

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

Although both Rivka and Yitzchok prayed to G-d, asking that He help them have children (see Rashi on Bereishis 25:21), the Torah implies that it was only Yitzchok's prayers that were answered. Rashi (ibid) explains that this was because "the prayers of a righteous person whose parent(s) were righteous cannot be compared to (i.e. are more effective than) the prayers of a righteous person whose parent(s) are wicked." Therefore, since Rivka's father was the wicked Besuel, while Yitzchok's father was Avraham (and mother was Sarah), even though both offered their heartfelt prayers, it was Yitzchok prayers that were accepted and not Rivka's.

On the surface, this may seem like a valid reason to differentiate between the two prayers. Upon further review, though, it is difficult to understand how the righteousness of the parent affects the effectiveness of the prayer.

If Rashi is positing that the virtue of their parents caused the difference in the outcome of their prayers, then the other factors must have all been equal (or of inconsequential difference). It was the same type of prayer, said just as earnestly, by people of comparable righteousness. Otherwise the difference could have been attributed to Yitzchok having worded the request better, or having better concentration, or being on a higher level. The only reason given is who their parents were; why should that affect G-d accepting the prayer?

One approach might have been the concept of "zechus avos," that the merits of the parents contribute towards an outcome not deserved based on the child's actions alone. However, the wording of Rashi's formulation (and that of the Talmud that Rashi is quoting from) is that the *prayer* of one cannot be compared to the *prayer* of the other. Not that one can't compare two *people* who come from different backgrounds, but that there is something inherent in the

prayer itself that makes one more acceptable than the other. The Talmud doesn't say that we can't compare someone who is righteous and has righteous parents with someone who is righteous but whose parents are not, but that their *prayers* cannot be compared. If the person offering the prayer is completely righteous, why should lineage make a difference as to whether or not the prayer is answered?

Usually, prayer can change what would have otherwise happened because it is a vehicle through which the person becomes more spiritual, and therefore more deserving of something- even if they hadn't deserved it before the prayer was made. The comparison is between the person before the prayer and that same person after the prayer. Because communicating with the Creator brings a person to a higher level -by acknowledging that He is ultimately the source of everything (and can therefore provide what we are asking for), and because of the soul-searching that accompanies standing before the Creator and trying to improve in order to deserve what is being asked for - this "new" person may deserve what the "old" person was unworthy of. In our discussion, though we are comparing two people on the same level, making a similar type of prayer. Yet, the prayer of one is said to be more effective. Why?

The Maharsha (Yevamos 64a) comments that the formulation given here - that the difference in lineage is the cause of the difference in the prayer's effectiveness - is considered but then rejected elsewhere (Berachos 7a) when trying to understand why some righteous people suffer while others (who are also righteous) do not. He explains that the only reason it was rejected there was because of a verse that disproves the formulation being applied to suffering; when it comes to prayer, though, the original thought process holds true. Therefore, if we can understand why the Talmud originally thought that lineage would make a difference vis-À-vis suffering, we can understand (at least according to the Maharsha) why it actually does make a difference by prayer. (The Talmud concludes that the righteous who suffer are not completely righteous; in order to avoid receiving punishment in the next world, they experience suffering here for the few sins that they had committed.)

When it comes to suffering, we could have applied the concept of "zechus avos" to explain why those whose parents are less righteous suffer: Based on their own actions, both would have suffered.

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Because of the merits of righteous ancestors, though, this suffering was avoided. However, the Talmud could not have meant (even in its "hava aminah," or original thought process) that "zechus avos" was the reason why lineage could have affected the amount of suffering. Besides the previously mentioned issue of the formulation by suffering no longer being applicable to the formulation by prayer (as "zechus avos" wouldn't be relevant to the effectiveness of the prayer itself even if it was relevant to the avoidance of suffering), we can also see from the reason the Talmud rejected this formulation that it couldn't have been based on "zechus avos."

