

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### Wein Online

**T**he conflict between Yitzchak and Rivkah over the future of their oldest son Eisav is reflected in the dramatic story of the blessings of Yitzchak. Yitzchak is apparently convinced that his blessings may yet transform Eisav and save him from the abyss of Hell where he is heading. Rivkah, a more realistic pragmatist, performs an act of triage in sending forth Yaakov to obtain his father's blessings at almost all cost.

Yaakov is a very reluctant participant in the struggle against Eisav. He does not raise his claim to his father that Eisav had in fact sold to him the rights to the blessings. He does the bidding of his mother and wears the clothing of Eisav, thus misleading his father as to who is actually appearing before him. And when Yitzchak asks Yaakov "who are you?" Yaakov answers "I am your eldest son Eisav."

Apparently this statement of Yaakov's contradicts his entire essence of being a truthful, serene simple person. Rashi interprets Yaakov's statement as being divided into two distinct parts. One is "I am" and the second part is "Eisav is your eldest son." Everything in this formulation is absolutely true, though it is obvious that this interpretation is not the literal simple explanation of the verse.

Nevertheless, Rashi seems to insist that this formulation of the words of Yaakov is the correct one and should be adopted when studying this parsha and its deeper meaning. What does Rashi see in the verse that allows him to offer up this interpretation as the mandatory one of the verse?

I have always felt that the interpretation lay in the first part of Yaakov's answer "I am." The core of Judaism is that a person must have an acute and accurate awareness of one's self. If a person feels that he or she is only part of the herd and has little or no self-awareness then it is impossible to grow spiritually and intellectually.

This issue of Toras Aish is dedicated to my new parents  
Shana & Moshe Lutwak  
and to my new grandparents  
Seymour & Raizie Lutwak  
on the occasion of my birth!  
Mazel Tov! I can't wait to hear what my name is!

We have a tendency to judge ourselves through the prism of external factors. Wealth, age, appearance, career success, public opinion, and other factors completely external to our true selves blind us to our true essence. The great rebbe of Kotzk, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Morgenstern (Halperin) stated: "If I am I and you are you, then I am I and you are you. But if I am you and you are me then I am not I and you are not you."

Yaakov tells his father "I am"- I am I and not a creature of external forces, drives and ambitions. I am here because through me the Jewish people will be built. That is my essence and my soul and my mission in life. Eisav on the other hand is formed by purely external factors - jealousy, physical desires, violence, greed and station in life. His claim to fame is that he is your son but that is an external accomplishment not related to his true identity. The blessing to which I am entitled can in no way help Eisav for he has no permanent deep self-identity. He will live by the sword but no lasting holy people with a divine and eternal mission can be built from him.

So "I am" is the correct response of Yaakov to his father Yitzchak. © 2008 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 SHLOMO RISKIN**

### Shabbat Shalom

**“A**nd these are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham begot Isaac" (Gen 25:19).

As Abraham, the over-towering and over-powering, path-breaking founder of a new nation and a new religion, passes from the scene, it must be left to his son and heir Isaac to establish continuity of leadership, to set down the majestic guide lines necessary for the direction of Abraham's seed towards the fulfillment of their universal destiny to bring G-d's words and blessings into the world. What might be the most qualifying talents for such a sensitive and complex task? To what extent will personal psychological baggage and haunting familial inter-play influence Isaac's decision? And thus, the question of questions; why does Isaac seem to favor (and especially love) the

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aggressive and entrapping Esau over the wholehearted and introspective Jacob?

To penetrate the subtleties that this critical question raises about the nature of Jewish destiny, we must concentrate not only on what the Bible says and on what the Bible doesn't say, on what is written in the lines of our sacred parchment scroll and on what is written between those lines, but we must also attempt to understand the sequence of the story-line, especially when the order seems to be out of "sync" with our logical expectation for how narrative should be constructed.

For example, our Biblical portion of Toldot opens (from the middle of Genesis Chapter 25) with the birth of the twin sons to Isaac and Rebecca, followed soon with the account of how the elder son Esau spurns the birthright by 'selling' it to his younger brother Jacob for a dish of lentils! Then, in Chapter 26, the text digresses from the main theme of the brothers' differences and rivalries and records how Isaac goes down to Gerar, the land occupied by the Philistines and their King Avimelekh, detailing his adventures there - only for the text to return (Chapter 27) to the sparring of the siblings and the subterfuge involved as to which brother will eventually receive the blessings and the birth-right.

