

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

### Taking a Closer Look

**P**oor Eisav. He comes home dead tired and extremely hungry. So tired that he can't even muster enough energy to chew food, if he had any. He's quite literally dying of thirst. Luckily, his twin brother Yaakov is cooking lentil soup. No chewing necessary, and it can revive him while quenching his thirst and satisfying his hunger all at the same time. So he plops down on the recliner and asks Yaakov to just pour the soup down his throat. What does Yaakov do? He insists that before giving him the soup Eisav sell him the birthright. Since he can see his life passing before his very eyes, Eisav agrees, and the deal is made. Yaakov, now officially the firstborn, feeds Eisav, who regains his strength and is able to leave on his own two feet (Beraishis 25:29-34).

Okay, maybe I over dramatized it a bit. Nevertheless, at first glance it does seem as if Yaakov took advantage of the situation, using his leverage of having exactly what Eisav needed to get what he wanted from him. Is this what we would expect from the extremely pious son of Yitzchok and Rivka and grandson of Avraham and Sara? And why, if Eisav was really in such dire straits and had no other choice, does the Torah tell us that by selling the birthright he "belittled" or "disgraced" it?

The Ramban tells us that the birthright was not the same as it is now. Before the Torah gave the firstborn a double-portion, its significance was not in the percentage of the inheritance, but the stature of being the head-of-family (or, while the current head is still alive and functioning, being the next in line to take over). The rest of the family (i.e. the younger siblings) must give the firstborn the respect the leader (or leader-in-waiting) deserves.

The Abarbanel explains that Yaakov realized that rather than the wicked Eisav being the appropriate son to take over the family's mission, it should really be him. The circumstances of Eisav's fatigue were not (just) being used to facilitate a transition of the family leadership; it served as a prime example of why the change was necessary. Avraham had just died and Yitzchok was in mourning. Since the first meal must come from others, it should have been Eisav, the supposed firstborn, to provide that meal. Instead, it is Yaakov, the Yeshiva bochur and younger brother, who

is standing there cooking the round lentils for the mourner's meal, while the elder Eisav is out gallivanting. And it is the younger brother feeding the older brother when it should be the other way around. Yaakov therefore points this out to Eisav, and asks him to sell him the birthright "like today," i.e. just as today we see that the roles are reversed, this is the way it has been and will probably be in the future, so I, Yaakov, should really take on the role and responsibility of the firstborn. At this point, Eisav could have turned things around and accepted upon himself to start being the family leader. What did he do though? "He ate, he drank, he got up, and he left." No second thoughts. He belittled the position bestowed on those having the birthright by abandoning it, by not fighting for it, and by selling it to his younger brother.

I would like to take it a step further. Why was Eisav so tired? Because he had just committed murder (Bava Basra 16b). Whom did he murder? Nimrod, the old family nemesis. The same Nimrod who had thrown his grandfather Avraham into a fiery furnace, and had killed his great-uncle Haran by throwing him into the very same furnace. He was also known as Amrafel, one of the kings that had taken his first cousin (once removed) Lot captive, quite possibly to drag Avraham into the war to have him killed. Avraham defeated Amrafel, a.k.a. Nimrod, soundly, and the animosity between the idol-worship promoting Nimrod and the monotheistic family of Avraham was still very much alive. But there was more.

Based on the Midrash Aggadah, Eliyahu Ki Tov (Sefer Haparshiyos, Lech Lecha, pg. 183) tells us that Nimrod elevated Terach (Avraham's father) to be his second-in-command because he knew that Noach had designated Shem and his family for leadership, for the birthright, if you will. Nimrod had come from the cursed Cham, who was his grandfather. Even though Nimrod ruled over the entire world, he was always fearful that someone from Shem's family would take it away from him. When Terach, who was the heir-apparent of Shem's birthright, showed himself to be extremely loyal to Nimrod and his idol-worshipping cause rather than following in Shem's monotheistic footsteps, Nimrod hoped that this symbolized the abandonment of Noach's blessing to Shem, which would allow him to maintain his rule indefinitely.

This would explain why the vision in the sky after Avraham was born, which indicated that this son

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of Terach (and therefore descendent of Shem) would inherit the world, scared Nimrod enough that he wanted to kill him even when he was just an infant (see Sefer Hayashar, Parashas Noach). And why even after being miraculously saved from the furnace 50 years later, when he dreamed that he would be killed by Avraham (or his descendents), Nimrod again wanted to kill him (but couldn't when Avraham ran away upon learning of Nimrod's plans). The Sefer Hayashar, in our Parasha, describes how this animosity continued between Nimrod and Avraham's grandson.