The Torah tells us that "sons shall not die for the sins of their fathers; each person shall die for his own sins" (Devarim 24:16). Because of this verse, the Talmud rejects the notion that poor lineage could explain why some righteous people suffer. After all, the Torah says explicitly that a son will not suffer the consequences of his father's sins. If "zechus avos" was the reason why it was originally thought that those with better lineage suffered less, this verse would not disprove that possibility. Even if a son can't be punished for a parent's mistakes, it's still possible that a parent's merits can protect the son from suffering (which would be a sort of reward to the parent). The inability to make the child suffer for a parent's sins doesn't preclude the child from benefiting from the parent's merits. If the Talmud dismisses the possibility of lineage being a factor because the negative can't be applied, then it must have never considered applying the positive as a possible explanation. More importantly (for our discussion), if the original notion that was rejected was that the sins of the parent impacted the suffering endured by the child, then (based on the above Maharsha) the actual explanation for why the prayer of that same child is less acceptable must be because of the sins of the parent. All we have left to discover, then,

is why the sin of the parent should affect the acceptability of the child's prayer.

When Rivka left her family to go with Eliezer (to marry Yitzchok), her brother and mother blessed her: "You should become (i.e. have descendants numbering) millions (lit. thousands of ten thousand), and your children should inherit the gates (i.e. cities) of your enemies." Rav Chama bar Chanina is quoted (Beraishis Rabbah 60:13) as saying the following regarding this blessing: "Why wasn't Rivka remembered (i.e. why didn't she become pregnant) until Yitzchok prayed on her behalf? So that the other nations shouldn't be able to say that it was their prayer that bore fruit (the birth of a nation through Rivka)." In other words, it had to be Yitzchok's prayer that was answered, so that the positive results could be attributed to him, someone righteous, and not to the prayer of sinners (Rivka's family). A prayer will be less effective if credit can be taken by, or attributed to, those unworthy. This could apply to the prayer of the offspring of someone unworthy as well, as the success of the prayer could be attributed to the parents, a misapplied "zechus avos," so to speak. And it would be consistent with the original thought process of the Talmud vis-À-vis suffering, as the child is negatively affected because of the sins of the parent.

(It also brings up a fascinating point, that the effectiveness of a prayer is at least partially dependent on how its being answered will be perceived. If the prayer being answered will bring people closer to G-d, it has a much better chance of being answered than if it raises doubts about the true nature of G-d.)

Obviously, the prayers of someone who is righteous are not ignored just because wrongful credit may be taken by, or attributed to, wicked ancestors. Nevertheless, when comparing the prayers of someone righteous with good lineage (i.e. Yitzchok) to the prayers of someone righteous but from poor lineage (i.e. Rivka), in order to avoid the possibility of giving credit where credit is not due, the prayer of the child of righteous parents will be more easily accepted. Or, as Rashi - quoting the Talmud - puts it, "you can't compare the prayer of one who is righteous and has righteous parents to the prayer of one who is righteous but has wicked parents." © 2004 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

There have been many attempts to explain how it was possible for Yitzchak and Rivka to give birth and raise such an evil son as Eisav. The wrong type of education - giving Eisav the same education as Yaakov; Rivka not being strong enough to stand up to Yitzchak's bias towards Eisav; parental indulgence, all have been advanced as possible causes for Eisav's behavior and way of life. These reasons have been offered by some of the great traditional commentators

to the Bible. Yet the Torah itself seems to deny any causal relationship between the home and parenting of Yitzchak and Rivka and the behavior of their son Eisav. The Torah tells us that in the womb of Rivka, still unborn, Eisav was already Eisav. Without entering into the genetics - environment controversy, I still feel that the Torah's message here is an unmistakable one - namely that there are certain circumstances in parenting and in human relationships that are beyond our control. That is why the rabbis wisely said that "children and how they turn out are dependent upon mazel - good luck." Why the Lord needed an Eisav in the world is a good question. Perhaps without the challenge of Eisav as a brother and a competitor, Yaakov would not have risen and matured to become Yisrael. But in any event or explanation, Eisav's appearance on the scene remains puzzling, disturbing and inexplicable.

In Jewish tradition, Eisav has come to represent Rome, and then Christianity, and in our time the Western world and its civilization generally. I think that we see here again the challenge of Eisav that forces Yaakov to continually strive to retain his values and way of life in an alien and often hostile environment. Perhaps Eisav is a necessary component in our national and personal life. Just as aerobic physical exercise requires a force to push against our muscles and raise our heart and lung activity in order to maintain good health, so too do we need the force of Eisav in the world to raise our spiritual health and efforts. This is not in any way to excuse Eisav's behavior, then or now, but it does give us a glimmer of insight into his presence in the affairs of humankind and especially of the Jewish people. By now we have been wrestling with Eisav for a very long time. We certainly limp from this match to survive but we have much gain to show for it. Eventually Eisav will calm down and appreciate his brother Yaakov and enlist himself as well in the service of God and man in a positive fashion. © 2004 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd Jacob said to his father, 'I am Esau your first born...'" (Genesis 27:18).

