

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI SIR JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

**A**round the gaps, silences and seeming repetitions of the biblical text, Midrash weaves its interpretations, enriching the written word with oral elaboration, giving the text new resonances of meaning. Often, to the untutored ear, midrash sounds fanciful, far removed from the plain sense of the verse. But once we have learned the language and sensibility of midrash, we begin to realise how deep are its spiritual and moral insights.

One example was prompted by the opening verse of today's sedra: "And these are the generations of Isaac, son of Abraham: Abraham begat Isaac."

The problem is obvious. The first half of the sentence tells us that Isaac was the son of Abraham. Why does the text repeat, "Abraham begat Isaac"? Listening to apparent redundancy of the text in the context of the whole Abraham-Isaac narrative, the sages offered the following interpretation:

The cynics of the time were saying, "Sarah became pregnant through Abimelech. See how many years she lived with Abraham without being able to have a child by him." What did the Holy One blessed be He do? He made Isaac's facial features exactly resemble those of Abraham, so that everyone had to admit that Abraham beget Isaac. This is what is meant by the words, "Abraham begat Isaac", namely that there was clear evidence that Abraham was Isaac's father. (Rashi to Gen. 25: 1, on the basis of Baba Metzia 87a)

This is an ingenious reading. The opening of Genesis 21 speaks of the birth of Isaac to Sarah. Immediately prior to this—in Genesis 20 -- we read of how Sarah was taken into the harem of Abimelech, king of Gerar. Hence the speculation of the sages, that gossips were suggesting that Abraham was infertile, and Abimelech was Isaac's father. Thus the double emphasis: not only in fact was Abraham Isaac's father, but also everyone could see this because father and son looked exactly alike.

But there is a deeper point at stake. To

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May his neshama have an aliva!**

understand it we need to turn to another midrash, this time on the opening verse of Genesis 24: "And Abraham was old, well advanced in years: and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things."

Again there is a problem of an apparent superfluous phrase. If Abraham was old, why does the verse need to add that he was well advanced in years? The rabbis noticed something else, that Abraham (and Sarah) are the first people in the Torah described as being old—despite the fact that many previously mentioned biblical characters lived to a much greater age. Putting these two facts together with the tradition that Abraham and Isaac looked identical, they arrived at the following interpretation:

"Until Abraham, people did not grow old. However [because Abraham and Isaac looked alike] people who saw Abraham said, 'That is Isaac', and people who saw Isaac said, 'That is Abraham.' Abraham then prayed to grow old, and this is the meaning [of the phrase] 'And Abraham was old.'" (Sanhedrin 103b).

The close physical resemblance between Abraham and Isaac created unexpected difficulties. Both father and son suffered a loss of individuality. Nor is this pure speculation. Examine Genesis carefully, and we see that Isaac is the least individuated of the patriarchs. His life reads like a replay of his father's. He too is forced by famine to go to the land of the Philistines. He too encounters Abimelech. He too feels impelled to say that his wife is his sister (Gen. 26). He re-digs the wells his father dug. Isaac seems to do little that is distinctively his own.

Sensitive to this, the rabbis told a profound psychological story. Parents are not their children. Children are not replicas of their parents. We are each unique and have a unique purpose. That is why Abraham prayed to G-d that there be some clear and recognizable difference between father and son.

Does this have any contemporary relevance? I think it does: in relation to a new medical technology, eugenic or reproductive cloning. Cloning—the method of nuclear cell transfer pioneered by Dr Ian Wilmut in the experiment that created Dolly the sheep in 1997 -- raises profound issues of medical ethics, especially in relation to humans.

It is far from certain that it ever will be. Animal experiments have shown that it involves a high degree of risk, and may always do so. Cloning apparently disturbs the normal process of "genomic imprinting" by

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which the genes on the chromosomes from one of the parents are switched on or off. Many scientists are convinced that mammalian cloning is an intrinsically flawed process, too unsafe ever to be used in human reproduction.

However, cloning is not just another technology. It raises issues not posed by other forms of assisted reproduction such as artificial insemination or in vitro fertilisation. Nuclear cell transfer is a form of asexual reproduction. We do not know why it is that large, long-living creatures reproduce sexually. From an evolutionary point of view, asexual reproduction would have been much simpler. Yet none of the higher mammals reproduce asexually. Is this because only by the unpredictable combination of genetic endowments of parents and grandparents can a species generate the variety it needs to survive? The history of the human presence on earth is marked by a destruction of biodiversity on a massive scale. To take risks with our own genetic future would be irresponsible in the extreme.