Eisav and Nimrod were both hunters, and had become rivals, and Nimrod was, for years, very jealous of Eisav. On the day that Avraham died, they were both out hunting in the same area. Eisav saw Nimrod, but Nimrod was unaware of Eisav. During the hunt, Nimrod became separated from his fellow warrior/hunters, except for two. So Eisav hid in ambush, and when they came close, attacked, cutting off Nimrod's head. There was then a fierce battle with Nimrod's two bodyguards, who screamed for help before Eisav killed both of them. Hearing their cries, the rest of Nimrod's warriors came, only to find that Eisav had killed their king. After taking Nimrod's coat, which was the one that G-d had made for Adam, Eisav fled for his life. By the time he reached his father's house, the exhaustion from the fight and the subsequent chase, coupled with his fear for his life, led to his physical and mental exhaustion, and his saying to Yaakov "why do I need this birthright." Interestingly, the Sefer Hayashar doesn't even mention the soup, or what the birthright was sold for (there are opinions that the meal was given after the sale, but was not part of the purchase price). It doesn't mention Eisav being hungry. All it says is that Eisav feared for his life and asked why he needed the birthright. Hearing this, "Yaakov made a wise move" which led to the sale. The implication is that it was Eisav who first brought up the birthright when he complained about it, whereupon Yaakov seized upon the opportunity and offered to buy it from him.

Why did Eisav mention the birthright? Even though the true birthright of the family was continuing the Abrahamic mission of ethical monotheism, Yaakov and Eisav had different perspectives on how to fulfill it. Yaakov focused on spiritual growth, which was not one of Eisav's strong suits. He was a hunter/warrior, whose role should have been to provide the physical

necessities (including protection and infrastructure) that would allow Yaakov to flourish. To Eisav, that included defeating the family's long-time enemy, Nimrod. Being the firstborn, he felt that it was his responsibility to kill Nimrod, which he did. But at what cost? He was physically worn out, and would have to stay alert at all times, wary of revenge or attacks from the next would-be king of the world. Was it worth it? Eisav regretted having all of this on his shoulders, and was complaining about it. When Yaakov realized that Eisav wanted no part of the birthright, he immediately offered to take it, knowing that the true birthright was spiritual leadership. It wasn't that Yaakov was taking advantage of a dying Eisav; from Eisav's perspective Yaakov was doing him a favor. In truth, though, Eisav had belittled the birthright by complaining about having it.

G-d said, "Israel is My firstborn son" (Shemos 4:22). Being the firstborn is a tremendous responsibility, and it is not always easy. There is an old Yiddish expression (turned into a song on an out-of-print Diaspora Yeshiva Band Album), "siz shver tzu zayn a Yid," it is difficult to be a Jew. Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt"l is quoted as having said that a whole generation was lost to assimilation because their parents, though devout Jews, complained about the hardships of being religious (especially having to find a new job every week if they wouldn't work on Shabbos). While this aspect may no longer be as much of a problem as it once was, being the "firstborn" isn't necessarily any easier. Nevertheless, it is still as important as ever to relish the position we are in, to step up and fulfill our role with pride, and to never, G-d forbid, complain about the additional responsibilities of continuing the mission started by Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov (and Sara, Rivka, Rachel and Leah). After all, we wouldn't want to be guilty of being "mevazeh" (belittling) the "bechora" (birthright). © 2007 Rabbi D. Kramer

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

Is there a foolproof recipe for raising obedient, productive and religiously observant children? Rav Moshe Besdin once gave me three rules to follow, on the day when I asked him to be Sandak at my son Hillel's circumcision: "The first rule is siyata diShmaya-heavenly help. The second rule is siyata diShmaya and the third rule is siyata diShmaya," he wisely said. Nevertheless, conventional wisdom has it that the parents must be compatible, providing a unified role model, must never favor one child over another, and must allow the children to develop according to their own natures, albeit with modification therapy. From this perspective, let us review the Biblical story of the genesis of Jacob and Esau.

Are Isaac and Rebecca an ideal couple? The Netziv (Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin, 1817-1893) directs us to their very first encounter. As Eliezer

returns with Rebecca, Isaac's future wife, and they approach their destination, they notice a man leaving the forest after an encounter with his G-d, a man radiant with the sense of divine nearness. Rebecca falls from the camel. When informed that this spiritual personality is none other than her intended husband, she immediately covers herself with her veil, a veil which, the Netziv informs us, is never again removed, in a psychological sense.