How can we properly understand Jacob's act of deceiving his father and his mother Rebecca's encouragement of this deception? The Bible itself certainly believes that this act was wrong and deserved punishment. After all, uncle Laban goes on to deceive his nephew Jacob by giving him the elder in place of the younger daughter as his wife, and Jacob's own sons cruelly deceive their father by telling him that Joseph has been torn apart by wild beasts. Between the

lines of the Bible, Jacob is certainly being punished "measure for measure."

Rebecca too suffers grievously for her part in the treachery. She "loses" her beloved son Jacob when he is forced to leave his parent's home lest Esau kill him. Esau himself can hardly be a loving son to a mother who has conspired to take away his birthright. There is even a hint in the Bible that even Jacob resents the parent who initiated his act of deception. How else can we understand the biblical account informing us of the death of Deborah, Rebecca's nurse, but never actually mentioning the death of Rebecca herself (Genesis 25:8). Perhaps it was easier for Jacob to mourn the death of his nanny, the woman who gave him much love but did not implicate him in the most treacherous deed of his life. It seems to me that it is this very tragic solitude of Rebecca, bereft of both her sons, which causes the Bible to say, "And Isaac sent away Jacob; and he went to Padan-Aram to Laban...the brother of Rebecca, Jacob and Esau's mother" (Genesis 28:5). This last description, which seems superfluous at first reading, may very well have been written dripping with irony.

Despite the obvious nature of their transgression against Isaac, Jacob still received the birthright and there is no word of remorse neither from the mouth of Jacob nor from the mouth of Rebecca. If the sin was so great, how can the Bible allow the sinner to benefit?

We have already suggested that Isaac initially chose Esau for the birthright because of his disappointment with himself, with his lack of aggressiveness vis-a-vis Avimelech's total disregard of their peace treaty, Avimelech's stopping up of Abrahams' wells and his banishing Isaac from the area of Gaza. Isaac understands that the torch carrier of the Abrahamic mission must be able to defend the family rights, even if it means using the hands of Esau in order to protect the message of ethical monotheism. In a world which is not yet perfect, one must often employ less than perfect means to achieve the deserved and desirable end. The ends never justify the means; but the achievement of some specific ends may often necessitate certain difficult and questionable means. Let us review the prior history (prior to the deception) of Esau, Jacob and Rebecca. Rebecca stood by as her eldest son Esau married Hittite wives, a blatant act of intermarriage in Biblical terms. Indeed the Bible itself records that "this was a bitterness of spirit to Isaac and to Rebecca" (Genesis 26:35) Jacob must have been filled with dismay when his elder brother agreed to actually "sell" his birthright for a bowl of lentil soup. He certainly understood that this impetuous and undisciplined hunter was hardly a fitting heir for the legacy of Abraham and Isaac. Isaac was making a tragic mistake by bestowing the mantle of the birthright on the shoulders of the son who would not properly wear it. Jewish history could not be allowed to end

before it really began. The vision of Abraham and the "covenant between the pieces" had to be realized. Rebecca and Jacob must certainly have felt an awesome responsibility to forestall an imminent tragic choice.

In subsequent generations our sages will rule that armaments are not an adornment (which may be worn on the Sabbath with impunity) but are rather a burden which may not be carried on the Sabbath unless a human life is at stake. After all, teaches the Mishnah at the conclusion of the tractate Shabbat, our prophets exhort; "And they must beat their swords into plowshares, their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift swords against nation and humanity ought not learn war any more" (Isaiah 2, Micah). But nevertheless the Bible and the Talmud call for obligatory warfare whenever the Jewish people are threatened by an attacking enemy; such war is termed a mitzvah! Fascinatingly enough a Priest-Kohen who kills a human being even in such a war may not rise to bless the congregation "with love". Nevertheless, the Priest-Kohen must go out and do battle in times of such a war (B.T. Kiddushin 20).