There is another objection to cloning, namely the threat to the integrity of children so conceived. To be sure, genetically identical persons already exist in the case of identical twins. It is one thing, though, for this to happen, quite another deliberately to bring it about. Identical twins do not come into being so that one may serve as a substitute or replacement for the other. Cloning represents an ethical danger in a way that naturally occurring phenomena do not. It treats persons as means rather than as ends in themselves. It risks the commoditisation of human life. It cannot but transform some of the most basic features of our humanity.

Every child born of the genetic mix between two parents is unpredictable, like yet unlike those who have brought it into the world. That mix of kinship and difference is an essential feature of human relationships. It is the basis of a key belief of Judaism, that each individual is unique, non-substitutable, and irreplaceable. In a famous Mishnah the sages taught: "When a human being makes many coins in a single mint, they all come out the same. G-d makes every human being in the same image, His image, yet they all emerge different."

The glory of creation is that unity in heaven creates diversity on earth. G-d wants every human life to be unique. As Harvard philosopher Hilary Putnam put

it: "Every child has the right to be a complete surprise to its parents"- which means the right to be no-one else's clone. What would become of love if we knew that if we lost our beloved we could create a replica? What would happen to our sense of self if we discovered that we were manufactured to order?

The midrash about Abraham and Isaac does not bear directly on cloning. Even if it did, it would be problematic to infer halakhah from aggadah, legal conclusions from a non-legal source. Yet the story is not without its ethical undertones. At first Isaac looked like a clone of his father. Eventually Abraham had to pray for the deed to be undone.

If there is a mystery at the heart of the human condition it is otherness: the otherness of man and woman, parent and child. It is the space we make for otherness that makes love something other than narcissism and parenthood something greater than self-replication. It is this that gives every human child the right to be themselves, to know they are not reproductions of someone else, constructed according to a pre-planned genetic template. Without this, would childhood be bearable? Would love survive? Would a world of clones still be a human world? We are each in G-d's image but no one else's. © 2009 Rabbi J. Sacks and torah.org

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd Isaac loved Esau because the trap was in his mouth" (Genesis 25:28) Isaac, our father, was a great man, a prophet and someone who strove to follow G-d's will throughout his life. So it's hard to understand why he loved the wicked Esau, apparently favoring him above the righteous Jacob. Our puzzle becomes even greater when we take into account the explanation given in the Bible that "the trap - the venison meat - was in his mouth" (Genesis 25:28). Did Isaac really overlook the fact that Jacob "was wholehearted, a studious dweller of tents, preferring Esau the hunter to continue his father's traditions because of culinary considerations?"

By returning to the events of the Akeda, we may be able to uncover some profound truths about the complex family relationships in the Bible and how they affected our forefathers' perceptions of the birthright and the honors it bestowed.

The events of the Akeda were dramatic - an intense moment for father and son. But from the moment that Abraham was told by the angel to put down his knife rather than sacrifice his son, their relationship seems to be severed, since Isaac disappears from the narrative. The Biblical text is very clear: "And Abraham returned to his lads, [the two young men who accompanied father and son to the Akeda, but whom Abraham told on the third day to remain behind with the donkey while father and son

would go to worship]... and they rose up and went together to Be'er Sheba, and Abraham [alone!] dwelt in Be'er Sheba" (Gen 22:19). In fact, Isaac does not appear again in the Biblical text until he encounters Eliezer returning with Rebecca, his intended bride. Then we are told: "And Isaac was just coming from Be'er La'Hai Ro'i, and he was dwelling in the land of the Negev and Isaac went out to commune with G-d in fields" (Gen 24: 63,64). Apparently Isaac was living separately, neither in Be'er Sheba nor in Hebron, but in the Negev near Be'er La'Hai Ro'i. Why is he not living with Abraham, and why would he choose Be'er La'Hai Ro'i? And apparently Isaac continued living in that place: "And after Abraham died, G-d blessed Isaac his son; and Isaac was dwelling in Be'er La'Hai Ro'i" (Gen 25:11).

