dishonest rulers. A treaty is only possible when it is made with a partner who fears God in the same way that we do.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

A Person's Word Is His Word!

In this week's parsha, Hashem promises Yitzchak, "I will increase your offspring like the stars of the heavens and will give to your offspring all these lands; and all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by your offspring. Because Avraham obeyed My voice and observed My safeguards, My commandments, My decrees, and My Torahs." (Bereshis 26:4-5). Rishonim marshal this last pasuk as a proof that Avraham kept the entire Torah even before it was given, and in fact claim that this was the practice of the other forefathers as well. The Ramban raises apparent counter-examples to this principle that the Avos kept the entire Torah prior to its being given. One of the points he mentions is that Yaakov Avinu simultaneously married two sisters, which is one of the Torah's arayos (forbidden marital relationships).

In a famous answer, the Ramban says that the Avos only fully kept the future laws of the Torah in Eretz Yisrael, "for the Torah is the rule of the G-d of the Land" and Yaakov's simultaneous marriage to two sisters ended before Yaakov returned from Charan to Eretz Yisrael. This is how everyone reads this famous Ramban: He is trying to answer the question 'How can it be that the Avos kept the entire Torah before it was given, and yet Yaakov married two sisters?' The Ramban answers: His marriage to them was only in chutz l'Aretz!

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky takes issue with this understanding and argues that this is not the correct interpretation of this Ramban. Rav Yaakov says the question 'How could Yaakov marry two sisters?' never begins! The reason Yaakov married two sisters is because he made a commitment! He promised Rochel "I am going to marry you." Once he gave his word to Rochel, he had to marry her. A person is not allowed to go back on his word. The fact that he and the other Avos kept the laws of the Torah that would be given in the future was only a 'chumrah' (an act of optional piety on their part). However, if a personal chumrah contradicts my word to someone else, my word must take precedence!

"There is no justification for allowing Rochel to suffer because of my chumrahs!" This must be seen as a general rule with broad applications: When a person's personal stringencies impinge upon someone else, he needs to forego his stringency. Once Yaakov gave his word to Rochel, it was a 'no brainer' that he would need to marry her. Lavan pulled a fast one on him and he wound up marrying Leah, but that would in no way stop him from keeping his word to Rochel.

So, according to Rav Yaakov's explanation, what does the Ramban mean when he says that the Avos did not keep the entire Torah in chutz l'Aretz? Rav Yaakov explains that the Ramban is coming to answer a different question with that statement. We know that there is a rule: The Holy One Blessed Be He will not bring a takalah ('misfortune') through the actions of the righteous. For instance, if a Tzadik went into a restaurant and he had a steak and then it came out that this restaurant was selling neveilah (non-kosher meat) the piece of meat that the Tzadik ate could in no way be treife (non-kosher). Heaven would have seen to it that some other customer was given the non-kosher meat. It could not have entered the mouth of the Tzadik, because of the hard and fast rule that the Almighty would not allow a Tzadik to stumble.

Therefore, the Ramban is asking, according to Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky, how did the Almighty let this happen to Yaakov? How did he let Lavan pull this fast one on Yaakov, if the Almighty will never allow a Tzadik to spiritually stumble? How could it be that Yaakov was put in a situation where he 'had to sin' by keeping his word to marry Rochel (who was now his sister-in-law). The Ramban answers by saying that it was in fact not an aveira (sin) at all, because they were living in chutz l'Aretz and only in Eretz Yisrael would it be considered an aveira for the Avos to marry two sisters.

The takeaway lesson from this interpretation of the Ramban's question and answer is that this is Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky l'shitaso (consistent with his life's major ethical behavior). Rav Yaakov's practice in life was that a person's word is sacred. If someone has given his word—that's it! There are very few things that trump a person's word, and certainly personal chumras do not trump a person's word.

I will cite two incidents from Rav Yaakov (the name of whose sefer is Emes L'Yaakov) to demonstrate how he personified and exemplified this attribute of truth and personal integrity throughout his life.

Rav Yaakov lived into his nineties. Towards the end of his life, he started putting on Rabbeinu Tam's Tefillin (which have the parshiyos placed in a different order within the Tefillin compartments) in addition to the standard Rashi Tefillin. Rav Yaakov was a quintessential Litvak (Lithuanian Jew). He was born in Lita, he was raised in Lita, and he studied in the Slabodka Yeshiva. He was a full-bred Litvak and Misnagid. Misdagdim and Litvaks do not put on Rabbeinu Tam Tefillin (a practice more prevalent among Chassidic Jewry). So why at the end of his days was he putting on Rabbeinu Tam Tefillin?

Many years earlier—fifty or sixty years earlier—someone asked him, "Why don't you wear Rabbeinu Tam Tefillin?" He answered, "I don't wear Rabbeinu Tam Tefillin because I am a Litvak. I am a Misnagid. We don't wear Rabbeinu Tam's Tefillin." The fellow said to him, "But, the Chofetz Chaim, toward the end of his life, also started wearing Rabbeinu Tam's Tefillin (even though he too was a Litvak and Misnagid). Rav Yaakov said something to the effect of: "When I get to be the Chofetz Chaim's age, I too will wear Rabbeinu Tam's Tefillin."

When someone is 25 or 30 years old, he can easily say "Yes, when I'm 85 I will put on Rabbeinu Tam's Tefillin." In those days, people's life expectancies were certainly not into their eighties or nineties. But because a young Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky said, "When I get to be the Chofetz Chaim's age, I will put on Rabbeinu Tam's Tefillin," he kept his word. That is why he wore Rabbeinu Tam's Tefillin. A person's word is his word.

The second incident is similar. Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky did not eat 'Gebrokts' on Pesach. Now, this too is atypical of Litvaks and Misnagdim, who are not particular about eating matzah products that have come into contact with liquid on Pesach. It is a Chassidishe minhag. Litvaks generally eat kneidlach, matza-brei, matzah with butter and jelly, and all such good things.

Rav Yaakov did not eat 'Gebrockts'. He let his family eat Gebrokts, but he did not eat it on Pesach. How did that happen? Rav Yaakov learned in Slabodka. In those days, there was no such thing as a Yeshiva dining room. So how did Yeshiva bochrim eat? There was an institution known as 'teg.' Every day or every two days, various Yeshiva bochrim would be assigned to a different host in the community, and they would be guests by that household.

In those days, it was not like today when everyone goes home for Pesach. Those were the good old days where men were men, and if you were in Yeshiva, you were in Yeshiva for years at a time without a break. Who had the money to travel back and forth from Yeshiva to home for Yomim Tovim (the holidays) and Bein HaZmanim (Yeshiva breaks)? So the Yeshiva assigned different bochrim to eat in different houses during Pesach as well.

Rav Yaakov was assigned to eat in a certain person's house. Rav Yaakov, for whatever reason, was not satisfied with the level of kashrus in that house. But what was he going to tell them? It would be insulting to say "I don't trust your Kashrus." What did he say? He said, "I would love to come but I don't eat Gebrokts!" After all, this was Slabodka, where virtually everyone ate Gebrokts. The hosts

bought his excuse. They were not insulted and he did not need to eat by them over Pesach.

But once Rav Yaakov said, "I don't eat 'Gebrokts' on Pesach" he did not eat Gebrokts on Pesach for the rest of his life. He kept his word. When you say something, you need to keep it.

That is Rav Yaakov's perspective in this vort on the Parsha. It is easy to 'talk the talk' but Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky also 'walked the walk.' He was a yafeh doresh (someone who expounded nicely) v'yafeh m'kayem (and who also put his nice words into practice).

And Yitzchak Gave the Wells the Same Names as His Father Had Given Them

The pasuk says, "All the wells that his father's servants had dug in the days of Avraham his father, the Plishtim stopped up, and filled them with earth." (Bereshis 26:15). The Chumash continues: "And Yitzchak dug anew the wells of water which they had dug in the days of Avraham his father and the Plishtim had stopped them up after Avraham's death; and he called them by the same names that his father had called them." (Bereshis 26:18)

Avraham dug wells and the Plishtim stopped them up. Yitzchak came along and re-dug those same wells. Not only did he re-dig the same wells, he renamed them with the very same names that Avraham had originally called them.

One might ask—although this is a somewhat irreverent way to state it—Who cares? Lech-Lecha, Vayera, and Chayei Sarah relate the life story of Avraham. Vayetzei, Vayishlach, Vayeshev and then Miketz, Vayigash, and Vayechi relate the life stories of Yaakov and Yosef. Yitzchak only gets a single parsha, Parshas Toldos. Is this event so significant? Do we really need the story of the wells in the one short parsha devoted to Yitzchak? Obviously, this must be significant if the Torah, which includes precious few words about Yitzchak, goes through the effort of including all these details. What is the deeper message here?

The sefer HaKesav v'HaKabalah explains that Avraham's digging of the wells was a tremendous public service. Society back then was not like it is today. Someone could not go to the faucet in his home, turn on the tap and get water. Having a well was a big deal. When people travelled, there were no rest stops where they could stop to get a Coke or lemonade. There was no indoor plumbing. There were none of these things.

What did Avraham do? He called each of the wells he dug by a specific name. The HaKesav v'HaKabalah writes that the names Avraham gave his wells all had to do with the Name of Hashem. He called Yerushalayim "Hashem Yir-eh" (G-d sees) and he called another city "Beis El" (the House of G-d). Avraham Avinu wanted to put the Name of Hashem into the mouths of people. He was a revolutionary, an iconoclast. His introduction of monotheism into a world of polytheism was a spiritual revolution. The Rambam writes that he was successful in bringing tens of thousands of people under the Wings of Divine Presence. He weaned the masses from idolatry and put the Name of G-d into their vocabulary. He did that through feeding people and being m'karev people. But he also did it by digging wells and giving each of them names that had to do with Hashem.

When a person would ask another traveler, "Where did you get your water?" he would answer, "Oh, I got it at the Well of Hashem, the Be'er Elokim, the Be'er Shakai. That had a tremendous impact on people because they had to think: G-d's Well! People associated water and public service with the Ribono shel Olam.

When the Plishtim stuffed up the wells, it was not just an act of vandalism. They had to have a motivation for doing this—as obviously they needed the water as well. They stuffed up the wells because they saw what effect those wells had on society. People were now abandoning the pagan gods and believing in the Ribono shel Olam. They stuffed up Avraham's wells to eradicate the Name of Hashem from the lips of the masses. Their goal was to reduce the mention of the Ribono shel Olam in the mouths of people.

The HaKesav v'HaKabalah writes that Yitzchak wanted to re-implement the original plan of his father. He re-dug those same wells AND—what is more important—he called them the same names that his father called them, to reintroduce the concept of "the Be'er of Hashem," "the Be'er Shakai," the "Be'er Tzivakos," or whatever he called them. These were not just water holes. This was a religious war, a cultural battle to wean people from avodah zarah.

Therefore, this is far from an insignificant act in the life of Yitzchak. It is a very significant and characteristic act on the part of Yitzchak Avinu.

Yitzchak Trembled Twice in His Life

The following is part of a Teshuva Drasha that Rav Yaakov Breish (1895-1976) said in Switzerland on the Yom Kippur following World War II.

Eisav came into Yitzchak and said, "…I am your first-born son Eisav." The very next pasuk says "Yitzchak trembled a great trembling…" (Bereshis 27:32-33) The Medrash Tanchuma notes that Yitzchak trembled twice in his life. The first time was when his father placed him on the Mizbayach at the time of Akeidas Yitzchak. The second time was when Eisav entered after Yaakov had taken the brachos (blessings).

Which was the greater of the two frights? From the fact that the pasuk says by the second trembling "Gedolah ad me'od" (exceedingly great), we understand that Yitzchak trembling when Eisav entered after Yaakov took the brachos was the greater of the two frights.

Rav Yaakov Breish said an incredible thing in that Yom Kippur drasha, given the historical context:

Over the centuries, Klal Yisrael has lost millions of people. They have lost millions of people in two ways.

(1) They lost millions of people because people "were moser nefesh al gabay hamizbayach" – i.e., people were willing to give up their lives for Yiddishkeit. They did this throughout the millennia.

(2) Unfortunately, there was also another way how Jews have been lost and that is through assimilation. This is the expression we hear all too often today: We are witnessing our own holocaust. It is not a holocaust of people being killed; it is a holocaust of shrinkage through assimilation. The number of Jews in America has remained steady at approximately five million for the last fifty years. Simple demographics dictate that if there were five million Jews forty or fifty years ago, then there should be a significant geometric progression by now. It should not remain constant at five million.

Why are there still only five million? The answer is that people are intermarrying and we are losing people. It is not because our enemies are killing us, it is because they are embracing us. The major trembling that Yitzchak experienced here was that Eisav was bringing him delicacies. He was trying to win our favor. He was trying to be open to us.

Which is a greater fear—losing Jews who are martyred or losing Jews to the fact that Eisav is bringing delicacies and trying to win us over to his camp? That is the question the Medrash poses. And the Medrash answers that the latter fear is the greater of the two. Charada Gedola ad Me'od. This is a far greater tragedy about which one must tremble exceedingly.

Dvar Torah
Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Are good deeds valid even when we don't intend to perform them?
In Parshat Toldot (Bereishit 27:22) Yitzchak declares, "Hakol kol Yaakov vehayadaim yedei Eisav." – "The voice is the voice of Jacob and the hands are the hands of Esau."
Yitzchak was troubled because he was wondering who was standing in front of him, when his youngest son Yaakov was actually deceiving him.

But notice the way in which letters make a huge difference. 'Hakol' and 'kol' are the same word repeated one after the other, but with a different spelling. It's a 'maleh vechaseir' (complete and incomplete) wherein

sometimes a word includes a vav and sometimes it doesn't. 'Hakol', the voice, is spelled kuf lamed (קל), without a vav and then the 'kol' coming afterwards is kuf vav lamed (קול), with a vav. What lesson emerges from this?

The Vilna Gaon teaches that if you read these terms literally it becomes 'hakal kol', which means 'sound is weak'. How can we understand this?

The Rambam in laws relating to Pesach answers a fascinating question. What happens if you have somebody who doesn't like matza, doesn't want to eat the matzah, but those around this person insist that they have to eat it, and so they eat it, they digest it, and they have had no intention whatsoever of performing the mitzvah. Does it count or not? The Rambam says yes, they have performed the mitzvah.

However, elsewhere in laws relating to the shofar on Rosh Hashanah, the following question is asked. If you happen to hear the sound of shofar, and you have no intention whatsoever for that to be your mitzvah, does it count?

During the coronavirus when we were all under lockdown, I blew the shofar at home for myself and my wife and then we went for a walk, and it was beautiful to hear the sound of the shofar from so many homes in our area, because people couldn't go to shul.
Now what would have happened had somebody walked past a house, heard the shofar, and arrived home thinking, "Hey, I've performed the mitzvah of shofar!" although they didn't have the intention at the time. The Rambam answers that such a person is not yotsei – he's not fulfilled his obligations of shofar.