Yes, the ends do not justify the means, but they often do necessitate unpleasant means. The choices that we make in life are not always between black and white; they are often between shades of gray, when each decision is both right and wrong. There are times when the situation demands that we commit sinful acts in order to prevent even greater tragedy. When this happens, we must take punishment for our actions—but we must commit them nonetheless. Rebecca and Jacob did what they had to do to prevent Esau's ascension to the leadership of Israel. At the same time they had to bear the bitter consequence of their act. Perhaps this is the price leadership must pay in a yet imperfect world. © 2004 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

As Ya'akov (Jacob) leaves his parents' home at the behest of his mother Rivkah (Rebecca), the Torah declares that Rivkah was the mother of both Ya'akov and Esav (Esau). (Genesis 28:5) At first blush this seems to be an unnecessary statement. Anyone who had been reading the portion certainly knows this fact.

Even Rashi, the greatest of commentators, writes that he does not know why the Torah mentions this. Rashi's admission of "I do not know" teaches an important lesson. People should be prepared to admit lack of knowledge rather than deceive others into assuming they know when they do not.

Yet, there are commentators who try to understand why the text here includes the fact that Rivkah was the mother of Ya'akov and Esav. The most

appealing view is that of Tzedah Laderekh, (Issachar Ber Parnas, Italy, 16c) quoted by Nehama Lebowitz. Before pointing out his comment, a little background on the story is necessary.

In our portion, Rivkah convinces Ya'akov to fool his father and take the birthright from Esav. For Rivkah the future was with Ya'akov. He was to be the third patriarch. Rivkah viewed Esav as unworthy, no more than a hunter; a rebel who strayed and even married out of the family. (Genesis 26:34)

Once Ya'akov had taken the blessings, Rivkah overhears that Esav, outraged that he had been short-changed, has plans to eventually kill Ya'akov. She therefore arranges that Ya'akov leave home. (Genesis 27:41-43)

Rivkah's concern was clearly for Ya'akov's well being—but, it is crucial to understand that she was equally concerned for Esav. If Esav would kill Ya'akov, not only would Ya'akov, Rivkah's beloved son, be dead, but Esav the murderer, would also have "died" in Rivkah's eyes. This fear of losing both children is clearly reflected when Rivkah points out, "why should I lose both of you (both of my children) in one day" (Genesis 27:45). Rivkah loved Esav as well. She feared that if Esav would kill Ya'akov her love for Esav would no longer be.

Hence, Tzedah Laderekh concludes, the Torah states that Rivkah was Ya'akov and Esav's mother. In other words the reason she insists Ya'akov leave was not only because she loved Ya'akov but also because of her love and concern for Esav. She was, after all, the beloved mother of both

An important message. Often it is the case that our children rebel. They abandon values and priorities that are held dear. Many leave the faith or do all kinds of things that upset and even outrage parents. While parents should certainly point out their feelings to their children, the Torah teaches no matter the nature or the actions of the child, a parent is a parent and love for a child must be endless and unconditional.

Like Rivkah's love for Esav. As evil as he was, and as much as we know that the Torah points out her love for Ya'akov, she still had great love and concern for her eldest son and sends Ya'akov away not only to protect Ya'akov but to protect Esav as well. © 2004 *Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA*

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

We are told in this week's Torah portion about the famine that took place during the time of Yitzchak. The Torah links this to the famine in the time of Avraham. "And there was a famine in the land, in addition to the first famine that had taken place during the time of Avraham, and Yitzchak went to Avimelech, the King of the Pelishtim, in Gerar"

[Bereishit 26:1]. However, Avraham and Yitzchak react in different ways. While Avraham left Eretz Yisrael and went to Egypt, Yitzchak remained in the land.

The commentators disagreed about the fact that Avraham left the land. The Ramban saw it as a serious sin, the reason that Bnei Yisrael were later sent to exile in Egypt. "Even his leaving the land, which at first he was commanded to do because of the famine, was a sin, since G-d can be expected to rescue from famine (see Iyov 5:20). Because of this act, his children were sent into exile in Egypt, in the hands of Pharaoh." [Bereishit 12:10]. RADAK, on the other hand, saw this event as a test for Avraham to pass. "This was one of the tests that G-d gave to Avraham, and he passed the test and had no doubts about the Almighty."