The rabbis were well aware of this extraordinary disappearance of Isaac from the family home. The Targum Yonatan accounts for Isaac's absence by suggesting that he was miraculously transported to the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever, but there is little support for this idea in the Biblical text.

There are further problems in the text, as well as in the Midrash, which require explanation. Although Sarah insisted that Isaac's step-brother Ishmael be banished from the family after he mocked Isaac at his weaning party, the Midrash suggests that Abraham specially went and fetched Ishmael to accompany him on the journey to the Akeda; that Ishmael and Eliezer were the "two lads" mentioned. (See Rashi on Genesis 22:3). Why would he have recalled his estranged son Ishmael for this event? Stranger still, despite the tense relationship between Isaac and Ishmael, the Midrash further suggests that after the death of his mother Sarah, Isaac made a special journey to Be'er Lehai Roi to meet with Hagar under her new name of Keturah, reintroducing her to his father, who promptly remarried her (Rashi on Genesis 24: 62).

Furthermore, the Midrash (Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer 30, Yalkut Shimoni 95), tells how Abraham never stopped missing Ishmael, and three years after the expulsion set out to visit him, promising Sarah that he will not get down from his camel. After making the long journey, Ishmael's wife informs Abraham that his son is not at home, and refuses to give her father-in-law any water or bread. Abraham sends a message for Ishmael to change the entrance-way to his tent, a hint that he should find a new wife, who would be more suitable. Another three years pass, Abraham attempts another visit to his son, again Ishmael is not at home, but this time the new wife gives Abraham food and drink, even without his asking for it. Abraham prays for Ishmael, the house is filled with blessings, and Ishmael understands that Abraham's love and compassion extends to him as a father's love and compassion extends to his children. What is the point of the Midrash?

Finally, the relationship between Abraham and Isaac seems increasingly complicated. True, we are told that Abraham favored Isaac over Ishmael and allowed him to inherit all that he had, but we see no sign of any conversation between Abraham and Isaac from the time of the Akeda until Abraham's death: even Abraham's preparations for finding Isaac's bride take place in the absence of the prospective groom! And while most of our forefathers used their final moments to bless their children, Abraham does not bless Isaac, leaving it to G-d to bless him.

To answer all our questions, it's important to understand that it cannot have been easy to be the son of the universally acclaimed Abraham, a dynamic leader who was a wealthy herdsman, a successful military general, a path-breaking religious visionary and a man chosen by G-d to lead a religious and social revolution. No one could blame Isaac if he felt inadequate in relation to the model established by his father.

Indeed, Isaac avoids any real confrontation with Avimelekh, and merely struggles to re-open the wells that his father had previously dug and which Avimelekh had stopped up. His passivity is further demonstrated by his having been taken to the Akeda and given a wife. Isaac's nemesis seems to be his older brother - Abraham's first born son - Ishmael, the man "whose hand is over every thing" and who seems to be far more the natural, strong leader, the heir to Abraham, than he!

And so Isaac may well be obsessed by the fear that had it not been for G-d's intervention, his father would have preferred Ishmael to bear the birthright. After all, had not Abraham requested of G-d - at the very moment that he had been informed of his, Isaac's impending conception - "would that Ishmael live before Thee"? (Gen. 17:18)

Therefore, Isaac is fascinated by Be'er LaHai Ro'i, the place where G-d promised Hagar a son who would become a great nation. Isaac continually returns to that place and eventually moves there. And when Abraham takes him on the journey to Mount Moriah, and he begins to realize that he is to be the sacrificial lamb - and he sees in front of him Ishmael, restored from his banishment and joining with his father to participate in the journey to Mount Moriah, can one blame Isaac if he thought the unthinkable, if he thought that at least unconsciously, his father wanted him to be sacrificed, so that Ishmael could displace him as the recipient of the birthright?

Perhaps Isaac leaves the Akeda angry and disturbed by the fact that his father had been ready to slaughter him. Yes, he suggests and even brings Hagar as Abraham's new wife, but maybe only as if to say, "I always knew you wanted her as your real wife and her son as your real son." Abraham fulfills Isaac's worst fears by not blessing him before his death, and the Midrash strengthens Isaac's suspicions by having Abraham "find" a wife for Ishmael - the expected task of

a father, certainly for the son he sees as his real heir - and give special blessings to Ishmael as well.