Oddly, this break in the narrative seems unnecessary, even awkward. Why not join the section of Jacob's deception to steal the blessings of the birthright with the earlier chapter that deals with Esau's sale of the birthright, and then record the story of Isaac and Avimelekh afterwards?! Certainly an orderly, sequential description of events, without the interruption of Gerar and Avimelekh right in the middle, makes more sense.

The first verse of our portion of Toldot - and the description of the next generation of Hebrew leadership - reads as follows: "And these are the generations of Isaac the son of Abraham, Abraham gave birth to Isaac" (Gen. 25:19). Is it not strange that the text describes the generations not from Isaac's children, the usual Biblical style, but rather from Isaac's forbear, "the son of Abraham, Abraham gave birth to Isaac"? But perhaps this is the key point: Isaac's relationship to his sons - and his choice for future leadership - is a direct result of what Isaac perceived to be his relationship

with his father, and his father's brand of (and choice for) leadership.

Abraham was a founder in every sense of the word - encompassing all of the dynamism, initiative and courage we would expect of a founder. He not only follows his G-d but even walks in front of Him; in order to save Lot, he wages war against the terrorizing nations of the Fertile Crescent and wins; and he succeeds in educating the next generations "...to guard the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice." (18:19). In the eyes of a founder's son, Isaac, the founding father Abraham was first and foremost a larger-than-life aggressive and forceful "type A" personality.

Isaac himself, however, is a much more passive and introspective individual, the almost natural result of living under the shadows of father so daunting and complete that it virtually makes it impossible for the son to feel that he can compete with his 'invincible' father. Isaac never initiates: he is "taken" (kah-na) to the binding, a wife is found for him, and the blessings are wrested from him. And although he has been marked by G-d as the heir-apparent to the birthright of Abraham, "For through Isaac shall be called your seed" (21:12), he can never forget that his father did not really want Yishmael banished, and that when G-d first promised Abraham a son with Sarah, the patriarch's reaction was, "Would that Yishmael will live before You" (17:18). Indeed, Yishmael is more aggressive and powerful than Isaac, a man "...whose hand wins over everything and everyone", (16:12), and perhaps, in his father's eyes and heart, even more fitting for leadership and more beloved than Isaac would seem to be. Isaac's "obsession" with Yishmael causes him to constantly return to the Be'er LaHai Ro'i, the place where the Almighty saved Hagar and blessed Yishmael (24:62; 25:11), and perhaps it is his own feelings of inadequacy which lead him to love and to choose for the birthright the more dominating and dominant Esau over the seemingly passive Jacob, who reminds him too much of himself.

These feelings are re-inforced in Gerar, where Isaac calls Rebecca his sister just as Abraham, a generation earlier, referred to Sarah as his sister. Gerar is where Isaac is driven away from a particular area in the land of Canaan (Israel) where Abraham and his descendants had been permitted to live by virtue of a treaty with Avimelekh, - and Isaac leaves quietly, without even a complaint. All he does is re-open those wells dug by Abraham which Avimelekh had shut up after the patriarch's death. Moreover, Isaac is forced into another treaty with Avimelekh, since "...he was only treated well (by the Philistines) who merely banished him from the area but did not harm his person" (26:29). No wonder the passive Isaac is then moved to call upon Esau to bring him his beloved venison meat and receive the birthright (Genesis 27).

However, Isaac's wife Rebecca had never been exposed or subjected to the complex family dynamics between Abraham and Isaac. Her vision was clear, wise enough to understand how Isaac's willingness to participate in the "binding" ("...and the two went together" 22:6,9) and his commitment to the Land of Israel (26:12,13) more than entitled him - and not Yishmael - to the birthright. Similarly, Jacob's whole-heartedness and studiousness, his deeper appreciation of what the birthright stood for, made him, rather than Esau, the proper heir to the Abrahamic covenant. In the final analysis it is the steadfast commitment to the mission of Israel to bring Blessings to the world through compassionate righteousness, morality and peace - rather than ambitious aggression - that define leadership for the seed of Abraham. © 2008 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

### **RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## **Taking a Closer Look**

“**A**nd he (Yitzchok) called it (the well they had previously dug that had just started flowing) 'Shiva;' therefore the name of the city is 'Be'er Sheva' until this day" (Beraishis 26:33). It would seem, then, that the city of Be'er Sheva got its name from the well Yitzchok dug that was called "Shiva." However, being that Avraham had already given it the name Be'er Sheva before Yitzchok was born (21:31), how could it be said that it was Yitzchok that gave it this name?