In any case, it seems that Yitzchak, who did not make any attempt to leave the land but rather went to Avimelech, "to live in his land until the famine had passed" [RADAK, 26:1], acted in a better way. As a result of this, Yitzchak heard two things from the Almighty that were said only to him. First, he was told, "Do not go to Egypt, live in the land where I will tell you" [26:2]. Evidently, in return for his dedication to Eretz Yisrael he received a command that was not given to Avraham—to remain in the land and never to leave it. Later, Yitzchak was told about the special reward that he would receive for his attachment to the land. "Dwell in this land and I will be with you and bless you, for I will give all of these lands to you and your offspring. And I will fulfill the oath that I swore to your father Avraham. And I will increase your children as the stars in heaven, and I will give your children all of these lands, and all the nations of the world will be blessed through your children." [26:3-4]. Most of these blessings were previously given to Avraham. In fact, this passage is very similar to the blessings that Avraham received after the binding of Yitzchak. "For I will bless you and increase your offspring like the stars in heaven and like the sand on the sea shore, and your children will take possession of the gates of their enemies. And your children will be a source of blessing for all the nations of the earth." [22:17-18]. However, one blessing was given only to Yitzchak: "And I will be with you."

This unique blessing is linked in the Torah specifically to Eretz Yisrael. Later on, this is what G-d says to Yaacov: "Return to the land of your fathers and your birthplace, and I will be with you" [31:3]. It is also part of what G-d promised Moshe at the burning bush: "And I have descended to rescue them from Egypt and to raise them up from that land to a good and broad land, to a land flowing with milk and honey... For I will be with you." [Shemot 3:8,12]. The same promise was given to Yehoshua. "And He commanded Yehoshua Bin Nun, saying, Be strong and courageous, for you will bring Bnei Yisrael to the land that I promised them, and I will be with you" [Devarim 31:23].

Thus, Yitzchak's attachment to Eretz Yisrael led to an eternal link to the land, and to the continuing direct link to the Almighty Himself.

The Mother of Yaacov and Esav

by Nechama Leibowitz, from her book, "Studies in Bereishit"

With respect to the verse, "the brother of Rivka, the mother of Yaacov and Esav" [Bereishit 28:5], Rashi notes, "I do not know what this teaches us." Many people have taken this opportunity to praise Rashi for his modesty and for acting in accordance with the advice of the Mishna, "About what he does not know, he says, I have not heard this matter" [Avot 5:8]. But in addition to giving him praise for the statement, we should try to understand why Rashi felt that he had to make a declaration that he did not know. It is reasonable to assume that when the sages taught us to "teach your tongue to say I do not know," they only referred to a case when somebody is asked a question. But when nobody asks, why should a person volunteer to make a declaration of ignorance?

Actually, this is not a valid question, since in general it is clear that all the verses on which Rashi makes no comment are clearly understood. However, if Rashi had not written anything with respect to the above phrase, he would have been in a sense not completely honest, since the verse has an inherent difficulty. Why was it necessary for the Torah to note explicitly that Rivka was the mother of Yaacov and Esav, when the entire passage is related to the relationship between Rivka and "Esav, her older son," and "Yaacov, her younger son"? Perhaps the explanation of the Haamek Davar offers some answer to this question. "This explains why Yitzchak and Esav did not realize that Yaacov was fleeing from Esav, since Lavan was his mother's brother too."

Perhaps we can find the complete answer to our question not only in relation to the nearby verses but in the overall context of the passage. The key to the matter can be seen in Rivka's words to Yaacov. "Why should I lose both of you on one day?" [27:45]. This is not clear—wasn't Yaacov the only one in danger? Rashi explains, like others who followed him, "If he attacks you and you kill him, his sons will kill you."

We can also certainly accept the interpretation by Ben Amozag, from Italy, in his commentary, Eim Lamikra: "Rivka said: No matter which one of you is killed, I will be in mourning, since the dead one will be gone and I will hate the one who kills his brother as a stranger and an enemy, as if he also does not exist. No matter what happens, I will lose both of you." This appears to be the real intention of the verse. Both of them are her sons, and in one day, at a single tragic moment, she might lose them both, since both the dead one and the killer will no longer exist for her.

With this in mind, we can return to the question above, why did the Torah find it necessary to

emphasize that Rivka was the mother of both Yaacov and Esav? We can quote the commentary Tzeida Laderech about the words of Rashi, "This is to tell us that in advising Yaacov to flee and escape death she was acting not only as the mother of Yaacov. At the same time she was acting as the mother of Esav, by preventing him from killing his brother." Thus, even though throughout this passage we have seen that her actions were meant to protect "Yaacov, her younger son," it now becomes clear that she acted with the understanding that she was "the mother of Yaacov and Esav," to avoid the tragedy of losing them both in one day.

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi?