So what's the difference therefore between matza and shofar? The Maggid Mishnah answers that when it comes to a mitzvah performed physically, it is a mitzvah but when it comes to sound, it is not. The reason is that in the case of the mitzvah performed physically – physically that person digested the matzah! You can't argue against that. But when it comes to sound it's only valid if you concentrate, if you appreciate the meaning of it and if it therefore uplifts you.
The Vilna Gaon's interpretation now makes so much sense and imparts to us a very relevant lesson for our times. It's not good enough to just perform mitzvot mechanically in an active and physical way. We also need to listen. And when we hear about our faith and strive to internalise its values, it needs concentration, it needs appreciation. Gone are the days where belief was just passed down automatically from one generation to the next. Unless we are convinced about what it is we're believing in, there is a danger it could be dropped.
Let us therefore strengthen the resonance of our tradition to enrich our lives and to guarantee the continuity of our faith.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Rivka, the Female Voice of the Book of Bereishit - Rabbi Yair Melchior

One big question that has always troubled me is Yitzhak's outright preference for Esav. How is it possible that Yitzhak, the father of the nation, couldn't see the obvious? How could he not see the great qualities of the "quiet man, dwelling in tents"? With time, this question became less urgent, as it made way for a deeper insight: There was, in fact, someone else who did see, someone who had an unobscured perspective – Rivka.

In my opinion, it was not merely woman's intuition at play, or high levels of critical thinking on Rivka's part. Rather, Rivka's character reverberates throughout because she plays an important role in more instances than we care to admit.

We all grew up with stories of the Patriarchs and the Matriarchs of the Jewish People. Much was told us of the Patriarchs, while the Matriarchs seem to have one single purpose – to be just that: matriarchs, mothers. However, this view of things is not entirely accurate. While many Torah chapters are dedicated to Avraham and Yaakov, Yitzhak appears in but a few. The two significant stories where Yitzhak is mentioned are directly connected to Avraham and Yaakov, respectively. It is pretty obvious that Yitzhak is the least significant of the three Patriarchs, so much so that in some Biblical references to this patriarchal lineage, his name is omitted entirely. For instance:

" But thou, Israel, My servant, Yaakov whom I have chosen, the seed of Avraham My friend." (Yeshayahu 41:8)

"O ye seed of Avraham His servant, ye children of Yaakov, His chosen one." (Tehillim 105:6)

In many respects, Yitzhak is just a link in the chain connecting Avraham and Yaakov. Similarly, when it comes to the relationship between Yitzhak and Rivka, Rivka is clearly the dominant figure.

Rivka first appears on the Biblical stage in the story relating the mission of Avraham's servant, where she is depicted as an exemplary hostess. When the twins in her womb give her a hard time, Rivka goes on her own to "inquire of the Lord" and attains prophecy. Rivka is also the one who loves Yaakov unconditionally, initiates the exchange of the blessings and plans Yaakov's ensuing escape. Add to this the fact that the Torah informs us of Rivka's birth (Bereshit 22:23), which is not the case with Sarah, Rachel and Leah.

These facts highlight, and maybe even help in clarifying, one of the most central questions in the previous portion: Why does Avraham insist on taking a wife for his son Yitzhak from his own birthplace? If it is absolutely forbidden to take Yitzhak out of Canaan and bring him to Avraham's homeland, why take a woman for him from that very place?

However, once we are introduced to Rivka's character, we suddenly understand the profoundness of Avraham's instructions. Avraham was a man blessed with the unique qualities of devotion to God and extraordinary hospitality. Both of these qualities were also manifest in Rivka. Rivka prefers the "quiet man dwelling in tents" who followed in the footsteps of Avraham and "walked upright before God." Rivka is first introduced as a woman of extraordinary generosity, one who shows exceptional hospitality to the stranger from the Land of Canaan.

Rivka, like Avraham before her, chooses to embark on the difficult journey to the Land of Canaan. The Torah also emphasizes the fact that it was done of her own accord, and not because her father or her brother instructed her to do so. In fact, both actually had some reservations about her departure.

With some caution, one might suggest that it is Rivka who is the true successor of Avraham. Maybe this was Avraham's intention all along when he insisted that his servant bring a woman from "there". When choosing a wife for his son, Avraham had to find a woman who would be able to see the bigger picture, and bring with her a taste of the old world in which he had grown up, and perhaps even the value of hospitality which was less common among the natives of Canaan. Avraham was looking for a woman who mirrored himself; one who had embarked on a similar journey and had made similar choices. Years later, Yaakov would set out on the same voyage as well.

Rivka's character sticks out even more in light of the scarcity of woman figures in the Bible, and the firmly based patriarchal family structure of the time. Prominent female figures throughout the generations had to work hard to prove themselves, while living in an environment that made this virtually impossible.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Hershel Schachter

A Kiddush Hashem??

About one hundred years ago a famous Jewish thinker stated that more than the Jewish people kept (observed) the Shabbos, the Shabbos kept (preserved) the Jewish people. Observing the Shabbos properly is the way we "testify" (and proclaim) that we believe in the story of creation. Once we accept that the Ribbono Shel Olam created the world, and all that is in it, then it follows that he is "baal ha'bus" ("the boss"), and all of His instructions are binding.

I was very saddened to hear that some writers were encouraging religious children in elementary and high school not to reject the dream of becoming a professional sports star

due to concerns of not being able to observe Shabbos. These writers say that a Jew could simply rent a hotel room within the techum of the stadium where the games will be played to avoid carrying anything in the streets and then play their sport on Shabbos with their yarmulka on and thereby accomplish a fantastic "kiddush Hashem". This is absolutely incorrect!

The Rambam writes that on Shabbos we are instructed to observe four mitzvos. The two that appear in the Chumash are zachor and shamor and the two that are spelled out by the Navi are Kibbud and Oneg. If one avoids violating any melochos, he has fulfilled the mitzvah of Shamor, but he certainly has not fulfilled the mitzvos of kibbud v'oneg. Rav Soloveitchik zt"l has suggested that the Hebrew word which the Rambam used to explain that kibbud and oneg were spelled out by the nevi'im could well be understood to mean that the prophets interpreted that kibbud and oneg are included in the biblical mitzvah of zachor.

Kibbud v'oneg require of us that we dress, speak, and act in a Shabbos-dik manner, in a way indicating that Shabbos is a very holy day. Wearing bigdei Shabbos (Shabbos clothes) is extremely important in this regard. Dressing in sports clothing to play a professional sport for which a person is salaried is clearly a violation of kibbud and oneg. The violation of Shabbos is on several levels that are independent of each other: a) bigdei Shabbos; b) he's being salaried; c) the activity itself is not Shabbos-dik. We were given the gift of Shabbos to recharge our spiritual batteries!

An Orthodox young man who says that he will be wearing his yarmulka and will be playing professional sports on Shabbos will not be making a kiddush Hashem at all. If anything, this will constitute a chillul Hashem b'rabim; it probably would be better if he would not wear the yarmulka.

The Chumash tells us that Hakadosh Baruch Hu loved Avraham Avinu because he was mechanech his children properly to fulfill Hashem's mitzvos. Parents have a serious obligation to see to it that all of their children should observe Shabbos on all of its levels, not just on the level of issur melacha. Once one chisels away at part of Shabbos observance, it will not take too long before the other levels of observance will also fall away. We should not permit our children to "compromise" on any of the mitzvos of Shabbos, or on any other mitzvos either.

The possuk (Tehillim 10:3) states that one who praises an individual who compromises on mitzvos is compared to one who curses Hashem. The Torah (Devarim 7:2) has a mitzvah of lo si'choneim. The Gemara (Avodah Zara 20a) points out that there are three levels of interpretation of this mitzvah, and all three are accepted as biblical prohibitions. One of the interpretations is that the verb "si'choneim" comes from the root of "chein", thus indicating that we should not elevate nochrim to be our heroes whom we look up to and choose to emulate. The nochrim have a totally different perspective on the world than the Torah's perspective. The Jewish people live differently, die differently, and are buried differently. We just read in Pasrshas Chayey Sara about the halacha of kever Yisroel, i.e. that Jews may not be buried in the same cemetery as non-Jews[1]. Similarly, the Torah teaches us that our body is not our personal property, and thus we may not tattoo or mutilate our body. We live in a generation where so many Jews have picked up the attitude from the rest of the world that we have the right to do with our bodies whatever we choose. This is totally in contradiction to the traditional Jewish attitude. We say in Selichos "Haneshama loch v'haguf sheloch" - we are totally owned by, and subservient to, Hakadosh Baruch Hu, and must act in the unique way that He requires of Jews in every aspect of life.

The Gemara (Bava Metzia 83b) explains the possuk, "Toshes choshech v'yehi layla..." (Tehillim 104:20) to be a reference to olam hazeh (this world) which is similar to layla (night). In what way is olam hazeh similar to layla? The Mesilas Yesharim explains that it is very unclear if a lot of things in life are a mitzvah or an aveira, and we need the Torah to illuminate this darkness. We therefore request in our tefillos, "v'haer eineinu b'Torasecha", that Hakadosh Baruch Hu should illuminate this choshech (darkness) by having us succeed in learning Torah and figuring out what He wants from us.

The Mishna (Pirkei Avos, end of perek 5) instructs us, "Hafoch ba va'hafoch ba d'kula ba" - don't reinterpret the Chumash and the Talmud based on your preconceived notions and desires, rather study the Torah carefully and adopt the Torah's true values and attitudes.
[1] Editor: see Jewish Burial, by Rav Schachter.

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perz

A Land and a People: a Mystical Marvel

There is a remarkable connection between the Land of Israel and the People of Israel – a connection, a chemistry, an alchemy unlike the connection between any other people to a land.

And it is rooted in this week's Parasha.

We know that in the last 150 years or so since the agricultural settlements were built by the pioneers, this land has yielded impossible results. Israel has been able to grow incredible fruit and vegetables, exported globally, out of places that were thought impossible – arid land, deserts, using hydroponic technology. Drip irrigation, cloud seeding, desalinization – Israel has also turned places with so little water into those with useable water and even a surplus.

A water and agricultural marvel.

Both of these things are rooted in the original pioneers – our forefathers, as we find in this week's Parasha. Wherever Yitzchak went, he found wells – he goes to the land of Gerar where the Philistines couldn't find water and yet everywhere he went and dug, he found water. Yitzchak was in this area, in today's Negev Desert, during a famine. Yet we are told that when Yitzchak planted in that land, he was blessed by Hashem with a one hundred-fold yield, even during a time of famine.

Since time immemorial until today, there seems to be an alchemy, a marvelous marvel of a connection between the land and the Jewish people. May this continue to grow and flower, because it is not only a blessing for Israel but for all of humanity.

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot

Religion by Relegation

In an almost casual, offhand way, our Sidra tells us of a series of incidents in the life of Isaac that are apparently of no special significance, but in which our Rabbis have seen the greatest importance.

Isaac lived in the land of Canaan, which suffered from scarcity of water most of the year, and he therefore decided to dig a well. We are told of three wells which he and his entourage dug. The first two involved him in difficulties with the people of Gerar, a Philistine people. The first of these, Isaac called Esek, because it was the cause of much strife and contention. He was no more successful with the second well; after his servants dug the well, he incurred the hatred of the people about him. He therefore called the second well by the name Sitnah, meaning enmity. It is only when the third well was dug that happiness prevailed once again; and so he called the third well Rehovoth, meaning: room, freedom, scope, peace, or joy.

Of what importance can these apparently prosaic matters be to later generations, who search in the Torah for matters of timeless significance and are not particularly interested in economic clashes and riparian rivalry in ancient Canaan? Nachmanides, following the principle of the Rabbis that מעשה אבות סימן לבנים - that the deeds of the fathers anticipate the history of the children – has taught us that the three wells of Isaac recapitulate the stories of the three great Sanctuaries of the people of Israel. The first well is a symbol of the First Temple, which was destroyed because of Esek, because of the battles and wars waged on the Jewish people by the surrounding nations. The second well, that called Sitnah, represents the Second Temple, for this Temple was brought to ruins by the hatred and enmity that prevailed amongst the Children of Israel during that period. However, the third well, Rehovoth, is

the symbol of the Sanctuary that has not yet been built – that of the great future. It represents the Beit Hamikdash which will one day be rebuilt in Jerusalem, and which will last forever in a spirit of Rehovoth – freedom and peace and plenty.

However, the question remains: why, indeed, was Isaac successful with the third well, whilst he failed with the first two? In what was the third well, symbol of the third Temple, superior to the first two? Permit me to commend to your attention an answer which has been suggested to me (by my uncle, Rabbi Joseph M. Baumol), which not only answers this question but also provides us with a powerful moral for our own lives. If we analyze carefully the three verses which tell of how these three wells were dug, we will discover one significant difference between the first two and the third. The first two were dug by Isaac's servants, his hired people. Of the first well we read: ויחפרו עבדי יצחק, and the servants of Isaac dug the well. With regard to the second well, we read ויחפרו באר אחרת, they dug another well. In both cases, Isaac relegated his duties and activities to others. Only with regard to the third well do we find the element of personal participation: ויחפר באר אחרת, and he dug another well. As long as Isaac was going to leave the performance of his duties to others, and not do them himself, there was bound to result in Esek and Sitnah, argumentation and hatred. It is only when Issac, despite the many people ready to serve him, was willing to dig the well by himself, that he was able to achieve Rehovoth – the peace and plenty and freedom that he so very much desired. The third Temple, that which will last unto all eternity, will come about only when every Jew will take it upon himself to perform the ויחפר באר אחרת, the willingness to work by himself, to commit his own energies, talent, concern and participation to the sacred tasks which we have been assigned.

Actually, Isaac's career from the very beginning reveals this tension between relegation and participation. Throughout his life we find signs of his struggling to learn this great principle of personal involvement. Even before he was convinced, the message came to his father Abraham that Sarah would bear the child, Isaac. However, the message came not from God Himself, as it were, but through an angel. And so, when Sarah heard it she laughed and ridiculed it – incurring Abraham's annoyance and God's irritation. Only afterwards do we read, "and the Lord said unto Abraham" – when God himself addressed Abraham, by Himself and not through an angel, Sarah began to believe in reverence and awe, and not doubt in mocking laughter, that she would be blessed with a child.

The great story of the Akedah also reveals this oscillation between relegation and participation. At first, Abraham decides to offer up Isaac himself. At the last moment, his hand is stayed and, instead, Abraham offers up a ram caught in the thicket nearby. The Torah puts it this way: And behold איל אחר נאחז בסבך, which we normally translate: "a ram was caught in the thicket behind them." But this has also been interpreted in an equally valid fashion as: "and behold another ram was caught in the thicket" – that is, instead of Isaac, another sacrifice was discovered: the ram. Isaac's life was saved and a "messenger" was offered up in his place, the ram!

His very marriage followed the same pattern. Isaac did not himself go to look for a wife. Instead, his father sent the servant Eliezer to look for a wife for Isaac. According to our tradition, Eliezer was legally a שליח קדושין, an agent to marry a woman for Isaac by proxy; no wonder, as the "Netziv" has pointed out, throughout their married lives Isaac and Rebecca suffered from a sense of distance and remoteness between them, a lack of complete communication and participation with each other. "Netziv" sees this symbolized in the event that occurred when Issac and Rebecca first met. There we read: ותקח את הצעיף ותתכס, that at the moment she saw him, Rebecca took her veil and covered her face. This veil is a symbol of a domestic curtain, an obstruction that prevented them from communicating freely. If there is no direct personal participation, then there is a possibility of misunderstanding and even enmity.

So it is with the wells. It took two difficult diggings until Issac learned that you must not send someone else to do your tasks. He then learned that only if "and he dug another well," by himself and with his own effort, can he achieve Rehovoth, the peace and freedom and room that he needed for his full development. This idea is especially important in contemporary society. As civilization grows more complex, each man grows less whole and less integrated, for he is less involved in the tasks that require his attention and devotion. With the division of labor, and the progressive concentration of expertise in narrower and narrower fields, we begin to suffer alienation, a sense of distance between ourselves and our fellow man, a withdrawal from all of life to within ourselves. Especially in our cornered cities, this introversion and withdrawal takes place only as a means to protect what little precious privacy we have left for ourselves. And of course, to some extent, we must limit our involvement in society and the lives of others. We need the mechanics of the delegation of duties and tasks in order for society to function. A good administrator is one who does not do everything for himself, but sees into it that others do their parts. We cannot and should not do everything by ourselves.