Since Isaac always feared that his father favored the more aggressive son, when it comes to his handing out the blessings to his sons, it is only psychologically natural that he favor his own more aggressive son, the hunter, who went out into the fields with strength and cunning. But G-d - who ultimately shapes and directs the chosen family of His covenantal people - insists otherwise. The birthright of ethical monotheism belongs not to the son who is most aggressive and powerful, but rather to the son who believes most passionately in Abraham's mission of ethical monotheism: Isaac and Jacob, not Ishmael and Esau. © 2009 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

#### **RABBI DOV KRAMER**

### **Taking a Closer Look**

“**A**nd G-d appeared to [Yitzchok] and said, "do not go down to Egypt" (Beraishis 26:2). Why couldn't Yitzchok go down to Egypt? "Because [Yitzchok was] a complete/perfect 'olah' offering, and being outside the [Holy] Land is inappropriate for [him]." Rashi's explanation that Yitzchok was not allowed to leave (what would become) the Land of Israel because Avraham had sanctified him to be an offering (at the "akaidah") is based on numerous Midrashim (e.g. Beraishis Rabbah 64:3 and Tanchuma Yushun, Toldos 6), and is echoed by many commentaries (including those that don't usually use Midrashim when it's not the simplest way to explain a verse, such as Ramban and Abarbanel). It would seem, though, that Yitzchok should have realized this even before G-d told him so. Avraham had sent Eliezer, not Yitzchok, to his hometown of Charan to find a wife for Yitzchok. Just as Avraham had told Eliezer that Yitzchok can't go to Charan if the girl won't come to Canaan (24:5-6), surely he told Yitzchok why he had sent Eliezer! Several Midrashim (e.g. Lekach Tov) and commentators (e.g. Rabbeinu Bachye and Chizkuni) say explicitly that the reason Avraham told Eliezer that Yitzchok couldn't go there was because he was sanctified as an offering and couldn't leave the Holy Land. Additionally, Rashi tells us (25:26) that the reason Yitzchok wouldn't marry a maidservant was because he was "sanctified as an olah temimah." If Yitzchok knew his special status because of what had occurred on Mt. Moriah, why did he have consider going to Egypt in the first place?

The Alshich asks this question, and says that despite knowing that ideally he shouldn't leave the Holy Land, Yitzchok thought the situation was such that it was the right thing to do. There was a famine similar to the one in his father's time, when his father had gone down to Egypt, and Yitzchok knew that a 400-year exile in Egypt had been decreed on his father's descendants. Perhaps this was G-d's way of telling him that he should go down now so that the exile can start, rather than all

400 years being thrust upon his descendants. G-d told Yitzchok not to go down, but promised that his "sojourns" in Palestine and Canaan would still count towards the exile. (In fact, the 400 years started from the time Yitzchok was born.) B'mechilas kevodo, I'm not sure how Yitzchok could do something he knew he shouldn't without an explicit commandment from G-d that he should go down to Egypt.

Before bringing the Alshich's answer, the Tzaidah Laderech suggests that Yitzchok leaving the Holy Land despite his status as a "korbon" was similar to Avraham leaving the Land despite G-d having commanded him to go there ("lech lecha"). Knowing that Avraham went to Egypt anyway because of a famine led Yitzchok to believe that he should do the same, until G-d told him that he shouldn't. Again, although I appreciate the attempt to answer this puzzling question, I'm not sure why being commanded to move to the Holy Land is comparable to having the status of a "korbon" that can't leave it's holy environs.

The B'er Basadeh says that Yitzchok knew full well that he wasn't allowed to leave the Holy Land, but felt that since his life was in danger because of the famine ("pikuach nefesh"), he had no choice. G-d therefore appeared to him and told him to stay in the Land, as He will bless him and provide for him (26:3). Nevertheless, if the issue was one of life or death, G-d could have provided for him without having to tell him not to go down to Egypt. Yitzchok was already in Gerar, where he ended up staying for a while; He could have just provided for him in Gerar, and Yitzchok would never have left for Egypt! The fact that G-d had to appear to Yitzchok specifically to tell him that he shouldn't go to Egypt makes it seem like there was another message here; that he wasn't allowed to go down. But didn't Yitzchok know this already?