The Rashbam, as well as the Ibn Ezra (in his second approach) suggest that there were two cities with the same name, one named by Avraham and the other by Yitzchok. The Rashbam directs us to Melachim I 19:3, where Eliyahu fled to "Be'er Sheva which is in [the portion of] Yehudah," implying that there is another city elsewhere with the same name (thus necessitating identifying which one he fled to). However, as the Radak there points out, the reason the area is identified is not to distinguish this Be'er Sheva from a different one, but to tell us that Eliyahu fled from the Northern Kingdom to the Southern Kingdom. Besides, it seems rather unlikely that Yitzchok would give a different city the same name used by his father, especially since both cities would have to be near Gerar, where Avimelech was.

The Sefornu says that even though they are the same city, the names aren't exactly the same. Avraham named it "Be'er Shuh-va" (with a kumatz), after the oath he made with Avimelech, while Yitzchok renamed it "Be'er Sheh-va" (with a segol) to signify both the oath and the well, which was the seventh well dug by he and his father. This is also difficult to accept, as throughout Tanach it is always called "Be'er Shuh-vah" when the trup (vocal note) is either an esnachta or a sof pasuk (which is the norm, even for names of people and places), but "Be'er Sheh-va" whenever there is a different trup.

The Chizkuni is among those that say that Avraham only called the well itself and its immediate surroundings ("the place," see 21:31) "Be'er Sheva," while Yitzchok called the entire city "Be'er Sheva." It's possible that there had been no "city" yet when Avraham made his treaty with Avimelech there, so could only give a name to the area around the well. After Avraham built the area into city based on his hospitality (see Rashi on 21:33), Yitzchok assigned the name to the whole city. The Radak says that even though the name was first given by Avraham, because Yitzchok reaffirmed the treaty with Avimelech there, it reinforced the name, making a much stronger, lasting impression, causing the name to stick. There might be another possibility as well.

Avraham had called it "Be'er Sheva" because of the oath ("shevuah") made to give some weight to the treaty between himself (and his children) and Avimelech (and his children), as well as to commemorate the seven ("sheva") animals he gave Avimelech (see Radak). However, it became known as the place where the treaty was made, with the other reason (conveniently) forgotten. This was problematic, for two reasons. First of all, Avraham is criticized for making a treaty with Avimelech, a treaty that made it much more difficult for King David to conquer Yerushalayim. Secondly, it created additional animosity between Yitzchok and Avimelech when Avimelech threw Yitzchok out of Gerar despite the treaty made with his father (or at least Yitzchok perceived that it did). It was for this reason that Yitzchok waited to move back to Be'er Sheva until after he dug a well that there was no argument over (26:22), but once that occurred moved back there immediately (26:23). After all, how could he move back to Be'er Sheva because Avimelech had chased him away if its very name was symbolic of the promise Avimelech had made to treat Avraham's children well! Yitzchok therefore wanted to fix the situation, but knew he couldn't change the name his father had already given it. Instead, he called the flowing well he had just discovered, the seventh well, "Shiva," publicizing the reason why it was called such. Then, he renamed the city with the same name his father gave it, only this time (he hoped) it would be known for the well, not for the treaty.

And Yitzchok called the well "Shiva." Therefore, because of that seventh well, the name of the city is "Be'er Sheva" until this day. © 2007 *Rabbi D. Kramer*

### **RABBI LABEL LAM**

## **Dvar Torah**

“**A**nd he (Essau) said (Aloud to his father Isaac): 'Isn't his name appropriately called Yaakov, because he tricked me these two times. First he took my birthright. Now he took my blessing.'" (Breishis 27:36)

Essau makes a strong accusation against his brother Jacob which is never openly answered in the text. Are we quietly in agreement on his point? Is it time again for us to bow our heads in shame and apologize for the crude way our father Jacob acquired the birthright from his brother Essau, by taking advantage of him in his moment of weakness? Can we excuse his actions by claiming he only did so because he recognized Esau's inherent lack of fitness for the Divine service? That always sounds like a "whitewash". How can we defend the indefensible to skeptical ears?

For millennium we are on trial for the honest reporting of events from the earliest days of our family history. Now, just relying on what's written there in the verses I would like to try in a lawyerly way to present a case that it was Essau who fumbled his place in Jewish History and not Jacob who callously stripped him of it.