This week's parsha tells of the rivalry between Jacob and Esau, and Esau's selling the Birthright to Jacob. Towards the end of the parsha, we read of Isaac blessing Jacob (dressed as Esau) and Esau (as himself), and finally Isaac knowingly blesses Jacob before he takes leave of his parents.

Let us examine a Rashi on Jacob's blessing to Jacob (as Esau). A close analysis of Rashi reveals an original interpretation, which he considers to be pshat.

"And may God give you from the dew of the heavens and from the fat of the earth and an abundance of grain and wine." (Genesis: 27:28)

"And may He give you"—Rashi: "May He give and repeat and give again. However, according to its simple meaning it refers back to the preceding topic: 'See the fragrance of my son, which the Holy One Blessed Be He, has given him, is like the fragrance of a field etc. And may He also give you the dew of the heavens etc.'"

Rashi gives two interpretations, one he calls pshat and one not. What would you ask here?

First Question: What is bothering Rashi, why must he offer any interpretations? Isn't the sentence clear as it stands? Look carefully at the "lead words."

Second Question: Why two interpretations?

Third Question: In the pshat interpretation, Rashi quotes part of the previous sentence, but he adds the words "which the Holy One Blessed Be He has given him..." He certainly didn't add them for nothing. Why did he?

An Answer: Most commentaries agree that Rashi is bothered by the fact that the sentence begins with the word "And". This seems to imply that the blessing here is not the first one mentioned, but an addition to one previously mentioned. But no blessing has been mentioned until now. It is this difficulty that Rashi addresses himself.

How does Rashi answer this question?

An Answer: Rashi reinterprets the word, "And" in "And may [He] give you" to mean, "May He give and give and give etc." The word "and" is a poetic way to

signify continuance, an unending giving. But Rashi doesn't consider this pshat. Why not?

An Answer: Perhaps simply because, "and" means "and" and not, "unending."

Now to our third question. Why does Rashi add the words "which the Holy One Blessed Be He has given him..." to the Torah's own words, in his second interpretation? (This looks like a Type II comment, meant to steer us clear of a misunderstanding.)

This is not easy. Hint: Reread the second half of sentence 27:27: "...and he said: See the fragrance of my son is as the fragrance of a field which God has blessed."

What do the words "which God has blessed" mean? What—whom—did God bless?

An Answer: Rashi gives the previous sentence (27:27) an unusual interpretation (which he considers to be pshat). At first glance, the sentence seems to say, "See, the fragrance of my son is as the fragrance of a field which (= the field) God blessed." In this reading it is the field that is blessed. But Rashi interprets these words differently. He says it is Jacob that is blessed with the fragrance. This is what Rashi means when he adds the words "the fragrance of my son, which the Holy One, Blessed be He, has given him..." Rashi's addition tells us that Isaac says that God blessed Jacob ("my son") by giving him a pleasant fragrance, (and not the field). The new meaning is thus: God had already blessed Jacob by giving him a fragrance like the field. "And may He also give [him] of the dew of the heavens etc."

We see how this explains the word "and" at the beginning of sentence 28. This is truly an original view of the Torah's words. This Rashi considers to be pshat, probably as we said, because in this interpretation the word "and" means "and"; it is not bent out of shape as it is in the first interpretation. © 2004 aish.org & Dr. A. Bonchek

THE SALANT FOUNDATION

Parsha Insights

by Rabbi Zvi Miller

The Torah (Bereishis 25:27) contrasts the characters of Esau and Yaacov: "Esau became one who knows hunting, but Yaacov was a wholesome man..." Rashi explains the phrase who knows hunting—Esau knew how to 'trap' and deceive his father with deceptive words. Whereas, the capability of deception was completely foreign to Yaacov who was a wholesome man; i.e., his words and his heart were one.

The honesty of Yaacov is superior to the falsehood of Esau, as light is superior to darkness. Nevertheless, it would appear that the ability to deceive requires an aspect of cleverness that is lacking in a 'wholesome' person. Indeed his lack of guile may be a

weakness that renders him innocent, naive, and vulnerable.

However, we find just the opposite to be true. Our Sages tell us that Yaacov affirmed about himself: "I am equal to Esau in the ability to deceive." Notwithstanding, his wholesomeness prevented him from employing deception! The purity of his heart would only allow him to act and speak with absolute integrity.

On the other hand, a person who acts with deceit is the opposite of a wholesome person. His inner corruption spurs him to trap others with his sly words and schemes. He has no scruples to harness his self-serving ambitions.