"Rabbi Hoshiya said, 'you (Yitzchok) are an olah temimah; just as an olah that goes outside the curtains (the Temple boundaries) becomes invalidated, so to will you become invalidated if you leave the Land.'" The wording of Beraishis Rabbah (echoed by the Mizrachi on Rashi) explains the reason why Yitzchok being a "korbon" meant that he couldn't leave the Holy Land. Not just because he was "holy" and needed to stay in a "holy" place, but because Yitzchok would lose his status of being a valid "korbon" if he left. However, this "rule" is only true after the offering has been brought, or at least slaughtered (see Rambam, Hilchos Pesulay Hamukdashin 3:6). One can designate an animal to be a "korbon" outside the Temple grounds and then bring it to the Temple. Even if it was brought back outside the Temple, as long as it wasn't slaughtered, it can be brought back in and used as a "korbon." And Yitzchok was never slaughtered! Why should his extra "holiness" be invalidated if he leaves the Holy Land, as long as he eventually returned?

We know that G-d considers it as if Yitzchok was, in fact, slaughtered, and "his ashes are still piled

atop the altar." Avraham may have hoped and prayed that G-d consider it as if Yitzchok was actually "slaughtered, his blood sprinkled, his skin removed, and his limbs burned and made into ashes" (see Rashi on 22:14), and therefore sent Eliezer to Charan. But Yitzchok may not have known that G-d considered it as anything more than Avraham being willing to sacrifice his son, and Yitzchok being willing to be sacrificed. Sure, ideally he would stay in a place of holiness, and not marry a maidservant, but that doesn't mean he wasn't allowed to leave. Therefore, when there was a famine (and perhaps the opportunity to start the 400 years of exile), Yitzchok planned to go down to Egypt. As a result, G-d had to appear to him and tell him that he can't. Not just that he shouldn't, because the 400 years will start anyway, and He will provide for him in the Holy Land. But because if he does leave the Land, his being considered an offering that was actually brought will be invalidated, and his "ashes" will no longer be "piled atop the altar." © 2009 Rabbi D. Kramer

#### 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. © 2009 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 BEREL WEIN

### Wein Online

**F**inding a mate is no simple matter. The rabbis characterized its difficulty as being on the scale of splitting the Yam Suf. But finding that mate and building a successful and satisfying marriage thereafter are two different tasks. From this week's parsha it is obvious that Yitzchok and Rivka are at cross purposes regarding the treatment due to Eisav. Yitzchok is willing to give him almost everything in order to attempt to save him from his own evil nature and negative course in life.

Rivka feels that Eisav is irredeemable and that the entire investment of parental energy should be concentrated on Yaakov. Her policy of very tough love contradicts that of Yitzchok towards Eisav. Thus she does not inform Yitzchak of her plans to grant Yaakov the blessings by dressing him up as Eisav. She demands that Yaakov now flee the country to escape Eisav's wrath and death threats.

Yitzchak acquiesces in her wishes though not from the same motives that impelled Rivka to send

Yaakov away. In short for much of the parsha Yitzchak and Rivka do not appear to be on the same page as far as the future of their sons is concerned. This naturally leads to complications and problems that will again reflect themselves in the family of Yaakov and his wives and children.

The rift between Yitzchak and Rivka is not discussed further in the Torah and even Midrash and the commentators do not dwell on it. Yet it appears to be a major influence on the lives of both Yaakov and Eisav and on the tortured relationship between the two brothers.

The saga of favoritism by parents regarding one of their children will be repeated by Yaakov in the story of Yosef and his brothers. That dispute will haunt Jewish life throughout its history. Everyone strives to achieve a harmonious home and family. But the goal is an elusive one for many. Differing circumstances, personal preferences, human error, and societal influences all play a part in the problem of creating a harmonious and loving household.

That is what the rabbis meant when they stated that Yaakov wanted to dwell in peace and serenity - he wanted to achieve that household of goodness and peace. Instead, the disaster of Yosef and his brothers impressed itself upon him and his family. A great sage once said that life and especially family life can be likened to ships that traverse the ocean. Each one fabricates its own wake but the wake soon disappears and the next ship has to find its way across the ocean by itself.