1) The defense would like to call Essau to the stand as a witness. "Essau, do you recall your comments when asked to sell your birthright? Were you maybe too tired and hungry to open your mouth? Is that why with your last ounce of strength you asked that the food your brother Jacob was carefully preparing be poured down your throat? Remember your words?" "Behold, I am going to die, what good is this birthright to me?" Would you like to defend this statement claiming that it was not so much expressing a disdain for the birthright as it was desperation for some food at that time. Could be! Let's see!

2) Who amongst the reading audience would sell their Jewish Heritage for a lunch? I know! What are they serving? Seriously! How many millions of Jews over thousands of years of history were willing to give their lives rather than alter a single custom, as the law requires, that is when our religious mettle is being tested?

It is known that the Nazis used to capture the Jewish leaders when conquering a city and execute them first to demoralize the rest of the community. It is told that in this one town it was rumored that the mayor was a Jew from a great grandparent. For three generations no one had practiced Judaism. To test the veracity of the matter the Nazis took him to the synagogue and placed a Sefer Torah in his arms and asked him at gun point to throw the scroll on the ground and trample it. He declared, "I want to thank you for returning me to my people and my G-d!" They killed him on the spot. For what value did Essau cash his heritage?

3) The verse says, "And Jacob gave to Essau bread (It wasn't on the menu) and cooked beans (That's what he asked for) and he ate and he drank (not part of the meal plan either), and he got up and Essau despised the birthright." (Breishis 25:34) Why over here does it say that "Essau despised the birthright"? Why is that declaration anchored to this place in the narrative? If the whole claim against Jacob is that he took

advantage of his starving brother to snatch the blessing, his complaint should have been filed at the time he finished eating. The verse testifies that he ate and drank and got up and left without a murmur of protest. That's when he most clearly expressed disdain for the birthright.

Clearly, he was not tricked as he later claimed. They made a deal like any other business deal based upon a fundamental disagreement about the value of a thing. Jacob opted for eternity while Essau ordered soup. Remarkably, even when the bowl was empty so was he. Essau walked away with only heartburn while Jacob continued to stir within a burning heart. © 2008 Rabbi L. Lam & torah.org

#### MACHON ZOMET

## Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Yehoshua Shapira, Rosh Yeshivat Ramat Gan

**T**hree times our Patriarchs struggle with nearby Gentile kings in disputes that were both complex and sensitive. All three events were related to the repeated theme, when they told their wives, "Please say that you are my sister" [Bereishit 12:13]. This ruse was used twice by Avraham and Sarah and once by Yitzchak and Rivka. What can we learn from this unusual link between holiness/purity and impurity/lust? How can we apply the principle that "the actions of the forefathers are a sign for the descendents" with respect to these events?

The Magid of Mezeritch, the disciple of the Baal Shem Tov, tells us amazing things about the incident that took place between Avimelech and Sarah. What he says can also be applied in this week's Torah portion. Avraham, the Magid says, was "blind" with respect to Sarah's physical beauty. He was not at all involved with her in a physical sense. Their unique relationship was nothing more nor less than an attachment of the souls. This is also true of the consequences of their actions, the converts? "The souls that they made in Charan" [12:5, see Rashi]. At this point they did not have any children of their own. It is only the encounter with the impure lusts of Pharaoh and Avimelech which awakens in Avraham some physical awareness of Sarah's external beauty: "Now the time has come to be aware of your beauty" [Rashi, 12:11].

Indeed, after these events Avraham and Sarah have their own son. It is not surprising that the cynics of the generation declared, "Avimelech made Sarah pregnant" [Rashi 25:10], because it was true that his influence helped Avraham achieve the ability to have a child. The same thing is repeated in this week's Torah portion, and once again it has physical consequences:

"And Avimelech looked on... And Yitzchak planted in the land, and in that year he found one hundred gates" [26:8,12]. Avraham owned sheep and cattle and many slaves, but he did not own fields and land. Only with respect to Yitzchak do we find a

physical blessing linked to the land. And once again this took place only after he came into close contact with the Pelishtim, the people who dwelt in the land.

Evidently this can teach us that for the holy people of Yisrael the souls take precedence over the physical elements of the body. Because of this, the Almighty sometimes finds the need to drag them to material surroundings, as if to say, "You are born against your will" [Avot 4:28]. The sanctity of Yisrael must be revealed from within a physical and material state, and it will lead to holy children who will improve the world.