שליחות, The Halakhah has recognized this idea and incorporated it in the institution of agency. We are permitted to make an agent to perform certain tasks, not only in financial law, but even with regard to such mitzvot as the giving of charity or the writing of a Sefer Torah. Nevertheless, the principle of שליחות is not valid for every occasion. For instance, I cannot make an agent to eat in the Sukkah for me, nor can I appoint someone to listen to the sound of the Shofar for me. If I do, I have failed to fulfill my religious obligations. How do I distinguish between those functions for which I can appoint a messenger, and those which I must perform myself? The author of the קצות החושן has put it this way: I may make an agent to perform any commandment save the מצוה שבגופו, that mitzvah which I am bidden to perform with my own body, my own self. Thus, charity can be given by anyone: the important consideration is the result, that the poor man be fed or housed. Anyone may write a Sefer Torah for me, provided that I commission it and possess it and use it. But when the commandment is that I eat in a Sukkah, or that I hear the Shofar -- that is a commandment relating to my body, to my person, and no one can take my place.

Thus, certain things cannot be delegated and relegated to others. Today, as we are threatened with the progressive depersonalization of life, we must emphasize as never before the the significance of the individual, of selfhood, of personal participation and מצוה שבגופו, responsibility. We must come to recognize that we are each of us not only a collection of assignable functions, but integrated, whole, unique individuals, who must act by ourselves and as ourselves.

This sense of participation and wholeness is important not only for our individual development, but also for the integrity of family and home. A family is the kind of unit which cannot exist when the people in it conceive of themselves as little islands of humanity who refuse to be involved with each other. A home is a place of people who are concerned with each other, not introverted ciphers. How relevant, unfortunately, to our modern condition is that caustic insight contained in the sarcastic story of a woman who was approached by a real estate agent to buy a home. She refused, saying: what need do I have of a home? I was born in a maternity ward, raised in a nursery, cared for by baby-sitters, sent to kindergarten and then to a boarding school, spent my summers in a camp, lived in a college dormitory, moved to a hotel, I spend my vacations at resorts or cruises, when I am sick I am sent to a hospital, when I am old I will spend my time in a senior citizen's home and I will be buried from a funeral parlor.

Who needs a home? Indeed, if we spend our lives assigning our activities to others, simply giving all of society the power of attorney over our lives, "home" becomes impossible. Modern life encourages ויחפרו עבדי יצחק -- the appointing of others as agents to do our own work, and therefore this same modern life produces an inordinate amount of Esek and Sitnah, of strife and hatred. Judaism, contrariwise, emphasizes the home by

stressing ויחפר באר אחרת, the importance of personal participation and involvement — with the resulting Rehovoth, the sense of joy, release, and freedom.

(Saadia, in his major work, asks: why were not man and society created perfect so that there would be no need of Torah and mitzvot to help us on the road to perfection? He answers, because happiness and spiritual fulfillment require human work, personal effort, individual commitment and participation. If perfection is given to us by God without our endeavors, it is impersonal, and it cannot help us to attain the highest levels of spiritual satisfaction. It is only when we, by our own participation and effort, can achieve spiritual growth through the study of Torah and performance of mitzvot, that we can rightly be said to have enjoyed and deserved what we have called Rehovoth.)

This emphasis is indeed characteristic of Orthodox Judaism; it is indigenous to our whole faith. We believe that many religious duties cannot be delegated, and others should not. Prayer must be performed by the individual, not sung by the choir and chanted by the cantor and ground out by the organ. Torah must be studied by every individual Jew, by himself and in lectures, not left to rabbis and seminary professors. Kaddish must be recited by the mourner himself, not assigned to the sexton or some hired individual. Kedushah must not be confined only to the synagogue; from the synagogue it must extend into the home, so that even the Jewish table becomes an altar. No, there must be no vicarious observance, no religion by relegation.

All the more astounding therefore to learn of a prominent Orthodox synagogue, with a distinguished membership, which lacks that personal commitment to public worship which will enable it to have a regular minyan of members. This, despite repeated requests by its rabbis, almost to the point of mutual embarrassment, who are now reluctantly forced to conclude that their people lack the sense of personal action, and are almost ready to hire religious Hessians, hired personnel, others to do the work that really ought to be considered מצוה שבגופו, a personal, non-transferable obligation.

This sense of involvement which we have been recommending is best symbolized by a rock, one that was placed into the coffin of the late, lamented Rabbi Maimion, ז"ל, the distinguished leader of religious Zionism and the first Minister of Religions of Israel. When he was a young man, he preached throughout the length and breadth of Europe on behalf of religious Zionism. Once, when he was speaking in a synagogue in the Galician town of Kolomea, an opponent of Zionism threw a rock at him, one that was so large that had it struck its mark it would have brought to an abrupt and tragic end what turned out to be a great and eminent career of a founder of the State of Israel. Rabbi Maimon cherished that rock as a symbol of his utter devotion to the Zionist ideals and he commanded in his will that upon his death, the rock be placed in his coffin as an eternal momento of his personal dedication and participation in the dream of Zionism based upon Torah.

May we too learn to apply our own efforts, energies, and personal talents to the great and sacred tasks at hand. May we dig hard and deep in the soil of Judaism and Jewish life. And may God grant that the wells of Torah open up, that they gush forth the living waters of Judaism and divine blessings, and that our lives become Rehovoth, possessed of new scope, new freedom, abiding joy and everlasting peace. Amen.

BS"D

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

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The Long View of Jewish History

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

November 16, 2023

Legend has it that, 400 years ago, local native Americans relinquished ownership over the Island of "Manhattes" for the modern equivalent of about $1000. In the public imagination, that infamous barter of Manhattan for worthless trinkets, ranks as the worst deal in history. Even if this legend is true, this reckless exchange isn't as laughable as Esav's trade with his brother 3700 years ago. To barter your status as the "chosen first-born" for a plate of beans is absurd and embarrassing. What caused his temporary lunacy? What was Esav thinking?

Esav's folly stems from the closing of his imagination. Responding to Yaakov's offer of a trade, he announces, "As I will, one day die, the title of first-born is meaningless to me." To Esav, any benefit which does not surface in his own lifetime is worthless. It was already clear that Jewish destiny would take centuries to fully evolve, and that historical prospects for the first born were planted in the distant future. Recognizing the postponement of any historical opportunity, Esav abdicated his title, preferring a hot meal to future glory. His limited vision was too narrow to appreciate the long view. Every sin is a tragic barter of the future for the small but pressing needs of the immediate.

Furthermore, Esav's frantic pace of life obscured his vision. Unlike his more scholarly and sedentary brother, who dwelled in introspective tents, Esav chose an active life of hunting and tracking. His frenetic lifestyle left little time for reflection and little occasion for contemplating the bigger picture. Exhausted, starving, and too tired for self-examination, he bartered away his future. Esav's tragic mistake is the footprint left behind by a life which races faster than wisdom can keep pace with.

In addition to being narrow-minded, Esav's dismissal of historical legacy appears selfish. He didn't deny any value to the title of first born but wondered aloud about the benefits for himself. Though it may possess great value for his descendants, these are people he will never meet. His growling stomach craves a hot plate of beans, and his appetite is more important than any advantage for his offspring. Esav's tragic blunder isn't just a product of myopic vision, but is also, shockingly, self-centered. Life should never be "all about me" or focused solely upon private benefits. Moral personalities sense a larger purpose to life and willingly sacrifice for the long term and for future generations.

Verticality

Franz Kafka, who possessed a sharp but tortured sense of Jewish identity, once remarked that "we Jews are born old." As we are born into a long and ancient legacy of past generations, we live their strengths and their sufferings, while perpetuating their traditions and prayers. Though Kafka was correct, and we are born with one eye upon past generations, our other eye is fixed upon future generations.

One day our own pictures will hang upon a wall and will tell a story. Our portraits will narrate our personal chapter in the great book we call Jewish history. Our lives are but one section of a glorious but sometimes complicated story of Jewish destiny. Jewish identity is pitched within an intergenerational maze of past and present. Selfish life is horizontal, whereas a life of covenant is vertical. By sacrificing foresight for fleeting pleasure, Esav betrayed any sacred covenant with his future and with generations unborn.

Dread and Optimism

Over the past month, we have struggled with a complex range of emotions. We have experienced shock, sorrow, revulsion, mourning, fear, anger and anxiety. Alongside these powerful emotions we are consumed with dread, as our people face a very long and winding road. Eliminating our maniacal and homicidal enemies will be an arduous campaign. Astonishingly, our moral and just war has awakened the ancient monster of antisemitism which will not easily be vanquished. Even after we succeed in our just war, we will continue to face both military and domestic challenges. Many of us struggle to remain optimistic about the future state of Israel and the future state of our people. Dread runs high, while confidence runs low.

Envisioning the long view of Jewish history restores faith and reinforces optimism. We face many uncertainties in the immediate present, but the larger narrative of Jewish future has already been written. We know exactly how this all ends. We just don't know how quickly it ends and how circuitous the route toward the terminus. Faith in Jewish history affords the confidence to navigate the adversities of Jewish history.

Throughout Jewish history we were attuned to the long view, and this vision helped us endure challenges far worse than our current predicament. Though facing irredeemable conditions, we always knew that our lives played a quiet but important role in a larger historical arc. Knowing that our courage didn't always yield immediate dividends, we looked to the long view. Patiently but valiantly, we added bricks to the ever-growing wall of Jewish history.

Life in the modern state of Israel, has made us all a bit impatient. Trained to think in redemptive or triumphant terms, to us everything feels new, fresh, and brimming with potential. Our triumphs have made us impatient and less sensitive to the long view of Jewish history.

Many refer to this war as the second War of Independence. This terminology assumes that the consequences of 1948 can be neatly wrapped into the first 75 years of our state, and that we are currently embarking upon a new chapter. I prefer to call this war a "continuation" of the War of Independence. It may take us several generations to fully achieve the independence, sovereignty and security we so desperately seek. It will certainly take multiple generations to achieve the religious, spiritual, and moral condition we have dreamed of.

Taking the long view of Jewish history mustn't distract us from present and immediate challenges, but it should provide optimism even during dark moments.

The Charles Bridge

About 20 years ago I was warned that, when visiting Prague, I should avoid visiting the Charles Bridge which spans the Danube river. Being a curious type and a non-conformist, I made this the first stop of my itinerary.

Arriving at the bridge, I better understood the reason for these warnings. As punishment for Jewish blasphemy against Christianity, a 17th century Jewish leader was forced to adorn a statue of Jesus with golden letters spelling out phrases of Jewish prayer. Though initially offended by this encounter, I

quickly overcame my uneasiness. After all, I was a mere three hours away from my glistening homeland.
My thoughts immediately turned to the 17th century Jews of Prague who daily endured this statue without enjoying the horizons of hope which the state of Israel afforded me. Sensing the spiritual stamina and stiff defiance of these generations filled me with moral energy and with Jewish pride. They took the long view of history, and now it is our turn.
Perhaps, one day, our eyes will gaze upon the radiant and golden city of Jerusalem with fully restored Jewish peoplehood. Perhaps we will be that fortunate. Alternatively, we may not be that fortunate and this vision will only emerge long after our eyes have permanently shut. Either way, we will have built a historical platform for the future. We may not personally witness it, but our fingerprints will be all over it.
The writer is a rabbi at Yeshivat Har Etzion/Gush, a hesder yeshiva. He has smicha and a BA in computer science from Yeshiva University as well as a masters degree in English literature from the City University of New York.

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https://torahweb.org/torah/special/2023/rtwe_evil.html
Rabbi Mayer Twersky
Evil's Fifth Column
Western Civilization is imploding.
The lifeblood of the victims had not yet cooled. Civilized people of conscience were still reeling from shock at the savage slaughter of babies, beheading, burning people alive, kidnapping, torture, and rape gleefully perpetrated by Hamas. In that very moment the moral turpitude which is destroying Western Civilization was on full display. Various groups, notable amongst them student groups, issued vile, Faustian statements exonerating Hamas for its savagery and brazenly blaming its victim, Israel, for the carnage. Some university presidents immediately responded; reprehensibly, they generically condemned violence, careful not to single out or even reference Hamas. Others, after an initial sickening silence, prevaricated. Upon days of public pressure and contemplation, they decided that, in fact, they were opposed to beheading babies but hastened to "balance" their tepid remarks by expressing profound concern for the suffering of the innocent Palestinians in Gaza, thereby implicitly or explicitly condemning Israel's humanitarian, self-defense response to subhuman, belligerent savagery. Notably, these "humanitarians" do not comment on the fate of Arab populations outside of Israel as they languish under brutal, dictatorial regimes. Tellingly, these academic "moralists" have been silent throughout the years as Hamas has integrated its terror network into the civilian infrastructure, inter alia, shielding themselves in, behind and beneath hospitals, schools, and residential complexes. When other countries have exercised their inalienable right to self-defense (think of any just, modern war) we have not heard a chorus of voices expressing concern for civilian casualties and invoking the laws of war. And rightly so. Should Hitler or Osama bin Laden or Isis be given carte blanche because of the grim, gruesome, tragic reality that even defensive wars inevitably involve civilian casualties? Should terrorists remain forever free to continue massacring innocents because they cruelly and cynically imbed themselves amongst the civilian population? Civilization cannot and would not survive such a hypocritical policy of "restraint".
Every person of conscience intuits that outright support for Hamas or camouflaged support in the form of moral equivocation are odious. Nonetheless, it is vital that we translate our pre-cognitive intuition into cognitive categories as that will reveal the existential threat which Hamas' apologists pose to civilization.
"The species of man is unique, there is no other species that resembles him in this respect, that he, of his own accord through his own understanding and contemplation, can discern good and evil", writes Maimonides, the great medieval jurist and philosopher (Code of Jewish Law, Laws of Repentance, ch.5) Humanity is divinely endowed with a capacity for moral clarity. The civilized world can only combat forces of evil such as Nazism, Isis, Al Qaeda, and Hamas with such moral clarity. Moral clarity marshals the necessary resolve to exercise military might and vanquish evil. Without moral clarity and resolve, military firepower will never be directed to vanquish evil. The evil of explicit "moral" support for Hamas, or support camouflaged in equivocation and equivalences, is that it destroys moral clarity. Clearly, this form of evil is not academic; it reeks blood. By destroying moral clarity, it erodes moral resolve and dissipates opposition to evil. It perniciously acts as evil's fifth column. Evil's fifth column - the students, professors, administrators, and their co-conspiratorial ilk beyond academic circles - has and continues to provide moral cover for the atrocities of Hamas, empowering them to continue their savagery and barbarism. Undoubtedly, rabid antisemitism animates the fifth column. In antisemitic quarters, Jewish blood is of no value and Jewish self-defense is a war crime. Nonetheless, the fifth column poses a universal threat. This is so morally because the beheading of babies, the fiery immolation of entire families, torture, and rape etc. constitute crimes against humanity. And this is so pragmatically because the Hamas beast, if allowed to torture and devour the Jews, will then turn its sadistic, predatory, murderous attention to all Westerners and "infidels".
Hamas, along with all other "pure, unadulterated evil" terrorist organizations, needs to be militarily destroyed. But that can only happen if the hypocrisy and evil of its fifth column is peacefully exposed and defeated. Every Jew and all other people of conscience must participate in this noble, non-violent effort to restore moral clarity. Educators, philanthropists, university board members, college bound students and their parents, heads of corporations, essayists, political pundits and activists, et al., and voters on both sides of the political aisle - each acting within their respective domains with moral clarity - must join forces. (Fortunately, some individuals and corporations have already taken initial steps in that direction.) The future of the Jewish people demands that effort. And the future of civilization depends upon it.