One could call it "awe at first sight:" and for the Netziv, this moment permanently fixes the couple's subsequent relationship. Rebecca will always feel awkward and spiritually inferior in the presence of Isaac.

Growing up in the idolatrous house of Laban and Bethuel, she suddenly finds herself in the holy world of Isaac and Abraham. And her sense of spiritual inadequacy stifles open communication between them; how can a less inspired person as she sees herself to be possibly disagree with the likes of a personage such as Isaac? Moreover, Isaac's own scars from the binding would hardly make him the kind of individual who would know how to loosen her up, make Rebecca more talkative. Indeed, Elie Wiesel refers to Isaac as the first survivor, for whom daily chit-chat and small-talk is not part of his world view.

This fragile, silent relationship between parents leads to the next development: the predicament of favoring children. "Now Isaac loved Esau because he did eat of his venison . . ." (25:28). Often we are drawn to the children who are different from ourselves, who will make up for our own inadequacies. Isaac is the more passive son of a dominant and dominating Abraham, an energetic and courageous Founder and path-breaker. Esau, the hunter, was everything that Isaac was not. Isaac's heart goes out to the son who is remarkably cunning in the fields, in love with the outdoors, a robust and wild spirit.

In contrast to Isaac's "venison" love, Rebecca's love for Jacob is unconditional; "...and Rebecca loved Jacob" (ibid.) is how the verse ends. Perhaps she is naturally drawn to this naive, wholehearted and bookish son, so different from her memory of her own childhood and her brother Laban. With each parent favoring a different sibling, the results could hardly be different: brothers who are competitive rivals rather than loving partners.

Isaac's choice for the blessings is Esau, unworthy in Rebecca's eyes. And when a mother has to involve her son against her own husband in a scheme for the blessings, is it any wonder that the distance between Esau and Jacob becomes unbridgeable?

Yet complementary harmony between parents is not necessarily a guarantee of cooperative offspring. Indeed, every parent must understand that each child is born with his/her own individual personality, often distinct from that of their parents, and must respect -

and even positively nurture - these individual differences.

In the beginning, Rebecca was childless. When she finally gets pregnant, she suffers so much pain, she wants to die. "The children struggled within her, and she said, "If it be so, wherefore do I live?" (25:22)

Quoting the rabbis, Rashi points out that the Hebrew word for Rebecca's struggle, *vayitrozzu*, is based on a root which means "to run." Whenever she'd pass by a site of idol worship, Esau would struggle to run out there, and whenever she'd pass by a House of Study, Jacob would struggle to run out there. On a more profound level, this midrashic interpretation says that even pre-natally, Jacob and Esau were different people. In other words, each human being possesses proclivities that reach back into the womb, one likes bows and arrows, another chess and checkers, a third, books, and a fourth, special foods. Too often parents find it hard to accept the child for what he is, attempting to modify rather than transform the innate personality.

In verse 27, we read, "And the boys grew..." ("*vayigdal* *hanaarim*"). Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch comments that the parents had them grow up and become educated together, ignoring their different proclivities. They were both sent to the same yeshiva, as it were, with the same programs and teachers. As a result, the parents only confounded the problem, exacerbating the tensions within and between them. The basic principle, as we read in Proverbs 22:6, is that children must be educated in accordance with their own personalities. In that way, we might hope to achieve personality modification rather than restructure, which generally leads to frustration and even disaster.

Culled from this week's portion, these points shouldn't be seen as the final word in raising children, a subject as vast as the human personality. But one message cuts through everything: Parents must realize that children are not carbon copies of themselves. Each child has to find his own way. Had Isaac and Rebecca handled their twin sons differently, perhaps the tragic split between brothers, which eventually becomes the split between Jew and Christian, Jerusalem and Rome, might have been avoided. © 2007 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

#### RABBI BEREL WEIN

### Wein Online

**T**he frightening thing about the struggle between Eisav and Yaakov is its apparently doomed inevitability. While yet in the womb of their mother Rivkah, they already find themselves opposed to one another. They are not only two different personalities, physically, emotionally and intellectually, but they represent two diametrically opposed worldviews. The only question that remains is therefore one of accommodating one another.

If the Lord created them so differently, their freedom of choice in life is centered on how they will deal one with another. And in that respect, the question of accommodation - of the relationship between the Jewish people and the broader, more numerous and powerful non-Jewish world - remains alive and relevant until our very day.

Eisav varies and wavers in his attitude towards Yaakov. Hatred, jealousy, scapegoating frustration are all present in certain aspects of his behavior patterns towards Yaakov. And yet there is also a grudging admiration and attempts at reconciliation on the part of Eisav. Yaakov is portrayed as reactive towards Eisav, of a more passive nature, of patiently attempting to wait out the situation and hope that Eisav will calm down and reconcile himself to Yaakov's right of existence - in what Eisav considers to be his exclusive world.