This approach sheds a very positive light on our generation which is so deeply involved in building the material level of the community of Yisrael as it returns to its homeland, which can be compared to the body with respect to the soul of the nation. Everybody who is involved with the dust of the earth and invests his time in contact with it will not be able to avoid contact with sin and impurity. A tiny blob of the evil inclination is mixed in with every act of creation, in spite of the will of the one who is involved in the creation. But the response is also included within the same act, because in the end this will always lead the way to the Almighty, for whom body and soul are the same and for whom light and darkness are the same. *Translated by Moshe Goldberg*

#### RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

### Haftorah

**T**his week's haftorah warns us to cherish our relationship with Hashem and never take advantage of it. Although the Jewish people enjoy a special closeness with Hashem, they are reminded to approach Him with reverence. The prophet Malachi addressed them shortly after their return from Babylonia and admonished them for their lack of respect in the Bais Hamikdash. He said in Hashem's name, "I love you... but if I am your father where is My honor? The kohanim disgrace My name by referring to My altar with disrespect." (1:2,6) Rashi explains that the kohanim failed to appreciate their privilege of sacrificing in Hashem's sanctuary. Although they had recently returned to Eretz Yisroel and the Bais Hamikdash it did not take long for them to forget this. They quickly acclimated themselves to their sacred surroundings and viewed their sacrificial portions like ordinary meals. When there was an abundance of kohanim and each one received a small portion he responded with disrespect. (ad loc) Even the sacrificial order was treated lightly and kohanim would offer, at times, lame or sick animals displaying total disrespect to their sacred privileges.

Malachi reprimanded them for their inexcusable behavior and reminded them of the illustrious eras preceding them. The kohanim in those generations had the proper attitude towards Hashem's service and

conducted themselves with true reverence. Hashem said about such kohanim, " My treaty of life and peace was with him, and I gave him (reason for) reverence. He revered Me and before My name he was humbled." (2:5) These verses particularly refer to Aharon Hakohain, the earliest High Priest to serve in the Sanctuary. They speak of a man so holy that he was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies. Yet, he always maintained true humility and displayed proper reverence when entering Hashem's private quarters. The Gaon of Vilna reveals that Aharon's relationship extended beyond that of any other High Priest. He records that Aharon was the only person in history allowed access to the Holy of Holies throughout the year, given specific sacrificial conditions. But, this privilege never yielded content and never caused Aharon to become overly comfortable in Hashem's presence.

Parenthetically, Malachi draws special attention to the stark contrast between the Jewish nation's relationship with Hashem and that of other nations. Their relationship with their Creator is one of formal respect and reverence. Malachi says in Hashem's name, "From the east to the west My name is exalted amongst the nations.... But you (the Jewish people) profane it by referring to Hashem's altar with disgrace." Radak (ad loc.) explains the nations exalt Hashem's name by recognizing Him as the supreme being and respectfully calling Him the G-d of the G-ds. (1:12) They afford Him the highest title and honor and never bring disgrace to His name. This is because they direct all their energies towards foreign powers and false deities and never approach Hashem directly. Their approach allows for formal respect and reverence resulting in Hashem's remaining exalted in their eyes. The upshot of this is because their relationship with Him is so distant that it leaves no room for familiarity or disgrace.

The Jewish people, on the other hand, enjoy a close relationship with Hashem. We are His beloved children and the focus of His eye. We are permitted to enter His sacred chamber and sense His warmth therein. This special relationship leaves room for familiarity and content, and can lead, at times, to insensitivity and disrespect. During the early years of the second Bais Hamikdash this warmth was so tangible that the kohanim lost sight of their necessary reverence and respect. This explains Malachi's message, "Hashem's says, 'I love you... but where is My honor?'" The Jewish people are always entitled to His warm close relationship but are never to abuse it. Malachi therefore reminded them to be careful and maintain proper respect and reverence for the Master of the universe.

This contrast between the Jewish and gentile approach to Hashem finds its origins in their predecessors' relationship to their venerable father.