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from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org> to: ravfrand@torah.org
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Rav Frand - A Person Can Get Used to Anything – An Advantage and a Disadvantage
These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1269 – The B.T. Dilemma: Can He Trust His Non-Observant Parents That All Will Be Kosher? Good Shabbos!
The pasuk says "When Esav was forty years old, he took as a wife Yehudis daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite; and they were a provocation of the spirit to Yitzchak and Rivka." (Bereshis 26:34-35). The Medrash notes the fact that the Torah points out that the daughters-in-law behavior was painful to Yitzchak and to Rivka (l'Yitzchak u'l'Rivka) rather than merely stating that their behavior was painful to Yitzchak and Rivka (l'Yitzchak v'Rivka) – without the second "to". The Medrash states that the nature of the Yitzchak's pain differed from that of Rivka's pain. Rivka, having grown up in the house of idolaters, was better able to handle pagan daughters-in-law than was her husband, who grew up in the house of Avraham and Sora.
Rivka was a tzadekes and of course avodah zarah bothered her, but having experienced it at home, she did not have the same visceral reaction to it as did Yitzchak. Dr. Abraham Twerski, zt"l, makes the point that a person who is exposed to negative phenomenon on a daily basis can lose their sensitivity to it. I once saw a statistic that the average child growing up in America has seen 300 murders (on television, movies, etc.). This was in the days BEFORE video games, in which killing people happens ALL THE TIME. Do you think that murder means the same thing that it meant 100 years ago? If you see something day in and day out, you can get used to it. You can get used to anything.
The truth of the matter is that this is the only way people were able to survive in the concentration camps. It was because "they got used to it." You can get

used to anything. That can be a tremendous advantage but it can be a horrible disadvantage as well – if someone loses his sensitivity to evil.

Giving A Boost to the Efficacy of the Tefilla of a Tzadik ben Rasha

In the beginning of the parsha we read "Yitzchak entreated Hashem opposite his wife, because she was barren. Hashem allowed Himself to be entreated by him and his wife Rivka conceived." (Bereshis 25:21). Rivka was barren. Both she and her husband, Yitzchak, davened that she should have children. The pasuk says that Hashem listened to Yitzchak and Rivka became pregnant.

Rashi points out that the pasuk emphasizes that Hashem listened to him – and not to her! It was Yitzchak's prayers that were answered, not Rivka's. Rashi explains that this was because "The (power of the) prayers of a tzadik (righteous person) who is the child of a rasha (wicked person)is not comparable to the (power of the) prayers of a tzadik son of a tzadik. Yitzchak and Rivka were both righteous, but he was the son of Avraham and she was the daughter of Besuel. Therefore, his prayers were superior. The Brisker Rav (Rav Yitzchak Ze'ev Soloveitchik) infers from this statement of Rashi that had Rivka been a tzadekes the daughter of a tzadik, the power of her prayers would be equal to that of Yitzchak and the Ribono shel Olam could have listened to either of them or to both of them.

The Brisker Rav is bothered by this inference: Does that mean that aside from their ancestry, Rivka was on the same level of righteousness as Yitzchak? Yitzchak went through the Akeidah. He was moser nefesh. He was an olah temima (an unblemished sacrifice). Rivka was a very fine woman but how can we compare her righteousness to his? He was also much older than Rivka, as he was sixty years old at this time and Rivka was much younger.

The Brisker Rav says that we see from here that a righteous woman who is the daughter of a rasha and the sister of a rasha, who was able to overcome her environmental disadvantages and emerge as a righteous woman is on the same level as a Yitzchak. To remain steadfast in her beliefs as a young girl in a house full of avodah zarah and full of reshaim is a monumental spiritual accomplishment, comparable to that of Yitzchak, who went through the Akeidah.

This brings us to our next subject:

Why in fact does HaKadosh Baruch Hu accept the prayers of a tzadik ben tzadik more than those of a tzadik ben rasha? The tzadik ben rasha has a lot going for him. He has been able to raise himself above his corrupt environment. That is an extraordinary spiritual accomplishment! So why does Hashem favor the prayers of a second generation tzadik over that of a first generation tzadik? The opposite should be the case: "In a place where a baal teshuva stands, completely righteous individuals cannot stand." (Brachos 34b).

I saw an approach to answer this question by a Rabbi Dovid Zucker, a Rosh Kollel in Chicago. He explains that the fact that prayer works is not something logical. It is something spiritual, something that sometimes defies regular logic. Better said, it has its own set of logic. There are laws of nature and there are metaphysical laws. In Hilchos Tefilla there are certain situations and conditions that make a person's prayer more accepted than other situations and conditions.

For example, there is a principle that "The Holy One Blessed be He does not reject the prayers of the masses" (Brachos 8a). In other words, a person has a better chance of having his prayers answered if he davens with a minyan. This is one of the metaphysical-spiritual laws of Tefilla. Not only that, if someone cannot daven with a minyan, he should at least try to daven at the same time that the tzibur is praying. (ibid.) Why does that work? The answer is that there is such a thing as an "eis ratzon" (a time of favor). There are such things as favorable times and favorable places to daven!

Why do you think people go to kivrei tzadikim (the graves of the righteous) to pray? What is behind that? Part of what is behind that is that a kever tzadik is a makom kodosh (holy place). If a person davens in a holier place, it makes his prayer better and more effective. That is why even if someone misses minyan, there is an advantage to daven in a Beis haKenesses (synagogue) or a Beis haMedrash (study hall). Why? It gives the prayer a boost. It takes advantage of the fact that the prayer is recited in a Beis haKnesses or a Beis haMedrash.

What is the logic behind that? In the privacy of my own home, I can have the greatest focus and dedication, while in shul there are more distractions. The answer is that these are parts of the metaphysical laws of Tefilla. There are certain things that make prayer more accepted.

Prayers are accepted during the Ten Days of Repentance between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur better than they are during the whole year. Why? It is an eis ratzon.

Rabbeinu Bechaye writes that it is customary throughout the Jewish world that women recite a prayer that they should be blessed with good children at the time they light Shabbos candles. He explains that this is done because the time of Hadlakas Neiros Shabbos is an eis ratzon. By virtue of the fact that the woman is fulfilling the mitzvah of lighting Shabbos candles, it makes her tefilla then more effective. It becomes a favorable time.

Rabbi Zucker writes that one of these metaphysical laws of prayer is that the prayer of a tzadik ben tzadik is more effective than that of a tzadik ben rasha. The tzadik ben rasha has overcome great odds and has proven his closeness to Hashem by emerging righteous from a house of wickedness, but nevertheless, in the laws of prayer, which have a logic of their own, the prayer of a righteous person who is the son of a righteous person, trumps the prayer of a righteous person who is the son of a wicked person.

This brings us to an interesting question. We have all occasionally davened in a beis avel (a mourner's house). It is a big mitzvah to help the mourner make a minyan during his week of shiva. Yes, but let us ask – why are you forgoing the mitzvah of davening in a shul? The Gemara says that davening in a shul is much more acceptable than davening in a house – so how can someone give that up by going to a beis avel?

The answer is that while davening in a beis avel, you are also doing a chessed for someone. That makes your tefilla more acceptable. That makes it into an eis ratzon because while I am davening, I am doing a chessed for those who are alive and those who are dead. This is also what the Rabbeinu Bachaye meant – when a woman davens at the time of lighting Shabbos candles, it is more acceptable.

If that is the case, the prayer of a "tzadik ben tzadik" is also more effective. That is just the way it works. That is the "law."

The Rosh was asked a 'shaylah' (halachic question). The congregation wanted to know who should be appointed as its shliach tzibbur. One candidate was a tzadik personally but he came from a disgraced family. The other candidate was a tzadik from a distinguished family.

Someone might say "I don't need a Rosh to answer that question. It is a Rashi in Parshas Toldos!" Rashi says explicitly in our parsha that the prayer of a second generation tzadik is superior to that of a tzadik whose father was wicked. However, the Teshuvas HaRosh ruled otherwise. He pasked that it is preferable to take the tzadik from the disgraced family over the tzadik with a more impressive pedigree.

Why? The Rosh writes that by taking this candidate from the disgraced family, the congregation is "drawing close those who are far" (being me'karev rechokim). The act of kiruv and chessed of the congregation will bring them merit in the Heavenly Court and will help the prayers of their shliach tzibur to be accepted.

This is common. People who are ba'alei teshuva have a certain inferiority complex. "My friend here is a me'yuchas – he can trace his ancestry back to Dovid HaMelech and look where I come from! What am I?" The Rosh quotes the pasuk "…Shalom, Shalom, to the 'rachok' and to the 'karov' …" (Yeshaya 57:19), in which the person who is distant (rachok) is given precedence over the person who is near (karov). That is the why the Rosh paskens to take the tzadik from a disgraced family. It gives their prayers the added boost called "kiruv rechokim" just like we can daven in a mourner's house rather than in a synagogue because of the added mitzvah of Nichum Aveilim. That chessed-boost equates the prayers of the tzadik ben rasha with that of a tzadik ben tzadik.

There is no contradiction between the psak of the Rosh and the Rashi in our parsha because in our parsha, no one is appointing Yitzchak to be the shliach tzibur and no one is appointing Rivka to daven. They each daven to Hashem independently on their own initiative. In that situation, with all other factors being equal, the Ribono shel Olam gives priority to the prayers of a tzadik ben tzadik. That is just the way it is. Those are the laws of tefilla.

The Rosh's case is not like that. There, the shul comes and asks "Who should we appoint?" There the Rosh says "Tell the shul to appoint the tzadik ben rasha because it will give them the merit of being m'karev this Jew with the inferiority complex." That equates with the tefilla of a tzadik ben tzadik.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com
Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org

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https://www.yutorah.org/sidebar/lecturedata/1080614/YUTorah-in-Print:-Parshat-Toldos-5784es from the First Aliyah in Toldot

Rav Soloveitchik on Toldot: Yitzchak's Countenance

Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider (Excerpted from Torah United, Teachings on The Weekly Parashah From Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, and The Chassidic Masters (Ktav, 2023)

These are the offspring of Yitzchak, son of Avraham; Avraham begat Yitzchak" (Genesis 25:19). Rashi asks the obvious question: Why does the verse repeat the fact that Yitzchak is Avraham's son? He answers that the Torah is addressing the generation's leitzanim, a loose term that can encompass everyone from scoffers to skeptics who debase everything they touch, who insinuated that Avimelech must have been Yitzchak's father, given the many childless years the couple had endured. In order to refute this calumny, God made Yitzchak an exact duplicate of the image of Avraham, so that skeptics could not but concede that "Avraham begat Yitzchak."1

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's namesake and great-grandfather, Rabbi Yosef Dov ha-Levi Soloveitchik, questions this comment in his Beit ha-Levi. If these leitzanim were scandalously and scurrilously spreading the lie that Avraham, tzadik of the generation, was not Yitzchak's legitimate father, why not brand them what they are—wicked? Moreover, how did their fiction even make sense, since Sarah and not Avraham was clearly the barren one? Although he offers his own answers, his great-grandson the Rav takes a different approach, one which elucidates Yitzchak's unique place as one of the Patriarchs.

Finding Yitzchak The Torah scants the biography of Yitzchak. While Avraham has three parashiyot and Yaakov many more, there is not a single parashah, with the possible exception of Toledot, in which Yitzchak is the dominant figure. This signals to us that we should pay close attention to whatever the Torah does tell us, such as the episode of contentious well-digging, in which the Philistines filled Avraham's wells with dirt and Yitzchak dug them out again. A key verse reads: "Yitzchak dug again the wells of water that they had dug in the days of his father Avraham, and which the Philistines had stopped up after Avraham's death, and called them names like those his father had given them" (Genesis 26:18). The Rav points out that if we pay close attention, we will see that much more than fresh water was at stake. The very next verse refers to digging a "well of mayim chayim" (Genesis 26:19). While usually mayim chayim, literally "living water," is translated as fresh or running water, drawing on rabbinic exegesis the Rav understands it as "life-giving water," that is, the Torah. In the era of the Bible, the well was a place where people would congregate to relate and receive information, so this means that Yitzchak succeeded in disseminating the life-giving Torah of his father. The leitzanim of the generation had dismissed Yitzchak as a capable successor of Avraham's legacy. They laughed at the notion that this man, a full century younger than his father, could continue to articulate, disseminate, and implement Avraham's vision. Word around the well was that Avraham's entire philosophy had died with him.2 Yitzchak's very name is emblematic of this doubting world into which he was born. The Rav quotes Yonatan ben Uziel's Aramaic rendering of the name Yitzhak to mean laughter. When he came into the world, people jeered and sneered. It was this tyke's lot to be the target of stares and loud whispers, an object of ridicule.3 People contended that instead of following in Avraham's footsteps, Yitzchak would be drawn to other influential personalities of his day. The leitzanim did not mean Yitzchak was the offspring of Avimelech biologically but culturally. They expected him to be molded by prevailing societal norms and mores. When Rashi writes that "Avraham begat Yitzchak" means the son had his father's visage, we should not envision Yitzchak as a physical clone of his father, but as a worthy spiritual heir who courageously defied the naysayers to tread his path.

Exemplar of Strength Yitzchak was given the upbringing necessary to successfully carry on his father's legacy.

Rabbi Avraham b. Meir Ibn Ezra posits that holid, the Hebrew term translated as "begat" in "Avraham begat (holid) Yitzchak," in fact refers to the raising and nurturing of a child. Avraham instilled his and the Torah's values in his son.4But it took a Yitzchak to devotedly embrace and actualize these lessons of his upbringing. The Rav cites the classic kabbalistic hierarchy of divine attributes in which Yitzchak is identified with the divine attribute of gevurah, usually translated as "strength." Yitzchak demonstrated immense inner strength and determination in internalizing his father's teachings and carrying the torch of Torah forward. Avraham was the inspiring revolutionary, and Yitzchak ensured that the fervor did not fizzle out by preserving his father's life's work. In this sense, Yitzchak's strength was not only manifest in steeling himself against the barbs of others and pressing doggedly forward under a heavy legacy, but in his distinctive capacity to retreat and withdraw. Yitzchak held his own self in check, so to speak, to maintain the trails his father had blazed.5If not for Yitzchak, Avraham's contribution to the world would have been utterly lost. Yitzchak dug again the wells of his father and even called them the same names. This episode is meant to teach that Yitzchak never sought his own fame, and that he succeeded in concretizing his father's legacy.