Let us follow in the footsteps of Yaacov Avinu, whose words were one with his heart. If we make every effort to conduct ourselves with honesty, HaShem will bless our lives with success and peace of mind.

Implement: Strive to keep all of your words and actions within the bounds of integrity. *[Based on Da'as Torah of Rabenu Yerucham HaLevi] © 2004 Rabbi Z. Miller & The Salanat Foundation*

TORAH CENTER OF DEAL

The Rabbi's Message

by Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

"And Esav came from the field and he was tired." (Beresheet 25:29)

Rabbi Nissan Alpert z"l points out that this is the first time the Torah uses the word ayef—tired. When a word is introduced to us in the Torah in a certain context, we are supposed to learn from that usage and apply that same meaning all over.

Abraham was one of the busiest men we have ever seen. He traveled from place to place, building altars, serving guests, being tested and passing those tests successfully, and we never find that he was tired. He lived for 175 years and had a full and very involved life and yet the Torah never describes him as tired. We know from our own experiences of great people who are very busy, involved in a million things, and we never perceive them as tired. The lesson here is that someone who is involved with a spiritual dimension to his life has the energy for many more things than someone who is just existing a mundane life. Esav was busy doing sins on the day he sold his birthright and he was not rejuvenated by anything spiritual of any meaning. Therefore, he was "tired." If we fill our lives with meaning, if we have spiritual contact in the things we do, we will have the spice and sparkle which will keep us from getting stale. Only someone who lives a life of materialism, without letting Hashem into his world, will become "tired" easily. Let us be like Abraham and have the energy for much more in our lives.

Shifting the Blame

"And Yitzhak was forty years old when he took Ribkah, the daughter of Betuel the Arami, from Padan

Aram, the sister of Laban the Arami, for himself for a wife" (Beresheet 25:20)

Rashi raises the question that the information in this verse about Ribkah's background seems superfluous. The Torah has already stated that Ribkah was the daughter of Betuel, the sister of Laban, and was from Padan Aram. The answer, says Rashi, is that this is to let us know the praise of Ribkah. She was the daughter of an evil person, the sister of an evil person, and lived in a community of evil people. Nevertheless, she did not learn from their evil behavior.

Many people try to excuse their faults by blaming others as the cause of their behavior. "It's not my fault I have this bad trait, I learned it from my father and mother." "I'm not to blame for this bad habit since all my brothers and sisters do it also." "Everyone in my neighborhood does this or does not do that, so how could I be any different?" They use this as a rationalization for failing to make an effort to improve.

We see from Ribkah that regardless of the faulty behavior of those in your surroundings, you have the ability to be more elevated. The righteous person might be considered a nonconformist and even rebellious by those in his environment whose standard of values are below his level. But a basic Torah principle is that we are responsible for our own actions. Pointing to others in your environment who are worse than you is not a valid justification for not behaving properly.

If you ever find yourself saying, "It's not my fault I did this. It's because of the way I was raised or because I learned it from so-and-so," change your focus to, "I'll make a special effort to improve in this area to overcome the tendency to follow in the footsteps of others."

Blaming others for your faults and saying that you cannot do anything to change them will be a guarantee that they will remain with you. Make a list of the negative traits you picked up from your early environment. Develop a plan of action to improve in those areas. (Growth through Torah)

Premature Birth

"Yitzhak entreated Hashem opposite his wife, because she was barren, and Hashem allowed Himself to be entreated by him" (Beresheet 25:21)

Concerning the unusual expression vaye'etar (translated here as "He allowed Himself to be entreated"), Rashi explains, "He allowed himself to be importuned, to be appeased, to be persuaded." The Torah very often speaks of G-d simply "hearing the prayers" of someone. Why in this instance was there a need for being "appeased, persuaded, etc.?"

Later on in this passage, when the Torah relates that Ya'akov cooked a stew of lentils (v. 29), the Midrash explains that this was a customary food for mourners, and Ya'akov was preparing it on account of his grandfather Abraham's death. Although he died at

the age of 175, the Midrash continues, Abraham was supposed to have lived another five years (just as Yitzhak lived 180 years). G-d brought about his early demise, however, in order that he not be distressed at witnessing his own grandson, Esav, rejecting his traditions and embracing instead a life of violence, crime and sin at the age of 15. Since it was this very day that Esav had undergone this transformation, G-d caused Abraham's immediate, "untimely" death.