The Midrash quotes the illustrious sage, Rabban Shimon Ben Gamliel bemoaning the fact that he never served his father to the same degree that the wicked Eisav served his father, Yitzchok. Rabban Shimon explained, "Eisav wore kingly robes when doing menial chores for his father, but I perform these chores in ordinary garments." (Breishis Rabba 65:12) This proclamation truly expresses Eisav's deep respect and reverence for his father. However, there is a second side to this. This week's sedra depicts their relationship as one of formality and distance. We can deduce this from the Torah's narrative of Eisav's mode of speech when addressing his father in pursuit of his coveted bracha. The Torah quotes Eisav saying, "Let my father rise and eat from the provisions of his son." (Breishis 27:31) Eisav always addressed his father like a king in a formal and distant-albeit respectful-third person. Yaakov, on the other hand, did not serve his father with such extraordinary reverence. He undoubtedly showed his father utmost respect but related to him with closeness and warmth. His association was too internal to allow for formal speech. The Torah therefore quotes Yaakov's words to his father during his bracha, "Please rise and eat from my preparations..." (27:19) Even when attempting to impersonate Eisav, Yaakov could not bring himself to speak to his father in any other tone than warm and love. (comment of R' Avrohom ben HaRambam ad loc.)

We, the Jewish people follow the footsteps of our Patriarch Yaakov and relate to our Heavenly father with warmth and closeness rather than coldness and distance. Although Yaakov never reached Eisav's ultimate levels of reverence he showed his father true respect through love, warmth and deep appreciation. We approach Hashem in a similar manner and relate to Him with our warmth and love and deep appreciation. The nations of the world follow their predecessor and approach the Master of the universe in a very different way. They maintain their distance and relate to Him in a formal and cold- albeit respectful and reverent way.

This dimension expresses itself in our approach towards our miniature Bais Hamikdash, the synagogue. Although it is truly Hashem's home wherein His sacred presence resides a sense of warmth and love permeates its atmosphere. We, the Jewish people are privileged to feel this closeness and enjoy His warmth and acceptance. However, we must always remember Malachi's stern warning, "Hashem says, 'I love you like a father does his son, but if I am your father where is My honor?'" We must always follow in our forefather Yaakov's footsteps and maintain proper balance in our relationship with our Heavenly father. We should always approach Him out of warmth and love, yet never forget to show Him proper respect and reverence.

Our turbulent and troubling times reflect Hashem's resounding wake up call. They suggest that

Hashem seeks to intensify His relationship with His people. Hashem is calling us to turn to Him and realize that all existence depends on Him. Let us respond to His call and show our loyalty to this relationship. Let us show Him our true appreciation by affording Him proper respect and reverence in his sacred abode. Let it be Hashem's will that we merit through this to intensify our relationship with Him and ultimately bring the world to the exclusive recognition of Hashem. © 2003 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

**RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY**

## Death Wish

**E**sav. He represents so much evil. We know him as the hunter, the ruthless marauder, murderer of Nimrod and stalker of Yaakov. Yet, believe it or not, he had some saving grace. He is even considered a paradigm of virtuous character at least in one aspect of his life honoring parents. The Torah tells us that Yitzchak loved Esav. And Esav loved him back. He respected his father and served him faithfully. In fact, the Medrash and Zohar talk favorably about the power of Esav's kibud av, honor of his father. They even deem it greater than that of his brother Yaakov's. And so Yitzchak requested Esav to "go out to the field and hunt game for me, then make me delicacies such as I love, and I will eat, so that my soul may bless you before I die" (Genesis 27:3-4). Yitzchak wanted to confer the blessings to him. Esav won his father's regard. And even when Esav found out that his brother, Yaakov beat him to the blessings, he did not yell at his father, in the method of modern filial impugnation, "How did you let him do that?!" All he did was "cry out an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, "Bless me too, Father!" (ibid v.34). Yitzchak finds some remaining blessing to bestow upon his older son, but the grudge does not evaporate. What troubles me is not the anger of defeat or the desire for revenge, rather the way Esav expressed it. "Now Esau harbored hatred toward Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him; and Esau thought, "May the days of mourning for my father draw near, then I will kill my brother Jacob."

"May the days of mourning for my father draw near" Think about it. How did the love for a father turn into the eager anticipation of his death? The seventh grade class of the posh Harrington Boy's School, nestled in the luxurious rolling hills of suburbia, was teeming with excitement. The winter had begun, and they were rapidly approaching the beginning of the holiday season. The children had been talking about their wishes and expectations for holiday presents and were telling the class what they were going to get.

Johnny had been promised that if he finished his piano lessons, he'd get a new 800-megahertz computer. Arthur had asked for a real drum set and

was promised it on the condition he gets grades of 100 on two consecutive math tests.