And, therefore, the question arises - in reality the question of all of the ages - is there room in the world, especially our rapidly shrinking world, for Yaakov and Eisav to coexist peacefully. One would hope so, though history belies this optimistic view of the rivalry between the brothers.

The Torah itself is pretty much noncommittal about the causes for the true source of Eisav's hatred of Yaakov. Even though Yaakov's purchase of the birthright and his subsequent preempting of his father's blessings are ostensibly the cause of Eisav's displeasure with Yaakov, these are only superficialities. For the hatred was there from the beginning, from the moment of their conception, even though no incidents between them had as yet occurred.

The Torah just seems to take it for granted that this is the way it is going to be. And this accounts to a great degree for the almost traditional Jewish attitude of fatalism regarding the behavior of the non-Jewish world towards the Jews. Rabi Shimon ben Yochai stated in the Talmud that it is a given rule that Eisav hates Yaakov. However, there are other opinions there in the Talmud that take a different tack and belie this inevitability of hatred and violence.

After the horrors of the Holocaust were revealed, Jews felt that perhaps Eisav had finally reformed and had seen the evil of the ways of hatred and bigotry. Almost seventy years later we are not so certain about this hopefully sanguine view of Eisav's reconciliation with Yaakov. Though we are certainly less accepting and passive about the situation now than we were a century ago, nevertheless there are relatively few options left to us as how to deal with the matter.

We should minimize whatever frictions possible but realize that we are dealing with a millennia-old problem that cannot be just wished away or papered over. Faith and fortitude in our own self-worth are the strongest weapons in our arsenal to bring Eisav to reconciliation and harmony. © 2007 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory](http://www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory).*

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**S**tanding before his father Yitzchak (Isaac), Ya'akov (Jacob) claims that he is his brother Esav (Esau). (Genesis 27:19) While some commentators rationalize Ya'akov's behavior, others insist that from that point on, throughout his life, he was punished for this act of deception.

For example: after Lavan tricks his son-in-law, Ya'akov, giving him Leah instead of Rachel, Lavan states, "It is not done in our place, to give the younger before the first born." (Genesis 29:26) Here, Lavan criticizes Ya'akov by implying that perhaps in his home, the younger brother may have taken blessings from the older-but in Lavan's community, the eldest takes precedence. (Rabbi Eliezer Ashkenazi)

The pattern of the deceiver being deceived continues. After the sale of his favorite son, Yosef (Joseph), Ya'akov's other sons take Yosef's garment of many colors and dip it in goat's blood, convincing their father that Yosef had been devoured. This is truly an extraordinary pattern. As a young man, Ya'akov deceived his elderly father into blessing him while wearing the goatskin of his brother Esav. (Genesis 27:16) Now, as an elderly father, he, himself, is deceived by his sons, who use goat's blood to convince Ya'akov of Yosef's death. (Genesis 37:31)

By virtue of the fact that he is constantly being tricked, one wonders if Ya'akov was ever forgiven for deceiving his father. Maimonides argues that true repentance is finding oneself in the same circumstance where one sinned-and not making the same mistake. But what happens if the second chance never arises? Perhaps, it can be suggested, that in such cases repentance can be expressed through one's children. Such may have occurred to Ya'akov as is reflected in the lives of his two most important sons, Yehudah (Judah) and Yosef.

Yehudah is blessed with twins from Tamar. As they are born, the first puts forth his hand upon which is placed a scarlet thread. (Genesis 38:28) It's almost as if, through this conscious act, Yehudah wants to fix the mistake of his father and make forever clear who is the eldest of the twins.

Similarly, in the episode of Yosef bringing his children before his father, Ya'akov, to be blessed, Ya'akov reverses his hands, placing the right on Ephraim, the younger, and his left on Menashe, the elder. Alarmed, Yosef attempts to correct his father, warning him that he was mistaking the younger for the older. (Genesis 48:17) It seems that Yosef does not

wish to make his father's mistake of presenting his sons out of birth order.

Often, children sense the remorse of parents for having committed a wrong. Even if parents are never given the opportunity to correct that mistake, their children may resolve to do the right thing if they are ever placed in that situation. In that sense, the failings of parents can be corrected by their children.