Exploring the Insight of the Rav Two parashiyot later, in Vayetze, we find Yaakov declaring in his ultimate confrontation with Lavan: "If I had not had the God of my father, the God of Avraham and the fear of Yitzchak, you would have sent me away empty-handed" (Genesis 31:42). The commentators are instinctively drawn to the curious phrase "fear of Yitzchak." Rashi understands it as an epithet of God, "the Fear of Yitzchak." Ibn Ezra reads it as Yitzchak's fear of God, evidenced on the day of the Akedah, the merit of which came to Yaakov's aid.7

Characterizing Yitzchak in this way fits our description of Yitzchak as a man of inner strength, who was prepared to be slaughtered in order to carry out his father's mission and the will of the Almighty. The Sages refer to this event as the Akedah, the Binding of Yitzchak, because it encapsulates his personality. In a word, Yitzchak resolutely bound himself to his father's mission and to the will of the Almighty. The Rav shared the following personal episode which sheds light on his perspective regarding the personality of Yitzchak. The Rav recalled that when he was a youth in Khaslavich, the secretary of the bet din, who was a very old man, recounted to the young Yosef Dov that he recalled as a boy having seen a very old cantor, who when he was a child, had been a member of an itinerant choir that would go from town to town. The cantor had himself recalled that once, when this choir was in Vilna to perform, he had seen a very imposing man, tall and handsome, walking in the street surrounded by his disciples in a

semi-circle. W hen he inquired who the man was, he was told that he was the Chassid of Vilna. [In his lifetime, the Gaon of Vilna, because of his pious ways, was called “the Chassid”] Hearing this made a powerful impression on the Rav. He had met another man who had met another man who had seen the Gaon. “I felt the link between the generations, the confluence of the mighty streams of the mesorah, not only the immediacy but the intimacy of the relationship between the generations of the tradition, the dialogue that transcends time.”8 Meeting someone who met someone else who beheld the visage of the Vilna Gaon is emblematic of an unbroken chain. Yitzchak teaches us that to be a Jew means to steadfastly safeguard the teachings received from the previous generation, to carry on the transcendent dialogue. The tradition of our people, our masorah, transmitted from parents to children and teachers to disciples, lives on in those who possess Yitzchak’s deep devotion to our faith’s glorious past, ensuring our celebrated future.
[1] Rashi on Genesis 25:19, s.v. קחצי תא דילוה מהרבא. [2] Chumash Mesoras HaRav, 1:195. [3] Ibid., 1:194. [4] Ibid., 1:184. [5] Ibid., 1:193. [6] Rashi on Genesis 31:42. [7] Ibn Ezra on Genesis 31:42 and 31:53. [8] Rakeffet-Rothkoff, The Rav, 1:141–142.

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from: Esplanade Capital <jeisenstadt@esplanadecap.com>
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Rabbi Yisroel Reisman's Chumash Shiur

The Understanding of Eisav and Edom

Eisav in this week’s Parsha has a special place. There is a Yishmael, there is an Amaleik and there is an Eisav. Eisav is a people that say, we are the chosen people. We are the people who HKB”H really wants. That is the Middah of Eisav. That is the Middah of the western world today. The whole religion of Catholicism is to say we are the chosen people. The Middah of Eisav is this Behala, make a Behala against Klal Yisrael to build themselves up.

The Gemara says in Maseches Yoma 20b (5 lines from the bottom) Tannu Rabbanan, (קול המונה של רומי). (אלמלא גלגל חמה נשמע קול המונה של רומי) means Eisav’s Tumult, the noise that Rome makes. If not for the orbit of the sun, we would go crazy from the noise that Eisav makes. The Maharsha says, it doesn’t mean that the sun makes noise that drowns out the noise of Eisav. There is a Bi’ur. What is the Bi’ur? The (המונה של רומי), the Tumult of Edom is what you see when you turn on the news. It is Eisav belittling Klal Yisrael, putting down Klal Yisrael and claiming the higher moral ground than Klal Yisrael. It is one thing with Amaleik. Amaleik is a Rasha. But the Middah of Edom is to say we are morally right, you are morally wrong. We have a higher standing, we have a better position than you. That is (קול המונה של רומי). That takes over the world. The Tumuling of Edom takes over the world.

So what is the antidote? (אלמלא גלגל חמה). What is (גלגל חמה)? The Iyun Yaakov on Bava Basra Daf Tes Zayin says the following. The Gemara says 16b (19 lines from the bottom) (אבן טובה היתה תלויה בצווארו של אברהם אבינו שכל חולה הרואה אותו מיד מתרפא). That Avraham Avinu had a special stone and someone who would see it would be healed and when he was Niftar HKB”H placed it onto the sun. HKB”H put it into the (גלגל חמה) the rotation of the sun.

All of the Baalei Machshava, the Baal Akeida, the Alshich on Tehillim 113, Rabbeinu Bachya in the beginning of Yisro, and really before them the Rashba in his Pirush which is brought here in the Ain Yaakov, they all say that this refers to Cholei Hanefesh. It doesn’t mean a stone that heals sick people. The Gemara actually says that until Yaakov Avinu nobody got sick. It means Cholei Hanefesh. People who are Fartumult in their Ehrlichkeit, Fartumult in their Frumkeit, Fartumult in their Emunah. Avraham Avinu, the glow of Avraham Avinu, the Even Tovah of Avraham Avinu is Zagt the Ain Yaakov, the Even Hama’ir, the seeing, the attitude of a Gadol B’yisrael, that is the Refuah. It doesn’t mean the speeches of Avraham Avinu, it doesn’t mean that he made a Drasha and it inspired people. It means the Etzem Metzios. Being in the Daled Amos of an Adam Gadol, when a person sees that the Hevlei Olam Hazeh become Batul. When you see the calmness of an Adam Gadol, it calms a person down, it makes the person understand everything around him is just a Tumult.

Today we live in a time where we are worried about Acheinu Bnei Yisrael that are in Eretz Yisrael. We almost can’t hold ourselves but to listen to the news and to find out the news, and it is a Tumult because most of the news certainly from secular sources is about those who are belittling Klal Yisrael and blaming Klal Yisrael. It is a Tumult. It comes from a good place that we are worried but it is (המונה של רומי). The Refuah is the (גלגל חמה), the brightness of Gedolei Yisrael. If you don’t have the Zechus to be in the Daled Amos of Gedolei Yisrael but at least to look at Toraso Shel Gedolei Yisrael. You could look at what they write about Shas Tzarah, to understand what they write about Shas Tzarah. It is a different dimension. It is a dimension of calmness, whatever is going on in the world. A dimension of a person who says I have something that needs to get done.

We saw Rav Pam, the most incredible thing is that whatever he was in middle of, he had a calm demeanor. Even if it was a time of challenge, he did it in a very calm way. Unbelievably Os’gecheshboned.

Let me share with you an episode I once had with Rav Pam. When he was ill and he had to go for radiation treatment to the hospital in Manhattan, I wanted very much to have an opportunity to be Meshameish him, to drive him. He didn’t let me. He said there is Seder in Yeshiva, you can’t. When it came to Bein Haz’manim, I said okay Rebbi there is no Seder today. He let me drive him. I went with him to the hospital and I accompanied him in to the room that he had to be in. Then we went home. When we got home, I walked into the door. He was in middle of an illness so you would think that he would be all Tzutumult. We got to the door and he said Reb Yisroel I want to tell you something. I know you wanted very badly to drive me. So I let you drive me once. But from now on, you sit and learn and I will have one of the bus drivers will drive me and you stay and sit and learn. The calmness, the Os’gecheshboned’keit, picked him up, drove there and back and when I walk into his door he stopped. He made a Cheshbon. The whole Tzutumul of everything he was going through, at that moment everything became clear and calm. (אלמלא גלגל חמה) we would all drown in the (המונה של רומי) in the Tumult of Rome all around.

We have to look in this time of tremendous worry, we have to channel the worry towards our Davening and Maisim Tovim. But Behala you need (גלגל חמה), you need the sun. The radiance of Gedolei Yisrael. We should be Zoche to be in the Daled Amos of Gedolei Yisroel who have calmness in difficult times. If we are not Zoche to be with them, at least to see it B’divraihem Hakedoshim. May HKB”H take us (מִצָּרָה לִרְוָחָה, וּמֵאֲפֵלָה לְאוֹרָה, וּמִשִּׁעְבּוּד לִגְאֻלָּה, הַשְׁתָּא בַּעֲגָלָא וּבִזְמַן קָרִיב). A Gutten Shabbos to all!

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https://theyeshiva.net/jewish/6052/hamas-israel-war-essay-parshas-toldos-we-fed-the-crocodile-for-too-long-israels-mission-today?print=1
Hamas-Israel War/Essay Parshas Toldos

We Fed the Crocodile for Too Long: Israel's Mission Today -- Maybe Rivkah Didn't Want to Deceive Her Husband, She Just Wanted Jacob to Display Another Side

Rabbi YY Jacobson

November 16, 2023 |3 Kislev 5784

Dedicated In loving memory of Sara bas Mordechai Deitsch by her daughter Rochel Leah Sandman; Dedicated with love from the Diamonds, Am Yisroel Chai! Dedicated by Daniel Brenkler, in loving memory of all the Jews killed in Pittsburgh, Shabbos, October 27, 2018

Touched to the Core

The bloodbath orchestrated by Hamas and Iran on Saturday, Simchat Torah (October 7, 2023) in Southern Israel has woken up a part in every single Jew that was dormant. The glee of the enemy in slaughtering Jewish babies reminded us that this has nothing to do with occupation, colonization, apartheid, or any other myth. This was a manifestation of visceral evil which craves to destroy every single Jew. Had Hamas had its way, it would joyfully perform this mini-Holocaust daily, until all 6.6 million Jews in Israel lay lifeless.

Every Jew living today feels the need to respond. Of course, we must defend ourselves in every possible way; we must support Israel and our soldiers with

every fiber of our being—encouraging them to fulfill their moral historic duty of eliminating every vestige of bloodthirsty evil. Of course, we must lift the morale of our brothers and sisters in Israel and the world over through an unprecedented outpouring of support, love and oneness, like never before.

But there is something more.

Taking the Blessings

The twin brothers Jacob and Esau (Yaakov & Eisav) occupy the leitmotif of this week's Torah portion, Toldos.

Rebecca (Rivkah) loves Jacob (Yaakov), the child dwelling in the tents; while Isaac (Yitzchak) loved Esau (Eisav), the "skilled hunter, the man of the field." As the story progresses, Isaac grows old and his eyes become dim. He expresses his desire to bless his beloved son Esau before he dies. While Esau goes off to hunt for his father's favorite food, Rebecca summons her son Jacob and instructs him to go take his father's blessings. She dresses Jacob in Esau's clothes, covers his arms and neck with goatskins to simulate the feel of his hairier brother, prepares a similar dish, and sends Jacob to his father with the food. The Torah quotes her saying:[1]

And now my son, listen to my voice, to what I am commanding you.

Go now to the flock, and take for me from there two choice kids, and I will make them tasty foods for your father, as he likes.

So Jacob drew near to Isaac his father, and he felt him, and he said, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau."

Jacob receives his father's blessings for "the dew of the heaven and the fat of the land" and mastery over his brother. Once Esau returns with the food, it is too late. Jacob has already obtained the blessings.

The Mysteries

This is a deeply complex narrative, or to paraphrase Winston Churchill who said of Russia, "a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma."

Here are five of the most thundering questions. How did Isaac and Rebecca allow themselves to grow so far apart in their perception of their children, to the point that Isaac favored Esau, and Rebecca insisted that Jacob receive the blessings? Why would she deceive her husband rather than speak to him? Why did Jacob employ cunning and stealth to deceive an unsuspecting brother? When Isaac discovers the trick, he seems shocked and bewildered. Why did he never chastise his wife or son?

Finally, when Jacob entered Isaac's chamber, and his father felt him, Isaac declared: "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau." Clearly, Isaac identified this man as having Jacob's voice. So why did he give him the blessings? Why did he not investigate who is the person standing before him?

Dozens of interpretations have been offered. Today I wish to present one perspective (of many possible ones)—it is an extraordinary insight presented by the late Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (1903-1993).[2]

The Ashes of Isaac

Isaac was the first person to be born a Jew. At the most defining moment of his life, he lay on the altar, bound up, about to be sacrificed. He was moments away from death. Only in the eleventh hour did the angel command Abraham: "Do not lay your hand on the lad."

It was, at that moment when he lay on the altar, that Isaac understood the magnitude of sacrifice that Jewish existence would require.[3] He knew that to be a Jew would be far from a simple feat. His people will endure fire and water. "Fire will not burn us; water will not drown us," goes a famous Russian Chassidic song. But fire and water it is! Jewish survival ought never to be taken for granted. "In each generation they rise up against us to annihilate us," we say in the Passover Haggadah, "and G-d saves us from their hands."

The Mission

That may be one reason Isaac had a special affinity for Esau: "And Isaac loved Esau because [his] game was in his mouth," the Torah states.[4] "Esau was a man who understood hunting, a man of the field, whereas Jacob was an innocent man, dwelling in tents," the Torah tells us.[5] Isaac understood that for the Jew to survive he will need to "dwell in the tents" of study and prayer,[6] to reside in the citadels of the spirit, in the mansions of moral contemplation and ethical explorations, aligned with G-d, the source of life, but he will also need to learn how to hunt in the field, how to take a weapon in his hand and battle with viscous aggressors in the killings fields of a harsh terrain. In the worlds of the Talmud: "He who comes to kill you, kill him first."[7]

It's not only about security. The mission of the Jew is to transform the physical and material world into a divine abode. To achieve this, he must enter into the real world and impact it. He must enter the open fields of society and live proudly as a Jew, to bring sanctity and holiness into the mundane, to integrate heaven and earth.

A Perfect Partnership

In Isaac's mind, a partnership between the twins Esau and Jacob will guarantee an eternal people. Jacob will grant the people its soul, spirit, conscience, and moral GPS, its Divine core, but Esau will be in charge of the "field," he will become the facilitator of Jacob's spiritual light and love in our physical world, standing guard against the enemy that craves to destroy goodness, morality and holiness in our world.[8]

The tragedy, of course, was that Esau did not see himself as a partner of Jacob. His material prowess, hunting skills, and field-maneuvers have become divorced from his spiritual, soulful core. His body was severed from his soul. "And Esau came from the field, and he was exhausted." His soul was exhausted because it felt empty. He craved to conquer the entire "field," to own the world, but he did not own himself; he remained internally worn out, emotionally exhausted, detached from his own spiritual roots. His internal universe was chaotic, distraught, and frenzied. Isaac yearned that Esau's enormous strength be harnessed to facilitate his soul, becoming a partner with Jacob. He wants to bless, empower and sublimate Esau.

Rebecca's Vision

It is Rebecca, the Jewish mother, who understands the calling of the moment—and the calling of history. "Now my son, listen to my voice, to what I am commanding you. Go now to the flock, and take for me from there two choice kids, and I will make them tasty foods for your father, as he likes." My dear Jacob! It is time to leave your tents of study and go out to the field (where the goats are.[9] It is time for you to learn how to garb yourself in Esau's cloaks and gear—to confront the enemy that might come to kill you. Sure, your tents of study and prayer will remain your eternal compass; they will guide your direction in the field and navigate your movements in the outside world; your faith and spiritual authenticity will be the bedrock of your success. But to be anchored in G-d means that at times you must go out and protect your children, standing up to your enemies with unwavering resolve. You must never apologize for your moral duty to crush your enemy, and you must never allow your hyper sense of fake morality and ethics to turn you into the punching bag of the world. If there is even the slightest chance that one of your children is in danger, you must go on the offensive and let your enemy be frightened for his life.

My dear Jacob! You despise violence, loathe conflict, and never give up on the dream of peace. We are the people of the book, not of the sword. But Jacob, there is a time in history when you must wage war, so that your children live. David will need to stand up to a Goliath; in the Persia of old, during the edicts of Haman, Jews will need to engage in moral violence to fight off their blood thirsty foes. In the days of Chanukah, the Jews will once again need to take up arms to save their people and faith. Time and time again, Jews will need to learn how to fight back. In June of 1967, and numerous times before and after, Israel will need to wage war to save a beleaguered people from the enemy's quest for our annihilation. After Simchas Torah 5784 it is clear that the restrain Israel demonstrated over the last decades, and all the compromises it made, have invited only war and violence. The words of Churchill in 1940 about the Nazis are applicable to Israel's terrible lack of vision in regard to its neighbors: "Each one hopes that if he feeds the crocodile enough, the crocodile will eat him last. All of them hope that the storm will pass before their turn comes to be devoured. But I fear greatly that the storm will not pass. It will rage and it will roar ever more loudly, ever more widely."