It emerges from this Midrash, noted Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, that according to the original "schedule," Abraham should have died five years later than he did, and Esav, who became corrupted at age 15, should have been born five years later than he was, in order not to distress Abraham. There was, therefore, a good reason why the birth of Esav and Ya'akov should be delayed. Hence, it was only due to Yitzhak's intense prayers that G-d "allowed Himself to be persuaded" to move up the time of Ribkah's giving birth by five years, although this would ultimately lead to an earlier death for Abraham.

Rav Yosef Chaim bolstered this insight by noting that the gematria value of the words vaye'etar (and Hashem allowed Himself to be entreated by him) is equal to that of the words (five years). (Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld on the Parashah)

Shabbat Table Talk

"Yitzhak called Ya'akov and blessed him, and commanded him saying, 'You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan.'" (Beresheet 28:1)

Any time we attempt to give advice to others, we obviously want to do it in the most effective way possible. If we do it in a way that makes the person ignore our suggestions, then we have failed in our attempt to help him. The Hafess Hayim learns from this pasuk that the best way to counsel others is to first show them that you are genuinely concerned for their welfare. When Yitzhak was going to tell Ya'akov not to take a wife from the daughters of Canaan, he first gave Ya'akov a berachah. Now that he demonstrated that he only had Ya'akov's best interests in mind, Ya'akov would more readily be receptive to the advice and follow it.

Question: When you give advice to others, do they get the impression that you are only looking out for their welfare? Does it ever happen that when you are making a suggestion to someone, you sense that he is not even listening to what you are saying? © 2004 Rabbi S. Choueka & Torah Center of Deal

RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

“**E**sav became one who knows hunting, a man of the field; but Yaakov was a wholesome man, dwelling in tents.” (25:27)

Rashi explains: "Knows hunting"—"literally understanding hunting; understanding how to entrap and deceive his father with his mouth; He would ask him, 'Father how should salt and straw be tithed?' Consequently his father believed him to be very punctilious in observing the commandments."

R' Elazar Meir Preil z"l (1881-1933; rabbi of Elizabeth, N.J.) writes:

Esav was the type of person who acts like a Roman when among Romans and a Yerushalmi when in Jerusalem, like an Orthodox Jew when among the Orthodox and a non-religious Jew when among the nonobservant. Can such a lifestyle bring a person happiness? Esav's own words demonstrate that it cannot, for he complained to Yaakov (25:32), "Look, I am going to die, so of what use to me is a birthright?"

In contrast, Yaakov lived a life of consistency. In his youth, he was a wholesome man, dwelling in the tents of Torah study. When he grew up and left home, where did he go? Chazal tell us that on his way to his uncle Lavan's home he detoured to the yeshiva of Shem and Ever for 14 years of Torah study. Where did all of this lead Yaakov? We read (33:18): "Yaakov arrived whole at the city of Shechem." In contrast to the chameleon-like Esav, Yaakov was the same wholesome person he had been as a youth. (Ha'maor)

Why doesn't the Torah say, "Yaakov was a wholesome man who knows Torah," just as it says that Esav "knows hunting"?

R' Shmuel Halevi Wosner shlita (one of the elder rabbis of Bnei Brak) explains:

A Torah student's future success is determined not by what he knows, but by his diligence. Yaakov was not content to know the Torah. Rather, he sat in his tent and toiled to reach greater and greater heights. (Quoted in Oztrotaihem Shel Tzaddikim)

"Hashem appeared to him [Yitzchak] that night and said, 'I am the G-d of your father Avraham—Fear not, for I am with you; I will bless you and increase your offspring because of Avraham my servant.'" (26:24)

R' Zvi Elimelech Spira z"l (the Bnei Yissaschar; died 1841) asks: Why did Hashem appear to Yitzchak at night? Our Sages teach that Hashem generally appears to prophets in the day-time, and only the likes of Bil'am generally experienced their prophetic visions at night!

He explains: Kabbalists teach that on the first night after a person arrives in Eretz Yisrael from abroad, his soul is exchanged for a loftier one. Yitzchak was returning from the territory of the Plishtim (Philistines) which, although technically part of Eretz Yisrael, is on a lower spiritual level than the central portions of the Land. Accordingly, Hashem appeared to Yitzchak on the first night after his return when his soul was "exchanged" and elevated. (Igra De'kallah) © 2004 Rabbi S. Katz & www.torah.org