No two family situations are the same nor are two children in the same family identical - even identical twins. The Torah informs us of the difficulties inherent in family situations and differing personalities and opinions. It offers no magic solution to these situations for there is no one-size fits all that can be advanced. Wisdom, patience, good will and common sense are the ingredients for family success and achievement. © 2009 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

#### RABBI DANIEL TRAVIS

### Integrity

“**Y**itzchak sent Yaakov on his way. [Yaakov] headed towards Padan Aram, to Lavan the son of Bethuel the Aramite, the brother of Rivka, Yaakov and Esav's mother.” (Bereshith 28:5)

Rashi comments, "I don't know what these words [Yaakov's and Esav's mother] come to teach us." There are those who say that Rashi's "explanation" is superfluous. After all, since Rashi could not fathom the reason these words appear in the Torah, if he had simply omitted any commentary on them, would it not

have been self-evident that he did not understand the words' intent?

Rashi's purpose was much deeper than merely offering a disclaimer. He was well aware that these words have been explained in a number of ways, but Rashi's approach is always to seek the pshat (i.e., the most straightforward explanation) of the Torah's words. Since he could not find a pshat that satisfied him, he commented that he did not know what we are to learn from this. (Sifthei Chachamim on Bereshith 28:5.)

A job interview is an especially challenging situation in which people often are tempted to create an inflated impression of themselves, in the hope of improving their chances of being hired. On a practical level, it is unwise to give a potential employer a false impression, since one may win the job based on that impression, in which case one will be forced to "live a lie," for the duration of one's employment. (Heard from Rav Moshe Meiselman) It is certainly forbidden to produce false credentials, and whoever does so and is hired on these grounds is guilty of having stolen from his employer. (Responsa Igroth Moshe, Choshen Mishpat 2:30)

Furthermore, honesty and reliability are sometimes the very traits that make the best impression, and are often just what an employer is looking for. During his very first job interview, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach was asked an unusually complex and difficult question which he did not know how to answer. Rather than trying to cover up his ignorance in the matter, and without offering any excuses, Rav Shlomo Zalman simply confessed that he did not know the answer, for he was altogether a man of truth.

When he returned home, Rav Shlomo Zalman told his wife that he was convinced he had not won the job, since he had responded, "I don't know." He was surprised therefore when his prospective employers called him back and told him that they had decided to hire him. It was the fact that he had put his own honor aside in admitting that he did not know the answer that had so impressed them! (Pe'er HaDor) © 2009 Rabbi D. Travis & torah.org

#### 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. © 2009 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

**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.

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**RABBI YOCHANAN ZWEIG**

## How About Them Apples?

“**A**nd these are the offspring of Yitzchak son of Avraham-Avraham gave birth to Yitzchak" (25:19) Parshas Toldos records the births of Yaakov and Eisav. The introductory verse states "these are the generations of Yitzchak, the son of Avraham-Avraham gave birth to Yitzchak". Citing the Midrash, Rashi explains the necessity of the apparent redundancy regarding Yitzchak's relationship to Avraham; it was in response to cynics of the generation who cast aspersions as to the legitimacy of Yitzchak's lineage. They claimed that since Sarah had not conceived for many years while married to Avraham, yet became pregnant immediately after spending the night in the palace of Avimelech, king of Plishtim, Yitzchak was clearly sired by Avimelech and not Avraham. Consequently, the Torah reiterates that Yitzchak was the son of Avraham. Sarah giving birth to Yitzchak is covered extensively in last week's parsha, Parshas Vayeira. Why is it necessary to refute the cynics in this week's parsha which begins with Yitzchak at the age of sixty?

The verse immediately following the reiteration of Avraham siring Yitzchak relates that Yitzchak fathered Yaakov and Eisav. Eisav's evil ways reinforced the claims of the cynics, for it was difficult to understand how the biologically and genetically endowed bearer of Avraham's legacy could be so malevolent. Therefore, the cynics argued that Yitzchak must have been the child of Avimelech, for if such was the case, it was Avimelech's genetic makeup to which the nature and disposition of Eisav could be attributed. Furthermore, Eisav was the progenitor of Amaleik who is described as having no "yiras Elokim"- "fear of Hashem". (See Ba'al Haturim 23:2) This is the same attribute that Avraham Avinu ascribes to the people of Plishtim, further lending credence to the theory of Avimelech being Eisav's grandfather. (See Kli Yakar 23:2)

Therefore, specifically at this juncture the Torah deems it necessary to quell the malicious charges which threatened to undermine the heritage and sanctity of the Jewish people. (See Tosafos Hashalem Bereishis p. 231) © 2009 Rabbi Y. Zweig & torah.org