Do we want dead Jews who are seen as ethical, or living Jews whom the UN and other clueless Jew haters will forever condemn?

My dear Jacob—said his mother—one day, Esau and Yishmael will become your partner. One day, the Moshiach will come—and may it be speedily in our days—and you will return to your tents of spiritual ecstasy, as the "spirit of impurity will be removed from the world," and the entire "earth will be filled with Divine consciousness as the waters covers the sea." There will be a time when, in the words of Isaiah (2:4), "He [G-d] shall judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples, and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift the sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore."

But till that glorious day, my dear Jacob, you -- a prince of G-d, a man of wisdom, integrity and faith -- must dress like Esau, you must don his gear. For your enemy is brutal, ruthless, and bloodthirsty. As long as you duck, the international community empathizes with his murderous plans. The world respects Jews who respect themselves, their faith, their history and their Torah; the world admires Jews who are not afraid of doing everything it takes to stop immoral violence and bloodshed. The world wants a strong Israel who demonstrates unwavering moral clarity to eliminate every last vestige of evil and terror.

A Radiant Field

Jacob obeys. He learns to enter the field. He learns to don the clothes of Esau. And when he enters the chambers of his father, something remarkable happens. And he [Isaac] said, "Serve [it] to me that I may eat of the game of my son, so that my soul will bless you." And he served him, and he ate, and he brought him wine, and he drank.

And his father Isaac said to him, "Please come closer and kiss me, my son." And he came closer, and he kissed him, and he smelled the fragrance of his garments, and he blessed him, and he said, "Behold, the fragrance of my son is like the fragrance of a field, which the Lord has blessed!

Isaac tells his son that his fragrance is one of a field blessed by G-d. Esau was a man of the field. Jacob was not. But when Jacob was forced to enter the field—to enter into the material, physical and earthy reality where Esau lives and succeeds; when Jacob is forced to learn how to use a rifle and drive a jeep; when Jacob is compelled to battle a war for survival; when Jacob is compelled to live and function in the larger world—it has "the fragrance of a field, which the Lord has blessed!" It is not a field which causes exhaustion and loneliness; it is a field that mirrors the radiance of the Divine. Jacob's field is filled with sanctity, harmony, and spiritual depth. Jacob imbues Esau's cloaks and vocation with holiness.

Jacob's field is not a place of vulgarity and bruteness; it is a garden of G-d. Jacob holds his book in one hand, and his plow in the other; his book in one hand and his sword in the other—realizing that the material too belongs to the oneness of the Divine. As Moses tells his people:[10] "For the Lord, your G-d, goes along in the midst of your camp, to rescue you and to deliver your enemies before you. Therefore, your camp shall be holy…"

An Integrated Jacob

Isaac, at lasts, acknowledges the possibility of Jacob fulfilling his mission, even while Esau is not yet ready to serve as a partner. "So Jacob drew near to Isaac his father, and he felt him, and he said, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau." At this moment, Isaac experienced that wondrous synthesis in his child. His voice is the voice of Jacob—a voice of Torah, of wisdom, of spiritual truth, of justice, compassion, ethics, sacred nobility, and moral values. It is the "Yiddishe Shtime," the voice of Yiddishkeit. "But the hands are the hands of Esau"—this same boy is capable of standing up to a cruel enemy with unapologetic resolve, unwavering moral clarity, unrestrained determination, and undeterred strength to preserve its life. His mind, heart and soul will be defined by Torah, and when the moment calls for it, he will know how to go out and change the world.

Of course, when the Jewish country has enough manpower to fight the enemy on the battlefield, it is an awesome and Divine merit for the army and the community to allow Jews to be dedicated completely to Torah study—the lifeline of our people. Those Jews who sit and study Torah day and night grant spiritual protection and Divine blessing to the army, the people, and the land. But if more manpower is needed, it is a grand mitzvah for every single capable Jew to don arms and go fight when the enemy attacks. And concerning war, the Torah states, "Your camp shall be holy," as your rifle is part and parcel of your spiritual holiness.[11]

Indeed, the opening of Isaac's blessings to Jacob is: "And may the Lord give you of the dew of the heavens and [of] the fatness of the earth and an abundance of grain and wine." He blesses him not only with the heavenly dew but also with the fatness of the earth. He empowers him not only to be holy in heaven, but also to bring holiness to the earth. Not to shy away from his power to conquer the earth and bring G-d into the earth.[12]

Wake Up!

The relevance to our times is clear. The Jewish people are facing yet again a sworn enemy. What Hamas and its supporters targeted was not just a piece of land, but an entire people. We have once again been confronted by the force of evil and diabolical hatred that craves to destroy G-d's eternal people.

At such a time, our response must be: Let's be Jewish like never before in history, and let's be united like never before! The voice of Jacob remains our greatest power—the voice of Torah study, the voice of prayer, the voice of celebrating Mitzvos and Judaism. This is why we are here today, 3300 years after our inception and 3300 years after almost every Empire tried to get rid of us.

Let us become the greatest Jews ever, by studying what it means to be a Jew and living it. 16 million Jews are waiting for marching orders. Each of us ought to use his or her influence to inspire our brothers and sisters to start living Judaism in their daily life, beginning with one mitzvah.

And at this moment let us not forget our moral duty to use the "hands of Esau." Israel's moral obligation is to eliminate terror with unwavering might, without endangering our soldiers. We must protect ourselves. Every synagogue, every school, every Jewish center, and every Jewish community must guarantee the highest level of physical and spiritual security. Not minimal security, but the maximum level of safety.

While we do not look for wars, we are a nation which loves peace, searches for peace, and respects and loves all people, if someone attacks us, we ought to respond with all our might. "One who is merciful to the cruel becomes cruel to those who deserve mercy," say our sages.[13]

Meir Uziel, an Israeli comedian (and grandson of former Sephardic Chief Rabbi Ben Tzion Uziel), once quipped: In the competition for Ms. Ethical among the 200 nations of the world, we always come in last place, since we are the only ones who show up!

Lessons from the Holocaust

The late Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin once wrote:

"I believe the lessons of the Holocaust are these. First, if an enemy of our people says he seeks to destroy us, believe him. Don't doubt him for a moment. Don't make light of it. Do all in your power to deny him the means of carrying out his satanic intent. (Note: one month later, Begin dispatched Israel's Air Force to destroy the Iraqi nuclear facility at Osirak.)

"Second, when a Jew anywhere in the world is threatened or under attack, do all in your power to come to his aid. Never pause to wonder what the world will think or say. The world will never pity slaughtered Jews. The world may not necessarily like the fighting Jew, but the world will have to take account of him.

"Third, a Jew must learn to defend himself. He must forever be prepared for whenever threat looms.

"Fourth, Jewish dignity and honor must be protected in all circumstances. The seeds of Jewish destruction lie in passively enabling the enemy to humiliate us. Only when the enemy succeeds in turning the spirit of the Jew into dust and ashes in life, can he turn the Jew into dust and ashes in death. During the Holocaust it was after the enemy had humiliated the Jews, trampled them underfoot, divided them, deceived them, afflicted them, drove brother against brother, only then could he lead them, almost without resistance, to the gates of Auschwitz. Therefore, at all times and whatever the cost, safeguard the dignity and honor of the Jewish people.

Begin missed one point, which sadly proved to cause such weakness in Israel. For Israel to retain its deterrence power, it must be convinced of its moral right, of its spiritual mission in this world, of its destiny as G-d's people. Every Jew must know the truth that the entire land of Israel is our eternal home, G-d's gift to the Jewish people. Only when the voice is the voice of Jacob, will his hands be able to deliver the punch it needs to. Without it, Jacob become apologetic, weak, frail and perceived as someone who can be defeated with enough pressure, lies, and terror.

Today Jacob must increase his voice and must don the gloves of Esau to eliminate through absolute strength and deterrence every vestige of terror in its midst.

May G-d bless Israel and the entire Jewish nation; may G-d protect and free our hostages; may G-d protect our holy soldiers; may G-d give us the resolve we need to stop ducking and start demonstrating authentic strength. And may G-d bring redemption to our people, our land, and our world, now, Amen!

[1] Genesis 27:8-18: [2] The Rav shared this at a convention of the Mizrachi movement, in Atlantic City, in 1961. You can read the original insight here: http://hebrewbooks.org/2813. Go to pp. 12-14. I included some other ideas to clarify some details. [3] The end of Vayikra (26:42) reads: "V'Zocharti es brisi Yaakov, v'af es brisi Yitzchok, v'af es brisi Avraham ezkor. I will remember My covenant with Yaakov; also my covenant with Yitzchak, and also My covenant with Abraham will I remember." The term Zechirah, the word for Remembering is mentioned in connection with Yaakov, and it is mentioned again with Abraham, but it is not mentioned with Yitzchak. Why? The great Biblical commentator, Rashi, offers the midrashic insight (Rashi to Lev. 26: 2).: "Why does Hashem use the term 'Remembering' for Abraham and Yaakov but not when he speaks of Yitzchak? Because in the case of Yitzchak, 'Remembering' is not necessary. The ashes of Yitzchak always appear before Me, gathered up and placed on the Altar!" Yitzchak remains the symbol of Jewish sacrifice, the readiness of the Jewish people to

dedicate their lives as an offering for G-d. Yitzchak's symbolic ashes stand before my eyes every single day, says G-d. The sages define Yitzchak as an "olah temimah"—a wholesome offering, whose sanctity required he never leave the borders of the Holy Land. [4] Genesis 25:28 [5] Ibid. 25:27 [6] See Rashi to Genesis 25:27 [7] Sanhedrin 72a [8] See at length the commentary of Netziv to the story. [9] Esau is represented by the goat, "saeir," while Jacob by the sheep, "hakvasim hifrid Yaakov." (Or HaTorah Vayishlach vol. 1). [10] Deut. 23:15 [11] See the address by the Lubavithcer Rebbe, 6 Tishrei 5728 (1967), a few months after the Six Day War. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fsADqkXyALk [12] What is fascinating is that Jacob beloved's son Joseph, will dream up, years later, a storm. "And Joseph dreamed a dream and told his brothers… 'Listen now to this dream, which I have dreamed: Behold we were binding sheaves in the middle of the field, when, behold! -- my sheaf arose and also remained standing; then behold! -- your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf.' "So his brothers said to him, 'Will you reign over us? Will you dominate us?'. And he again dreamed another dream, and he related it to his brothers, and he said: 'Behold! I have dreamed another dream, and behold, the sun, the moon and eleven stars were prostrating themselves to me'… His brothers envied him, but his father awaited the matter." Joseph's double dreams take him from the plane of agriculture to the realm of the celestial. First, he dreams of himself—and his brothers—embodied as sheaves of a field where their sheaves bow to his. Yet as his dreams progress, he views himself and his family as heavenly lights: the son, the moon and the stars. Joseph defines here two roles for himself and his family: He will be the great economist, leading a nation to a prosperous agricultural future, sustaining the land with earthly food. But simultaneously he sees himself guiding the sun, moon and starts—granting vision, light, and direction to the planet. The two are not contradictory in his world—as Jacob was given both the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth. The voice must be the voice of Jacob, and the hands must employ the skills of Esau. [13] Tanchuma, Parashat Metzora 1. Yalkut Shimoni Shmuel 1 #121.

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https://jewishaction.com/jewish-world/the-hidden-blessings-of-anti-semitism/

The Hidden Blessings of Anti-Semitism

RABBI YITZCHAK BREITOWITZ

Fall 2019

The topic I want to address today is a bit provocative. And I hope I will not offend anyone's sensitivities by describing the constructive role of the anti-Semite in the formation of a Jewish identity.

All of us understand, of course, that Hakadosh Baruch Hu created a world of bechirah (free will) and individuals are held accountable for their sins and for the evil they perpetrate. Hitler cannot go to God and say, "If You didn't want the Jews to die, You wouldn't have let me do it." At the same time, Hakadosh Baruch Hu uses the billions of autonomous decisions that people make to advance His own aims in the world. This can be likened to a chess grandmaster who turns all the moves of the opponent to his advantage. Thus, even the destructive evil that people perpetrate can be co-opted by the Ribbono Shel Olam to bring about a necessary, or even positive, outcome. There are lessons to be learned from those who oppress and denigrate us. The lessons may be painful and even devastating, but they are lessons nonetheless. Hence, the hidden blessings of anti-Semitism!

"Be Like the Nations"

At the beginning of the twentieth century, well before the Nazis rose to power, Rabbi Meir Simcha HaKohen of Dvinsk, in his classic work Meshech Chochmah, described a tragic pattern in our history. In every generation, he said, there are Jews who seek to "be like the nations" and embrace foreign cultures. But the more Jews strive to become like the nations of the world, the more Hashem allows the nations of the world to remind us that we are different. And in what are frighteningly prophetic words, Rabbi Meir Simcha wrote: "Those people who think Berlin is the new Jerusalem will discover that from Berlin will come a churban that will tell Klal Yisrael 'You are a Jew; you cannot be one of them.'" Indeed, the Lubavitcher Rebbe used to say that it was easier to be Jewish in Siberia than in suburbia. The Russians didn't let the Jews forget who they were. In suburbia, Jews can easily abandon their identity and assimilate.

The Chatam Sofer makes the same observation. In the Haggadah we read, "Arami oved avi, vayered Mitzraymah—the Aramean [Lavan] tried to destroy my father Yaakov and [therefore] he [Yaakov] went down to Egypt." The Chatam Sofer questions this seeming non sequitur: Yaakov Avinu did not descend to Egypt upon leaving Lavan's house. He actually returned to Eretz Yisrael, where he lived for many years. Why does the Haggadah link these two episodes?

The Chatam Sofer explains that during the brit bein habetarim, Hashem told Avraham, "Ki ger yihyeh zaracha b'eretz lo lahem—Your children will be strangers in a land that is not theirs." He did not explicitly state that the exile would take place in Egypt. Theoretically, the period of exile could have taken place in any country. That being the case, since Yaakov was already in a state of exile in Lavan's house, why didn't he just remain there and allow the decree to be fulfilled in that way?

The answer is that Lavan would have destroyed us in a way that would have been far more devastating than what Pharaoh did. When it says, "Lavan bikesh la'akor et hakol—Lavan sought to destroy the whole," according to the Chatam Sofer it doesn't mean that Lavan wanted to physically destroy Yaakov. Lavan came to Yaakov and said, "Achim anachnu—we're brothers. Be like us, let's work together, let's collaborate," as opposed to Pharaoh, who basically said, "You're slaves and we're going to kill your children." Being with Lavan would have destroyed Yaakov spiritually, would have destroyed Am Yisrael. Therefore, Hashem had to fulfill the decree of galut in a hostile environment in order for the Jews to preserve their identity. Indeed, it was precisely because of the slavery and oppression that the Jews in Egypt remained separate, keeping their distinctive language and clothing.

And thus, within the darkness of anti-Semitism lies a hidden berachah—the hatred of the nations toward us serves as the ultimate reminder that the Jewish people must remain distinct and apart.