As it relates to our narrative, Yehudah and Yosef are the tikkun (repairing) for Ya'akov. Ya'akov had deceived his father and suffered for that misstep all of his life. Only when Yehudah and finally Yosef reject deception, has Ya'akov come full circle. His sin has finally been fixed—he has seen his children repair his wrong—only then could he feel truly shalem, truly whole.  
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### YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

## Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA  
HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL SHLIT" A

Summarized by Matan Glidai

Translated by Kaeren Fish

“**A**nd may G-d give you (ve-yiten lekha) of the dew of the heavens and of the fat of the earth, and much corn and wine.” (Bereishit 27:28)

Rashi is puzzled by the fact that the verse starts with "and." This verse is the beginning of the blessing; what is the conjunctive "vav" connecting it to?

One might suggest that it is meant as a continuation of the previous verse: "Behold, the fragrance of my son is like the fragrance of a field that has been blessed by G-d" (27:27).

Attention should be paid to the beginning of verse 27, and the fact that the text speaks of Yaakov's clothing: "He drew near and he kissed him, and he smelled the fragrance of his garments, and he blessed him" (ibid.), while afterwards Yitzchak says, "See, the fragrance of my son...."

The garments that Yaakov was wearing were those that Rivka had taken from Esav: "Rivka took the best garments of Esav, her elder son, which were with her in the house..." (27:15). Commenting on this, the midrash tells us:

Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel said: All my life I waited upon my father, but I never served him a hundredth as well as Esav served his own father. I, when I would wait upon my father, would serve him while I wore soiled clothes, whereas when I set out on a journey I would depart wearing clean clothing. But Esav—when he waited upon his father, he would only serve him in fine robes. He would say: It is not honorable for my father that I serve him in anything but

fine robes. This is as it is written, "which were with her in the house." (Bereishit Rabba 62:16)

Esav admittedly excelled at the mitzva of honoring his parents. The gemara (Kiddushin 31a) questions to what extent is one required to honor one's parents, and recounts the story of Dama ben Netina, a non-Jew who once had the opportunity to close a deal involving a great sum of money, but the merchandise was locked up and his father was sleeping with the key under his pillow. Dama ben Netina chose not to waken him, and the Gemara notes that G-d rewarded him with a red heifer that was born into his herd. Why was this the specific reward given to him?

The Rebbe of Kotzk explains that, following this extraordinary example of honoring parents, Am Yisrael had an accuser in heaven: here was a non-Jew who honored his parents to a far greater degree than they did. Through the birth of the red heifer, G-d was hinting that the gentiles fulfill only such laws that are rational, but do not (and would not) fulfill commandments whose reasons cannot be understood (such as the law of the red heifer), while Am Yisrael do perform them.

Esav excelled at honoring parents, but not at other commandments. He fulfilled certain mitzvot, but only in the sense of "the fragrance of his clothes": it was external to him. Yaakov, on the other hand, was full of mitzvot; for him, fulfilling the will of G-d was his whole essence—"the fragrance of my son."

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 37a) teaches: "Even the least worthy among [Israel] are as full of mitzvot as a pomegranate [is full of seeds]. Rabbi Zeira deduced this from the words, 'He smelled the fragrance of his clothes'—'Do not read 'his clothes' (begadav), but rather 'his deceivers' (bogdav)."

Thus, Yitzchak's blessing to Yaakov is that mitzvot should be intrinsic to him, like "the fragrance of my son," and to this he adds: "And may G-d give you...."

Rashi offers a different explanation for the conjunctive 'vav' in the word, "ve-yiten." He cites a midrash that says, "'Ve-yiten lekha'-may He give, and give again" (Bereishit Rabba 66:3). Let us try to understand what this midrash is saying.

Rabbi Bunim of Peshiskhe asks, concerning the verse, "You shall go upon your belly, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life" (Bereishit 3:14):

What kind of curse is this? The snake is being promised that its food will always be readily available; it will never have to search for it! The curse, he explains, is that since the snake will always have food, it will never feel itself to be in need of G-d's mercies, and will never have the opportunity to pray to Him.

Concerning Eretz Yisrael, the Torah tells us: "It is not like the land of Egypt... where you sow your seeds and water it with your foot, like a vegetable garden... It is a land of hills and valleys; you will drink water from the rain of the heavens. It is a land which

the Lord your G-d cares for; the eyes of the Lord your G-d are always upon it, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year." (Devarim 11:10-12)

In contrast to the land of Egypt, Eretz Yisrael does not have a permanent, reliable source of water. It is always dependent on rain, and therefore Am Yisrael must pray to G-d to bring rain. G-d could have chosen Switzerland, or any other country in the world. He could have led Am Yisrael to a quiet, deserted place with no troubles or concerns, a place blessed with abundant resources. However, in His infinite wisdom, He chose Eretz Yisrael—a land of complicated political, economic and defense issues; a land that is constantly in need of Divine mercies, and is dependent only on G-d. G-d's eyes are truly upon this land at all times, because He knows that it needs Him. Every year, as winter begins and the rains have not yet started, we already start fasting and adding special prayers.