Billy had not been so lucky. He had begged his dad for a Harley-Davidson motorcycle, to which his father replied, "Over my dead body!" He settled. If he would write a weekly letter to his uncle in Wichita, he would get a motorized scooter.

The day came and all the kids had the chance to share their expectations with their peers. "When I get two hundreds in a row, I'm getting a real drum set!" shouted Arthur.

"When I finish piano lessons, I'm getting the latest computer!" exclaimed Johnny. And so it went. Each child announced his goal and the prize that awaited him upon accomplishment.

Finally Billy swaggered up to the front of the class. "If I write my uncle I'm gonna get a scooter." He quickly continued, "but that's nothing! 'Cause when my daddy dies, I'm getting a Harley-Davidson motorcycle!"

Passions overrule sanity. They even overtake years of love and commitment. When one is enraged, he can turn against his best friend, his closest ally, and even his own parents! Esav, who spent his first 63 years in undying adulation of his father, changed his focus in a burst of emotion. Now, instead of worrying about his father's fare, he awaited the day of his farewell. All in anticipation of the revenge he would take on Yaakov.

When passions perverse our priorities, and obsessions skew our vision, friends become foes and alliance becomes defiance. In the quest for paranoid revenge, everyone is an enemy even your own parents. But mostly your own self. © 2000 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & Project Genesis, Inc.

#### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

## **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**T**his week's portion tells of Yitzchak's (Isaac) special love for Esav (Esau) and Rivka's (Rebecca) special love for Yaakov (Jacob). (Genesis 25:28) One wonders how Yitzchak could have been so naive to prefer his eldest son Esav more than the younger Yaakov. After all, Esav was merely a hunter while Yaakov was a student of Torah.

Perhaps it can be suggested that Yitzchak knew that Esav was physically strong. Having just experienced the Akedah (the binding of Isaac), that moment when a knife was literally on his neck, Yitzchak favored this trait. He sensed that throughout Jewish history we would be similarly bound with a knife on our neck-facing near death. Physical strength would be needed.

What the Jewish people needed, Yitzchak thought, was a two headed leadership. Esav would be the physical heir. He would defend the Jewish people against all attacks. Yaakov on the other hand, would be the spiritual heir who would teach Torah and soulful

principles to his people. Yitzchak was not fooled by Yaakov's disguise and therefore blessed Yaakov, with blessings that were physical in nature. "May G-d give you your due of heaven and plenty of corn and wine." (Genesis 27:28) The blessings Yitzchak gives to Yaakov just before Yaakov leaves home were the covenantal blessings. "May the Lord give you the blessings of Avraham (Abraham) and may you inherit the land of your sojournings." (Genesis 28:4)

Rivka did not see things that way. She insisted that there could only be one heir. The body and the soul should not be separated. Rivka understood that we are not human beings who are disjointed. The body and soul must work in harmony. The soul needs the body to exist in this world and the body needs the soul to give meaning and direction to its existence. For Rivka, the pathway to spirituality is not to separate it from the body, to denigrate the body but rather to sanctify it. She therefore insisted that Jacob, the Jew of the spirit, the student of Torah, could learn to be physically strong as well.

Thus, as my Rebbe the saintly Rav Ahron Soloveitchik of blessed memory points out, Rivka pushes Yaakov to have courage by insisting that he challenge Esav by taking the blessing from him and putting his life on the line. We know that Yaakov eventually learns this lesson for later in his life he successfully wrestles with a mysterious man, (Genesis 32:25) and is given an additional name-Yisrael which means one who is able to fight and be strong.

The body-soul issue is one that has been debated and discussed for many centuries and in many religions and cultures. It is certainly present in the modern State of Israel. Many Yeshivot refuse to allow their students to fight in the army. They insist that they are protecting Israel spiritually through their learning and physical protection should be taken care of by others.

Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaCohen Kook, however, thought differently. He was the father of Yeshivot Hesder whose students enlist in the army and fight; gun in one hand, and Talmud in the other. In tune with Rivka's thinking, they become almost like two children of the third patriarch, Yaakov, the student of Torah, and Yisrael, the strong fighter, for they integrate both body and soul in the service of G-d. © 2006 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

#### **RABBI YAAKOV MENKEN**

## **Lifeline**

**G**en. 25:22-23, "And the two children were pushing inside her, and she said if so, why do I exist? And she went to ask H'. And H' said to her, there are two nations in your womb..."