Throughout galut, Jews have been faithful citizens of every country in which they have lived. "Ger v'toshav anochi imachem—I am a stranger and a resident among you," said Avraham Avinu millennia ago. Rabbi Joseph Ber Soloveitchik derives from those words a dictum for the Jewish people: "I am a stranger and a citizen among you." Dina d'malchuta dina. We respect the laws. We contribute to the welfare of every society in which we live. Religious or not, Jews bring berachah in the realms of economics, art, science, et cetera. We're loyal, we're supportive, we're law-abiding. But at the same time, we must be a ger. We must know we are strangers and that the foreign society in which we find ourselves is not truly ours. A Jew must remember—I am different, I have a different mission.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, after Napoleon conquered Europe and turned his sights on Russia, a controversy arose among the Chassidic rebbes: Should the Jews pray that Napoleon should win or that the Czar should win? The Jews living under the Czar endured extreme poverty and terrible suffering. They were only permitted to live in the Pale of Settlement, were required to pay exorbitant taxes and were often evicted from their places of residence. Most tragically, Jewish boys were forcibly taken at a young age and drafted into the Russian army.

Napoleon promised emancipation, the collapse of the ghetto and political and civil rights. He assured the Jews that they would be able to own property and enter various professions that had been closed to them. Not surprisingly, many Jews, including prominent rabbinic figures, felt the lives of the Jews would be vastly improved were Napoleon to triumph. The lone voice of opposition, the da'at yachid, was the Baal HaTanya, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, who preferred the Czar over Napoleon. The Czar, he explained, seeks to destroy our bodies, leaving our neshamot intact. With emancipation, he predicted, Jews would ultimately abandon the Torah.

The Baal HaTanya's foresight proved true. The Haskalah, the Reform movement and the myriad other secular Jewish movements that rejected Yiddishkeit were essentially the result of the newfound freedoms following the French Revolution and Napoleon's rise to power a little later on.

While freedom is, of course, a great blessing, and we should be exceedingly grateful for the opportunities we are afforded by living in a free society—be it the United Kingdom, the United States or Eretz Hakodesh—we must recognize that sometimes we need the anti-Semites of the world to remind us of that which we are in danger of forgetting.

The prophet Balaam was one of the earliest anti-Semites. God turned Balaam's curse into a blessing. "Hen am levadad yishkon—the Jewish people are a nation that dwells alone." In order for Klal Yisrael to flourish, we must retain our sense of aloneness.

In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, a young journalist in Vienna, Theodor Herzl, covered the notorious Dreyfus trial. He was astounded to discover the depth of the anti-Semitism that permeated European culture. A cultured man, but one who lacked a Jewish education and upbringing, he could not understand how Jew-hatred could persist in modern progressive society. As a result of his experiences, he developed a theory: Jews were hated because they were not like the other nations; if they were to have their own land and their own army, like Germany, France and England, the nations of the world would respect them. Normalization, claimed Herzl, is the key to eradicating anti-Semitism.

History, however, has shown us that the opposite is the case; as the Meshech Chochmah famously predicted, the more we try to "normalize," the more anti-Semitism grows. And as grateful as we are for the State of Israel, if we ask ourselves honestly whether the creation of the Jewish State eradicated anti-Semitism in the world, the sad answer is: It did not. It did not at all. That is because when we strive to be k'chol hagoyim, like the nations of the world, there will be those who will remind us that we cannot and should not. And we must remain cognizant of the fact that in reminding us, they are, unquestionably,

messengers of God. True, these anti-Semites will be punished for their actions since their intentions are evil. Guided by their own free will, they hate us because of their own sinful, immoral inclinations. Yet, God employs even the rasha to teach us what we need to learn.

Approaching Modern Secular Culture

Our forefather Yaakov's encounter with Esav is the prototype for how we should relate to the nations of the world. Rashi explains that Yaakov Avinu employed three steps in preparation for his encounter with Esav: 1. He sent gifts. 2. He prepared for war. 3. He prayed to Hakadosh Baruch Hu for siyata d'Shmaya. Indeed, Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi, head of the Sanhedrin and political leader of the Jewish community during the Roman occupation of Eretz Yisrael, would study Parashat Vayishlach before meeting with the Romans. These strategies encapsulate how we should approach the non-Jewish culture.

Gift-giving is a form of embrace. Chazal state, chochmah bagoyim ta'amin—there is wisdom and insight among the nations of the world from which we can benefit. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch was a proponent of Torah im derech eretz, engaging with secular wisdom and culture while maintaining strict adherence to Jewish law.

Milchamah, war, represents the opposite approach—namely, that there is much in modern society that is degenerate, corrupt and corrosive, which we must reject. Taking an extreme all-or-nothing position is wrong, irrespective of which side one chooses. Totally embracing secular modern culture is a colossal mistake. Yet, total rejection is not the answer. If one had to choose between total acceptance and total rejection, the latter is certainly preferable. However, the ideal derech is a path of balance and harmony, where one discerns what to embrace and what to oppose, what to be mekarev and what to be merachek, what to permit into one's home and what to keep out, et cetera. This approach is certainly the more challenging one, and when choosing this derech, one needs to know that the essential ingredients for success are tefillah and siyata d'Shmaya.

In Maariv on Motzaei Shabbat, to mark the separation between Shabbat and weekdays we add the paragraph "Atah chonantanu . . . vatavdeil Hashem Elokeinu bein kodesh l'chol . . . bein Yisrael la'amim—You have graced us . . . and You have distinguished, Lord, our God, between the sacred and the secular . . . between Yisrael and the nations." The Gemara in Berachot asks: Why is Havdalah placed in the berachah of Atah Chonein where we ask God for wisdom? The Gemara answers: "Im ein da'at, havdalah minayin?" Havdalah, the ability to distinguish, is not a mechanical, automatic process. One needs wisdom, understanding and discernment in order to determine what is good, what is bad, how to separate between the two and how to distinguish between kodesh l'chol—the holy and the profane. We pray for wisdom in the berachah of "Atah chonein l'adam da'at." And it is through tefillah that we are granted the ability to discern. Choosing what to embrace and what to reject is a lifelong challenge.

There is more we can learn from the story of Yaakov and Esav. The night before Yaakov is to meet Esav of the flesh, he encounters Esav of the spirit. He fights with this mysterious man, the Sar shel Esav, an angelic figure, and they struggle all night. At times Yaakov is on top and at times the mysterious figure is on top. In the morning Yaakov is finally victorious, but he is limping.

The Sefer HaChinuch interprets this episode beautifully. The night alludes to the long galut that the Jewish people will have to endure, during which enemies will try to destroy us physically and spiritually. Yet Hashem promises that after that long night, dawn will come and the very enemies who tried to destroy us will be forced to bless us, just as the Sar shel Esav was compelled to do. While the Jewish people will survive the long, dark exile, it will not be without sacrifices. Just as Yaakov emerged from the battle limping, we will not emerge from the battle unscathed. The galut is going to take a terrible toll—the segment of Klal Yisrael that will survive to experience the geulah will be decimated and demoralized. But the overriding message of this episode in the parashah is that despite the darkness of the night, dawn will come. Every time we refrain from eating the gid hanasheh, we remember the battle between Yaakov and the angel, and we remind ourselves that despite the current state of despair and darkness, the geulah will come.

The Chofetz Chaim derives two additional teachings from this parashah. Firstly, he asks, why does the angel of Esav—the koach hatumah—only attack Yaakov? Why didn't Avraham and Yitzchak experience a similar struggle? Pirkei Avot tells us, "Al sheloshah devarim ha'olam omed—the world stands on three pillars": "Al haTorah, v'al ha'avodah, v'al gemilut chasadim— on Torah, service of God [worship] and acts of kindness." Avraham Avinu represents gemilut chasadim; Yitzchak, who was ready to be a korban, represents avodah; and Yaakov, who spent fourteen years in Yeshivat Shem V'Ever without sleeping, represents the power of Torah learning.

The koach hatumah, explains the Chofetz Chaim, is perfectly willing to let us perform mitzvot if our success will only be short-term and will eventually dissipate. The yetzer hara takes the long view! The Sar shel Esav is not concerned when Jews perform gemilut chasadim without Torah; let them create social welfare institutions, hospitals, cemeteries and Landsmannschaften. After a few generations, their descendants won't be Jewish anyway. Let them perform avodah, let them build magnificent shuls. The Sar shel Esav did not attack Avraham or Yitzchak because chesed and avodah without Torah cannot sustain the Jewish people. Yaakov, however, who embedded within us the power of Torah, did possess nitzchiyut, eternity.

As a society, we need all three pillars—Torah, avodah and gemilut chasadim. Studying Torah properly will bring one to the other two pillars as well. Gemilut chasadim or avodah alone, on the other hand, will not necessarily bring one to Torah. Simply put, without Torah there is no continuity. Orthodox communities in this country did not begin flourishing until Torah chinuch became widely available. Even if parents are religious and keep mitzvot, they will not succeed in transmitting Yiddishkeit to their children unless they give them a solid Torah education.

The second teaching of the Chofetz Chaim based on the episode of Yaakov and Esav is that although the yetzer hara, the Sar shel Esav, wanted to destroy Torah, he was not successful. There will always be Jews who will study Torah despite the hardships and deprivations. On that level, Esav could not win. He did, unfortunately, succeed on another level—the fact that Yaakov emerged limping represents the damage that the Sar shel Esav was able to inflict upon the support of Torah. According to the Zohar Hakadosh, the thigh represents the concept of support, just as the thigh supports the body. The victory of Esav was in weakening the tomchei d'Orayta, the support of Torah. As a result, support for Torah, whether financial or emotional, will always be precarious and weak. In fact, the Chofetz Chaim used to say that if a Torah institution doesn't have financial problems, one must question whether it is an authentically religious institution!

(Now that doesn't mean if someone comes to you for tzedakah, you say, "I'm sorry but you were cursed, I'm not supposed to give you." A number of Christian theologians in the nineteenth century were opposed to women taking anesthesia for childbirth because they believed the curse of Chava necessitated that she give birth in pain; Judaism on the other hand, differentiates between a curse and a commandment. The curse may be the natural condition of the world, but we are certainly permitted and indeed obligated to mitigate the negative consequences. The imperative of supporting Torah is very much the same way. It is our duty to overpower and transcend the curse of Esav. The curse becomes a challenge and a responsibility, rather than an excuse.)

Rabbi Yehuda Leib Chasman, the great mashgiach of the Hebron Yeshiva, presents another insight into the episode with Yaakov and the Sar shel Esav. Before the angel left, Yaakov asked the angel, "Haggidah na shemecha—Tell me your name." The angel responded, "Lamah zeh tishal l'shmi—Why do you ask my name?" Rashi explains the angel's reply to mean: "I don't have a regular name; my name depends on my mission, sometimes I'm this, sometimes I'm that." Rabbi Chasman understands the verse differently. In his reading, the angel's name is: "Don't ask my name." What sort of name is "Don't ask my name?"

Rabbi Chasman explains with a parable. A Polish farmer was traveling to the big city for the first time. He was told that if he bought a ticket and sat in a dark room (it was a movie theater), he would see people and animals emerging from the wall. He bought a ticket, took a seat in the dark auditorium, and suddenly he saw people walking towards him. Confused, he pulled out his powerful flashlight and shined it on the wall to see if he could locate the door from which the people were emerging. But when he shined the bright light on the dark wall of the movie screen, he could no longer see the picture, and the people coming towards him disappeared. The crowd in the audience began yelling at him to turn off the light; "We can only see the movie when it's dark," they explained.

The meaning of the parable is this: When we sit in darkness in This World without pondering the purpose of our lives, all sorts of illusions appear to be real—money, honor, even grudges we harbor against others. We think they are so real because we are sitting in darkness. Conversely, while you're sitting in the

dark, there might be a bag of diamonds on the next seat that you're not going to notice. Darkness makes you think that certain things that are not real are real, and it obscures your ability to see things that are real. When you turn on the light, you realize that what you thought was so important was an illusion, and you can see the diamonds next to you.

When Yaakov Avinu asked the angel, "What is your name," he was in essence asking the yetzer hara, "What is your power over people? How do you entice people to sin?" (A name signifies power. The Arizal explains that at a brit, Hashem gives the parents some element of prophecy to name their child, since a name embodies a child's potential spiritual power.) And the Sar shel Esav replied, "I entice people because nobody bothers to ask my name! Nobody thinks about me; they are living in darkness." When they are in darkness, they are fooled.

Anti-Semitism is one of the mechanisms that Hakadosh Baruch Hu employs to "turn on the light," to make us realize that we must be unique, we must be distinct. We have a mission.

"Let Me Learn From My Enemies"

Even the brazen lies of the anti-Semites contain a musar lesson for us. One of the major issues we face is the ridiculous double standard applied against the State of Israel—countries that literally massacre tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of their own citizens sit in judgment if the IDF accidentally kills a Palestinian civilian. When such an accident occurs, it is regrettable and the IDF itself regrets it; it is indeed the most moral army in the world. Clearly this double standard is unfair and unjust. But even in that hypocrisy and injustice, there's a message. The nations of the world may not have a right to impose a double standard on us, but we have to impose a double standard on ourselves! It's not enough to say the other nations are worse. It is not enough to say that we don't do all the bad things that others do. Hakadosh Baruch Hu says we have to live lives of kedushah, lives of goodness, lives of greatness. So when I hear the double standard hypocrisy of the umot ha'olam, it is a musar for me that I have to strive to be better!

And the same is true for the anti-Semitic canard, "Jews control the world and the banking industry." That too has a lesson to teach us. We do have the power to change the world for the better—through our mitzvot and ma'asim tovim. The Chofetz Chaim used to say that the fashions of Paris can be affected by the Torah learning in Radin. Just as an atom bomb produces waves of radiation thousands of miles from ground zero, goodness has its own ripple effects. It may be that by the time the learning in Radin gets to Paris, people aren't going to be learning fifteen hours a day, but at least the dresses [designed by Parisian designers] might be a half inch longer. We can make a difference and we therefore must make a difference.

This is essentially the meaning of Dovid Hamelech's prayer, "me'oyvai techakmeini," which can be interpreted to mean, "Let me learn from my enemies." In the hateful, false lies they spread I can find nuggets of musar that challenge me to achieve greatness. May all of us merit b'ezrat Hashem to rise to this challenge.

Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz is a maggid shiur at Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem and rav of Kehillat Ohr Somayach. Prior to his family's aliyah, he was the rabbi of the Woodside Synagogue in Silver Spring, Maryland. This is an edited transcript of a speech Rabbi Breitowitz delivered to a group in London. The editing preserves the informal tone of the presentation.

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Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Toldos
Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

תשפ"ד תולדות פרשת

ויעתר יצחק לד' לנכח אשתו... ויעתר לו ד'

Yitzchak entreated Hashem opposite his wife… Hashem allowed Himself to be entreated by him. (25:21)

The implication of the masculine singular form is that Hashem responded to Yitzchak's prayer – rather than to Rivkah's. Chazal (Yevamos 64a) teach that one cannot compare the prayer offered by a tzaddik ben tzaddik, righteous person, the son of a righteous person, (Yitzchak Avinu) to the prayer entreated by a tzaddik ben rasha (Rivkah Imeinu). Thus, Hashem listened to Yitzchak. This concept is most efficacious when each individual supplicant is praying for himself personally. Yitzchak and Rivkah were both praying for the same thing: offspring. Why would Yitzchak's prayer find greater acceptance than Rivkah's?