In Sefer Shoftim, after every cycle of threats and trouble, Am Yisrael prays; thereafter we read: "And the land was quiet for forty years." It is never quiet permanently.

G-d desires our prayers. He wants us to ask for His mercies. The Gemara teaches (Yevamot 64a) that the reason the patriarchs and matriarchs were barren and waited so long before they bore children was because "G-d desires the prayers of the righteous." G-d desires a connection with us; He wants us to be dependent upon Him.

Esav was blessed that "your dwelling shall be of the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of the heavens from above" (27:39) — a permanent state of material abundance. Yaakov, in contrast, is given the blessing, "And may G-d give you of the dew of the heavens." His sustenance is dependent upon G-d.

"May He give, and give again"—in the case of Am Yisrael and Eretz Yisrael, G-d "gives" each time anew. Every year we pray to Him, and every year He provides for our needs. (*This sicha was delivered at seuda shelishit, Shabbat Parashat Toldot 5756 [1995].*)

#### RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

### RavFrand

**T**he pasuk says: "And these are the generations of Avraham: Avraham gave birth to Yitzchak" [Bereshit 25:19]. Rashi is bothered by the fact that "Avraham gave birth to Yitzchak" merely restates something we already know. Furthermore, why does the Torah go back and trace the family lineage from Avraham when introducing the offspring of Yitzchak?

Rashi answers that the cynics of the generation (leitzanei hador) contended that Sarah became pregnant from Avimelech. "She lived many decades with Avraham and had not become pregnant from him." To counteract this cynicism, G-d fashioned Yitzchak's appearance to be identical to that of Avraham. It was

immediately obvious to anyone who saw Yitzchak that "Avraham fathered Yitzchak."

Many times children look like their parents. It is possible to meet someone for the first time and immediately recognize him as being the son of an individual who is well known to you. In this case, the identical appearance of the father—son pair was more overt than even that. The Medrash states that G-d made a "miracle" to make this happen. The appearance of Yitzchak was so exactly like that of his father that it was miraculous!

The Gemara [Bava Metziah 87a] describes that Avraham made a party to mark the occasion of the weaning of Yitzchak, to which he invited all the great men of the generation. Avraham Avinu was not just a private citizen. He was society's primary proponent of monotheism. He rejected the pagan idols of the rest of the world and proclaimed the existence of a Master of the Universe.

Avraham Avinu wanted to sanctify the Name of G-d (Kiddush Hashem) and publicize the great miracle that G-d did for him. Avraham made this big celebration for just that purpose, but the cynics were sitting there having a field day. They joked that Yitzchak could not possibly be Avraham's child. Sarah must have become pregnant from Avimelech. We know how it goes: A roll of the eyes, a twist of the nose, a mocking smile.

In truth, this cynicism was illogical. They were saying that "Sarah was pregnant from Avimelech" because he could not possibly be Avraham's child. The wonder here wasn't that Avraham had fathered a child. Avraham had already fathered a son from Hagar! The wonder was that Sarah, barren all her life, indeed conceived after she reached the age of ninety!

What then was the nature of this cynicism? Why did G-d respond in such a miraculous fashion to counteract this patently false type of mocking?

The point is that cynicism (leitzanus) has exactly this power. Cynicism does not need to be precise or accurate. The effect of a "one-liner" is basically that of a pin that, in a moment, bursts the balloon. The "press" will write it up. The fact that anyone with intelligence who thinks about this for 30 seconds will recognize it as nonsense is irrelevant. The damage has already been done. Such is the power of leitzanus.

Allowing this momentary bursting of the balloon of Kiddush Hashem would have defeated Avraham's entire purpose in making the party. Thus, G-d needed to make a miracle to restore the inspirational nature of this festive meal.

The Mesilas Yesharim writes in Chapter 5: "With the smallest joke, a person can deflect from himself the greatest amount of inspiration and enthusiasm. One joke pushes away 100 rebukes."

Consider the Biblical incident of Eliyahu at Mt. Carmel [Melachim I Chapter 18]. Eliyahu duels with the

prophets of Baal. He is trying to prove that idols are false and that the Almighty is the Only G-d. He brings down fire from heaven to consume his offering, after the prophets of Baal fail miserably when calling out to their G-ds.