This passage is difficult to understand. What is so unusual if children are kicking in the womb? As Rashi explains, nothing is wrong with that - so it's obvious that this verse means something extraordinary. So the Medrash tells us that the word for pushing or crushing, "Retzitza", in this case is being used for "Ritza", running. When Rivka would walk by the Yeshiva of Shem and Aver, Yaakov would "run", pushing to get out. And when Rivka would walk by a house of idols, Esav his brother would push.

So Rivka is upset, she asks what's going on, and she's told: "not to worry, you're having twins." Excuse me, but - why is this helpful? So now instead of having one child who is interested in all sorts of G-ds, both real and imaginary, she has one who is interested in the One H', and one interested in idols. Why is she comforted?

I suppose in simple terms, she already knew that the line of Avraham had continued with Yitzhak, rather than with Yishmael or any other brother - and so she understood that even with a son dedicated to idols, she only needed to find one pure son to carry the line forward. Therefore twins - one good and one wicked - were better than a single confused child.

On a deeper level, I heard the following from a leader in today's Mussar movement (Mussar - moral exhortation): that a son moving in the wrong direction can be turned around, but it is much more difficult to "straighten out" someone who is moving every which way. The same Greek root that produced "epicurian" is also the source for "apikorus", a heretic.

Avraham, by rejecting polytheism, would have been branded an intolerant bigot in today's politically correct society. If Rome went to war with Venice, and Venice lost, then the citizens would offer sacrifices to the Roman G-ds. This was not because of a "rejection" of Venician G-ds, but rather simple pragmatism: obviously, the Roman G-ds were stronger! So all the cultures of the world accepted the essential validity of everyone else's G-ds. Abraham - the father of Judaism - rejected this concept.

At a certain point, we must choose a direction!

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### **RABBI SHLOMO KATZ**

## **Hama'ayan**

**W**e read in this week's parashah how Yaakov wrested the rights of the bechorah/birthright from Esav. The midrash says that Yaakov used his Torah knowledge to accomplish this. How so?

R' Avraham Abuchatzzeirah z"l (20th century) explains as follows: Another midrash says, "Why did Yaakov risk his life for the birthright? He saw that the sacrificial service in the then- future mishkan would initially be performed by the firstborn and later would be transferred to the kohanim." Yaakov learned from this that a firstborn can lose his rights, something which is

not intuitively apparent. Why did the firstborn of the Exodus generation lose their rights? Because of the sins associated with the golden calf, i.e., idolatry and murder. (Bnei Yisrael killed Chur, had who rebuked them.)

Chazal say that on the day that Esav sold the birthright to Yaakov, Esav committed those very same sins -- he denied the existence of G-d and he murdered Nimrod. If so, Esav, like the firstborn of the future, had forfeited his rights. This is what the above midrash means: Yaakov used his Torah knowledge to recognize that the prerogatives of the birthright were transferrable if the firstborn sinned. (Toldot Avraham)

"The G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzchak, and the G-d of Yaakov" -- this is the meaning of the verse (Tehilim 124:1), "If not that Hashem was with us, we would say, 'Yisrael!'"

Of the third Patriarch's two names, Yaakov and Yisrael, the latter refers to his greatest spiritual accomplishments. Why, then, did the authors of Shemoneh Esrei use the name "Yaakov" in the above phrase?

The phrase, "The G-d of Avraham, the G-d of Yitzchak, and the G-d of Yaakov" has 26 letters, which is the gematria of Hashem's Name. If not for the significance of the number 26 -- causing "Hashem" to be "with us" -- the name Yisrael (which is longer) could have been used.

"If you do evil with us...! Just as we have not molested you, and just as we have done with you only good and have sent you away in peace -- Now, you, O blessed of Hashem." (26:29)

Throughout the Torah, the word "only" signifies a limitation. Thus, the midrash comments on the above verse that the good which the Plishtim did with Yitzchak was only a partial good. How so? R' Shlomo Kluger z"l (19th century) explains as follows:

The gemara (Berachot 64a -- tomorrow's daf yomi) states that one who parts from another should say, "Go to peace," and should not say, "Go in peace." The gemara demonstrates that those who were sent "to peace" succeeded thereafter, while those who were sent "in peace" did not. Thus, the Plishtim who sent Yitzchak "in peace," as our verse states, did him only a partial good. (Imrei Shefer). © 1994 Rabbi S. Katz and Project Genesis, Inc.