Horav Meir Shapiro, zl, explains that Yitzchak, having been raised in the home of Avraham Avinu and Sarah Imeinu, lived in a spiritual environment in which he was not exposed to evil of any sort. His parents were paragons of virtue, his home a sanctuary. Thus, when he prayed for children, he did not add "good" children, because he did not know the meaning of bad. Rivkah, on the other hand, was acutely aware of bad and evil, having grown up with a father like Besuel and a brother like Lavan. When she prayed, she stipulated "good" children. This is why Hashem listened to Yitzchak's entreaty over hers. Since Yitzchak did not specify the kind of child he wanted, Hashem gave him two sons – Yaakov and Eisav. This is what is meant by the idea that Hashem responded to Yitzchak. Had He listened to Rivkah's prayer, Eisav would not have existed. Since unfortunately we require Eisav and his descendants to keep us in line, Hashem listened to the tzaddik ben tzaddik.

ויתרצצו הבנים בקרבה ותאמר אם כן למה זה אנכי

The children agitated within her, and she said, "If so, why am I thus?" (25:22)

Chazal teach that vayisrotzetzu, "and they agitated," is derived from rotz, to run. When Rivkah Imeinu passed the yeshivah of Shem and Ever, Yaakov struggled to leave; and when she passed a house of idol worship, Eisav wanted out. The Bais HaLevi asks the well-known question: We are taught that a Heavenly angel teaches the Torah to the growing fetus. If so, why would Yaakov want to escape to the yeshivah? He was learning Torah from an angel; can one ask for more? The Bais HaLevi explains that such learning is not worth it if it means being in the vicinity of Eisav. I would like to take the liberty to expound on this idea. After all, we do not always have the luxury of choosing our child's learning environment. Depending upon where one lives and what school his children attend, we can always find students from diverse backgrounds, who, due to no fault of their own, might influence the class in a less-than-positive manner. Does this mean we should all homeschool our children?

I think we gloss over a critical aspect of the learning experience: the rebbe/talmid relationship. An angel may be able to expound on any area in the entire corpus of Torah, but the angel does not have a kesher, relationship, with the student. If the student is a perfect learner – great. If the perfect learner is in a classroom with other boys who are not perfect, the rebbe is able to mold his shiur to fit each student individually. The angel, however, gives a one-size-fits-all lecture. The angel has no motivation, no outreach, no sense of joy in learning Torah, no focus on the individual needs of each student in a classroom of boys that might not be on his spiritual, moral plane. Yaakov Avinu could not learn in the presence of Eisav because he had no rebbe to cater to his individual needs, trying to study Torah with a brother who wanted anything but Torah study. An angel's teaching is robotic; a rebbe teaches with his heart.

Let us delve deeper into this idea. Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, focuses on the benefits of a rebbe-talmid relationship. When a student develops a bond, he becomes connected, not only to his immediate rebbe, but also, to his rebbe's rebbe, going back to the mesorah, chain of tradition, heralding back to Har Sinai. A rebbe's relationship with his student is one predicated upon love and reciprocity.

Horav Meir Chodosh, zl, Mashgiach of Chevron and Ateres Yisrael, was an educator without peer. His love for his students was legendary, treating each and every one like he was his only son. They could come and go to his house whenever they pleased and stay as long as they wanted. After all, they were his sons! He loved each student, regardless of his faults and weaknesses. He would peer into each student's heart, track his progress, pay attention to the effort he expended and rejoice with his every triumph. Talent and ability were not factors in his abiding love for them. His students were part of his "self."

The Mashgiach never saw any student in a negative light. He would always find positive aspects about the student and underscore them. When he was compelled to rebuke a student, it was with great pain – a pain that was evident, as a father must rebuke his son. He never raised his voice, threatened or spoke harshly. He spoke softly, with complete calm, patience and respect. Thus, his words penetrated deeply and had a lasting effect.

It was this form of rebbe/talmid relationship that Yaakov could not experience when he was learning from an angel. Furthermore, a rebbe imbues his students with a love for Torah and joy in studying it. Horav Pinchas Sheinberg, zl, was wont to say that a rebbe's function is to create a feeling of Torasecha shaashuai, "Your Torah is my delight," in every student. Shaashua also means toy. When a

child plays with his toy, he is completely engrossed in it. Nothing disturbs him; no one can distract him and take him away from his toy. Likewise, the rebbe should make the Torah the student's "toy," so that he experiences the greatest delight upon studying it. [One caveat: in order for the rebbe to imbue his student with joy, he must feel a sense of joy and excitement about life, and the merit that he has to teach Yiddishe kinder.]

Last, a student must be infused with a sense of confidence. One who is insecure, afraid, anxious, nervous cannot shteig, succeed to the fullest, in Torah. He must be calm, relaxed, as well as excited to learn. Horav Chaim Kanievsky, zl, related in the name of Horav Meir Karelitz, zl, brother of the Chazon Ish, the following story – whose veracity has been a tradition in their family.

The author of the Pischei Teshuvah, commentary on Shulchan Aruch Yore Deah (also, Even Ha'Ezer and Choshen Mishpat, published after his petirah), Horav Avraham Hirsch Eisenstadt, zl, was Rav in Utyan near Kovno. Prior to his passing, he asked that his son be his successor in leading the community. Apparently, this did not sit well with some of the community's leadership, who felt that, while the son was erudite, he did not come close to the level of his father. They felt that a city of the caliber of Utyan could do better. Thus, they debated the issue and arrived at a consensus of opinion: The would-be Rav would travel to Kovno, to the gadol hador, preeminent Torah leader of the generation, Horav Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, zl, and submit to a bechinah. Rav Yitzchak Elchanan would then decide if the young man was qualified to lead their community.

Travel was not quick and simple. It was a strenuous, grueling journey to Kovno. Furthermore, taking an examination from Rav Yitzchak Elchanan was not a walk in the park. The trip, the pressure, anxiety, all contributed to a poor showing on the examination. Rav Yitzchak Elchanan was under-impressed – to say the least. While the young man who stood before him might be learned, he certainly did not qualify to fill the shoes of the Pischei Teshuvah.

That night, Rav Yitzchak Elchanan had a dream during which the Pischei Teshuvah appeared and implored him to retest his son. "You should know that my son is a gaon muflag, brilliant scholar, who is eminently capable of assuming the position as Rav of Utyan. When he is given the opportunity to calm down from the pressure, he will demonstrate his uncanny knowledge." The Kovner Rav acceded to the "request," and the Pischei Teshuvah's son proved his father right. He shone in his brilliance, demonstrating to Rav Yitzchak Elchanan that he was familiar and comfortable in all areas of Torah law. When a student is shown warmth, love and understanding, he will produce beyond our and his expectations. So, why would Yaakov remain with Eisav if he could enjoy the benefits of a rebbe?

In memory of Mrs Helen Gelb הענדיל לאה בת יצחק אייזיק ע"ה
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Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein <ravadlerstein@torah.org> Thu, Nov 16, 12:43 PM
Ksav Sofer

By Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein
Parshas Toldos

Smarter Than You Thought

He [Esav] said, "Bless me too, father!" He [Yitzchok] said, "Your brother came with deception and took your blessing." He [Esav] said, "Is it because his name was called Yaakov that he outwitted me twice?"[1]

This is a difficult dialogue to follow. Esav was well aware that Yaakov had taken the brachah through deception. Yitzchok had told him as much. After his immediate cry of anguish, Esav began to pull himself together. His father seemingly had endless brachos to give. If Esav couldn't get the brachah that he had hoped for, there was always a Plan B. He asked his father for a different brachah.

Yitzchok's response makes no sense. He simply repeated what he had said before. Yaakov had deceived him, and ran off with the gold medal. How did this address Esav's request for the bronze?

Esav's reacts with an exclamation about this not having been the first time. It seems pointless. Was he simply letting off steam? Why doesn't he engage his father, and pursue his request for a brachah?

A midrash provides an answer. It says, "with deception – this means with wisdom."[2]

This is what the midrash is telling us: Deception comes in different forms. One kind requires no wisdom at all. Arrogance, perhaps. The ability to lie without compunction and without flinching. You can deceive someone simply by inventing lies or distorting the truth. It does not take rocket science.

Another kind, however, takes brains. It requires planning, strategy. The master of this kind of deception is a chess-player, anticipating the moves of the other players. The traps he sets for the unsuspecting can work for years without anyone discovering them.

Yaakov, the "dweller of tents,"[3] would hardly be expected to exhibit ingenuity any deception. He was too cut off from the rest of the world. He had no experience with true ruthlessness. He was not going to hatch a plot that would astound people for its cleverness. Or so thought Esav. If he found it necessary to lie, Yaakov would do just that – but nothing more. Esav believed that Yaakov had simply presented himself to his father, and said, "It's me! Esav, your first-born!"

Yitzchok responded, according to our midrash, that Esav had underestimated his brother. No, he had not simply claimed to be Esav. He came with wisdom. He anticipated that Yitzchok would be suspicious, so he dressed in Esav's clothing, and donned a hairy skin to hide his own smooth features. He got past Yitzchok's examination.

Yitzchok, too, was surprised at this. He could only conclude that Yaakov had been acting with special Divine assistance. Hashem had given Yaakov special wisdom for the moment, so that he would receive the brachah. If that were so, then he, Yitzchok, had been in error about Esav and his suitability to receive the brachah. Therefore, he was not interested in giving him any brachah at all!

Esav persisted. "No, father. That's not what happened. Yaakov has done this before. He is certainly capable of full deviousness himself. Don't assume that this required Divine intervention.

Esav apparently was successful, for Yitzchok answered his request positively, and gave Esav a substantial brachah!

1. Bereishis 27:34-36 ↑ 2. Bereishis Rabbah 67:4 ↑ 3. Bereishis 25:27 ↑

From: contact@MichalHorowitz.com
Parshas Toldos: The Prayer of the Righteous
By Michal Horowitz on Nov 16, 2023 08:01 am

In the beginning of Parshas Toldos, we learn of the struggles of Yitzchak and Rivka to bear offspring. The Torah tells us that both Yitzchak and Rikva davened that offspring be granted to them.

וַיֶּעְתַּר יִצְחָק לַה' לְנֹכַח אִשְׁתּוֹ כִּי עֲקָרָה הִוא וַיֵּעָתֶר לוֹ ה' וַתַּהַר רִבְקָה אִשְׁתּוֹ – and Yitzchak davened to Hashem opposite his wife, for she was barren, and Hashem accepted his tefillos, and Rivka his wife conceived (Bereishis 25:21). Rashi teaches: לנכח אשתו. זֶה עוֹמֵד בְּזָוִית זוֹ וּמִתְפַּלֵּל וְזוֹ עוֹמֶדֶת בְּזָוִית זוֹ וּמִתְפַּלֶּלֶת: – opposite his wife: he stood in one corner and davened and she stood in a different corner and davened; ויעתר לו. לוֹ וְלֹא לָהּ, שֶׁאֵין דּוֹמָה תְּפִלַּת צַדִּיק בֶּן צַדִּיק לְתִפְלַּת צַדִּיק בֶּן רָשָׁע, לְפִיכָךְ לוֹ וְלֹא לָהּ – and Hashem accepted his (Yitzchak's) tefillos, but not hers, for the prayer of a righteous person, the son of a righteous person, cannot be compared to the prayers of a righteous person, the child of a wicked person; therefore Hashem was moved by the prayers of Yitzchak (ben Avraham) and not Rivka (bas Besuel).

Why did Hashem accept his tefillos over hers? After all, is it not true that מָקוֹם שֶׁבַּעֲלֵי תְשׁוּבָה עוֹמְדִין — צַדִּיקִים גְּמוּרִים אֵינָם עוֹמְדִין – in the place where the repentant stand, even the completely righteous cannot stand (Brachos 34b and see Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Teshuva 7:4). Why, then, was Hashem's mercy aroused to answer their pleas through Yitzchak's tefillos, over Rivka's?

Sivan Rahav-Meir, world-renowned Israeli media personality, chozeret b'teshuva, and Torah teacher, relates, "When people ask me to talk about my teshuva story, I always say that there's no great wisdom to learn from it. The story of people who grew up religious is much more exciting to me, precisely because it is not exciting. There is no great wisdom in becoming a ba'al teshuva. You come from outside without any coercion, you simply fall in love with the Torah. No teacher at school ever told me to make a beracha or to daven and no one criticized me when I studied Torah subjects. I came from outside of my own free will and choice – straight to the Torah, to G-d, to the thing itself. It requires real strength to grow up inside the religious

community, and to find renewal from within. To continue the legacy of the generations that came before you and to add your own floor to the building you inherited – this takes great strength and fortitude.

"That's why I most admire people who grew up religious and who light the spark within," she explains, and immediately adds that this is not her idea. Rather, it can be found in Torah – specifically in our Parsha, Toldos. "Our Sages explain that Yitzchak's prayer was accepted because he was a 'righteous man who was the son of a righteous man,' as compared to Rebecca, 'a righteous woman who was the daughter of a wicked man.' Why was Yitzchak's prayer answered and not Rebecca's? Wasn't Rebecca on a higher level, specifically because she was a ba'alat teshuva? It seems that being a righteous son of a righteous man is not as easy as we might expect. If your father and grandfather went to Shul, in a world that constantly calls on us to innovate and reinvent ourselves and to rebel and break conventions – yet you still go to the synagogue with enthusiasm, with commitment, and with passion – then you are on a truly high level" (HaMizrachi, v.6, #4. R"H and Y"K 5784, p.57).

To find G-d on one's own, as did our first forefather, Avraham Avinu (see Mishheh Torah, Hilchos A"Z, 1:1-2), takes immense fortitude, willpower, innovation, and determination. To leave one's past, and chart a new course for oneself is heroism of the highest caliber. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt'l teaches, "When the righteous man falls he has the strength to rise up again. However, there are those who do not have the strength and courage to stand up once more. They have no courage to rise. One of the main factors that prevent people from making amends and repenting is a lack of faith in themselves. They say it is too late. They state: 'I am not capable of performing such a deed, of changing my life, of changing my identity and my personality.' I remember a certain person, a very tragic person, who attended my shiur in Boston. He was very impressed. I am not bragging; I am just telling you the story. He was interested and moved by my teachings. I once asked him: 'Tell me. I see that you wish to cling to Yahadut. why can't you take the final step and make your home kosher? Afterwards, we will begin to think about the Sabbath laws.' So he said to me: 'Rebbe. I would like to, but I can't do it.' 'Why?' I asked. He answered: 'Because my family will declare me insane and I will be locked up. In addition, I do not belong in your society. I am far away. I do not belong in your community. I live a different life. I have no courage. I have to die a sinner'" (The Rav, v.II, by R' A.Rakeffet-Rothkoff, p.19).

Yet we learn from the prayers of Yitzchak that to remain steadfast in one's Torah upbringing, to maintain passion for Torah and Tefillah, to forge a personal relationship with the RS"O, when one's past is cemented in Judaism, this too is heroic and beloved to G-d. In an ever-changing world, when rebellion is condoned, tradition is shunned, and the ways of the past scorned, to remain a Jew – believing, loving, practicing, proud and strong – and to carry on the path forged by our fathers, takes tremendous strength indeed.

While Rivka left a wicked past (see Rashi to 25:20) and became an Em b'Yisrael and a true tzadekes, Yitzchak embraced the path of his past, and continued the legacy that Avraham and Sarah founded.

In our world today – where chaos reigns supreme and the forces of evil desire to destroy our nation and Land – both kinds of heroes are needed. Our nation embraces the tenacity and beauty of each and every Jewish neshama finding their way back to Hashem. And the RS"O hears the prayer of each and every Jew who continues to build on the great foundation bequeathed to him by his fathers.

And together, we will march forward to proclaim the name of Hashem in the world as once again, the enemies that rise against us will be destroyed, and the eternity of Am Yisrael will persevere.

May all of our collective tefilos be answered la'tova and li'vracha, בברכת שבת שלום,

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

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.

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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