All Eliyahu had to do was to cry out "Answer me, my G-d, Answer me." (Anneini Hashem Anneini). Why the repetition of the word "Answer me"? Chazal explain that Eliyahu offered a dual prayer: (1) Answer me, G-d, that a fire will come down from Heaven; and (2) Answer me, that the people not say that my actions were witchcraft (ma'aseh keshafim). In other words, "G-d, please save me from the cynics." Save me from the proverbial guys in the back of the shul that no matter what the Rabbi says, no matter what happens, always have a "one-liner" to make a mockery out of anything inspirational or thought provoking.

Eliyahu was worried that he might be able to bring down fire from Heaven and have everyone shout "Hashem is the L-rd! Hashem is the L-rd!"... and that one cynic might undermine it all by saying: "Eh. It's magic!" That is what Eliyahu was worried about and that is what the Almighty was worried about when he miraculously made Yitzchak look exactly like Avraham. Such is the destructive power of leitzanus. The Almighty felt that it was imperative to combat it, even at the cost of making a miracle. © 2007 Rabbi Y. Frand & torah.org

### **RABBI NAFTALI REICH**

## **Legacy**

**W**hat would you think if you saw a luxury car being offered for sale for a ridiculously low price? You would undoubtedly wonder what was wrong with it. The price a seller demands reflects his opinion of the object he is selling. It would take a large sum to make him part with a cherished possession. As for his children, who are more precious than anything else in the world, he would not sell them for any sum at all. But something he holds in low regard he would give away for a pittance.

In this week's Torah portion, we encounter the struggle over the firstborn birthright of Israel between Esau and Jacob, Isaac's two sons. As it turns out, it is not much of a struggle. This firstborn birthright signifies the privilege of becoming the chosen people of Hashem, and Esau, being the older of the two sons, holds first claim to it. It is Jacob, however, who yearns for this birthright with all his heart. One day, Esau returns from his exertions in the field thoroughly famished, and he agrees to sell the birthright to Jacob for a bowl of red lentil soup. And so, the Torah concludes, Esau ate, drank, rose and left, having disgraced the birthright.

Let us think for a moment. At which point did Esau disgrace the birthright? When he actually ate the soup or when he agreed to sell the birthright for a bowl

of soup? It would seem that as soon as he agreed to give it away for a pittance he had already shown his utter contempt for the spiritual birthright of Israel. Why then does the Torah accuse him of disgracing the birthright only after he ate, drank, rose and left?

Our Sages explain that Esau might have been so famished that his behavior could be excused. It is quite possible that his discomfiture caused him to lose his sense of proportion momentarily and agree to sell his birthright for a bowl of soup. Perhaps he was not thinking clearly at the time and agreed to do something on the spur of the moment that went against his better judgment. But if so, what happened later when his hunger was sated and his thirst assuaged? Did he protest that his agreement had been made under duress and that the transaction was null and void? Did he rant and rage at what Jacob had done to him?

Not at all. He just gulped down the soup, stood up and stomped out. This was when he demonstrated his disdain for the birthright. Had he shown any regret he would have defined himself as an upright person, but he didn't. Therefore, the Torah records this moment for posterity as the act of contempt for the birthright.

A rich man once visited the town's poorest man late one night.

"Listen, my good fellow," said the rich man. "You know I have everything a person could possibly want. I have estates and carriages and the finest horses. But one thing I do not have is a child. Your situation is the exact opposite of mine. You live in this little hovel and you cannot even put a few crusts of bread on the table. But you do have children. Ten of them." The rich man paused.

The poor man looked at the rich man curiously. "So what is the point?"

"I want to propose a deal," said the rich man. "You give me one of your ten children, and I will give you one tenth of everything I possess. What do you say?"

The poor man was taken aback. He stood up and looked at the faces of his sleeping family behind the partition. Which child could he give away? This one? Surely not. That one? Impossible. And thus he looked at the faces of all his children and finally decided he could give none of them away. He had no choice but to reject the rich man's offer.

The next day, overcome with remorse for even having considered the arrangement, he poured his heart out to his wife.

"Do not tear yourself down," she told him. "It was the pressure of our poverty that drove you to think about it. But when it came right down to it, you couldn't do it. You are a good man."

In our own lives, we all know full well how we are driven by impulse, by the spur of the beguiling moment. But what do we do when the moment passes?

Do we listen to that little voice of guilt that Hashem has so kindly implanted deep in our brains, showing ourselves to be essentially good people? Or do we plunge on ahead, heedless and thoughtless, the helpless captives of our impulses? It is this moment, when we have had the chance to pause and reflect, that truly defines who we are and what we are worth.

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**RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER**

## Weekly Dvar

**P**arshat Toldot tells the story of Yaakov (Jacob) and Esav, two brothers that couldn't be any more different. When their father Yitzchok (Isaac) decides that it's time to bless his two sons, Yaakov ends up getting the better of the two blessings. In comparing the two blessings, though, the Chafetz Chaim points out a very interesting observation: When Yaakov gets the blessing, the Torah says "And may G-d give you of the dew of the heavens and of the fatness of the earth" (27:28). However, when Esav gets his blessing, Yitzchok says "Behold, of the fatness of the earth shall be your dwelling and of the dew of the heavens from above" (27:39). Why was the order of the fatness and the dew reversed?

The Chafetz Chaim explains that since Yaakov preferred the spiritual to the physical, his blessing came from heaven (dew) to earth (fatness of the earth). On the other hand, since Esav valued the physical more, his blessing was customized to his desires by focusing on the physical first. Although that's a nice explanation, there's a much deeper lesson to be learned from it. Because Yaakov focused on heaven and the chain of where things come from, he realized that he's being GIVEN of the dew of the heavens, which produces the fatness of the earth, and consequently thanked the source, G-d. Contrarily, as the verse adds, Esav's fatness was simply his "dwelling", as if it were there all along, with no connection to where it came from. Yaakov was blessed with the ability to see beyond what was in front of him, and therefore appreciated it (and G-d) more. We too are given that same opportunity every day. And all we have to do is stop and think about what we have (as opposed to what we don't have), and where it REALLY came from!

Only then will we ever truly be content, fulfilled, and most importantly, blessed! © 2007 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

**MACHON ZOMET**

## Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

**T**he Torah tells us that the Pelishtim were not happy that Yitzchak became so wealthy. "And the man grew and was rich, and he became very wealthy. And he had sheep and cattle, and much agriculture, and the Pelishtim were jealous of him" [Bereishit 26:13-

14]. As a result, Avimelech turned to Yitzchak and expelled him from the land. "And Avimelech said to Yitzchak, Go away from us, for you have become very rich at our expense" [26:16]. But even after Yitzchak left the area of Gerar, his disputes with the Pelishtim did not end, and they continued to argue with Yitzchak about the control of the wells.

In the end, Yitzchak arrived in Beer Sheva and pitched his tent there. Surprisingly, just at that point Yitzchak had the privilege of a royal visit, when Avimelech the King of the Pelishtim arrived with some of his colleagues. Yitzchak was surprised, and he asked, "Why did you come to me, even though you hate me and you sent me away?" [26:27]. They replied, "We have seen that G-d is with you, and we said, let there be an oath between you and us and let us make a covenant between us" [26:28]. But this is certainly not clear: What changed since Yitzchak was chased away at first? After all, he was very wealthy even when he was in their land, and he was blessed then too? "And Yitzchak planted in that land, and his wealth grew that year by one hundred, and G-d blessed him" [26:12]. If while Yitzchak was still in their land the Pelishtim did not understand the benefits that they could achieve by having a covenant with a man who is supported by G-d, why did they begin to understand this when he reached Beer Sheva? According to Chizkuni, the blessing disappeared from the land as soon as Yitzchak left it, but this is difficult to accept since the Torah does not mention it at all.

Thus, it seems that the key to understanding these events can be found in the verses between Yitzchak's expulsion and the arrival of Avimelech and his entourage (26:17-25). This is a description of when Yitzchak dug the wells, and one expression in the passage stands out as being different from the others. "And Yitzchak's slaves dug in the riverbed and there they found a well of fresh water (mayim chaim)" [26:19]. Ibn Ezra takes this to mean, "water that flowed constantly." This unique expression also stands out in comparison to the well that Yitzchak's slaves dug in Beer Sheva. In that case, all that is written is that they said, "We have found water" [26:32]. Other wells in the Torah are also described similarly, using the expression "a well of water" (see 21:19 about Hagar, 21:25 about Avraham and Avimelech, and 24:11 about Rivka and Avraham's slave). From this point on in the Tanach, the expression "mayim chaim" is only used as a reference to G-d Himself. For example: "They have abandoned me, a well of fresh water" [Yirmiyahu 2:13; see also 17:13]. Yitzchak's well was the trigger that started the dispute with the local shepherds, but after the disagreement had died down Avimelech and his men finally understood the message: One who finds a fresh well (of "mayim chaim") is intimately linked to the source of the water of life. As they put it, "G-d is with you."