

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

It is the deep, reverberating question at the heart of Toledot. Why did Rebecca tell Jacob to deceive Isaac and take Esau's blessing? Her instruction is brisk and peremptory: "Now, my son, listen carefully and do what I tell you: Go now to the flock and bring me two choice young goats, so I can prepare some tasty food for your father, just the way he likes it. Then take it to your father to eat, so that he may give you his blessing before he dies." (Gen. 27:8-10)

Rebecca's reaction was extraordinary. Although the situation had only just arisen-she could not have known in advance that Isaac was about to bless Esau, or that he would request some venison first-yet her plan was immediate, detailed and complete. She had no doubts or hesitations. She was determined to seize the moment. When Jacob raised concerns-What if Isaac is not deceived? What if he touches my skin and knows immediately that I am not Esau? -- her reply is brief and blunt. "My son, let the curse fall on me. Just do what I say; go and get them for me" (27:13).

Our question tends to be: how could Jacob deceive his father? Yet the real question is about Rebecca. It was her plan, not his. How did she consider it permissible [1] to deceive her husband, [2] to deprive Esau of his father's blessing, and [3] to order Jacob to commit an act of dishonesty? Jacob on his own would not have conceived such a plan. He was an *ish tam*, meaning "a simple, straightforward, plain, quiet, innocent man, a man of integrity" (25:27)? How then did Rebecca come to do what she did?

There are three possible answers. The first: she loved Jacob (25:28). She preferred him to Esau. She knew Isaac felt otherwise. So she was driven by maternal instinct. She wanted her beloved son to be blessed.

This is an unlikely answer. The patriarchs and matriarchs are role models. They were not driven by mere instinct or vicarious ambition. Rebecca was not Lady Macbeth. Nor was she Bat-sheva, engaging in court politics to ensure that her son, Solomon, would inherit David's throne (see 1 Kings 1). It would be a serious misreading to read the narrative this way.

The second possibility is that she believed strongly that Esau was the wrong person to inherit the blessing. She had already seen how readily he had sold

his birthright and "despised" it (25:31-34). She did not believe a "hunter" and "a man of the field" fitted the template of the Abrahamic covenant. She knew that this was one of the reasons why G-d chose Isaac not Ishmael, because Ishmael was destined to be "a wild ass of a man" (16:12). She knew that Isaac loved Esau but felt-for various reasons, depending on which commentary one follows-that he was blind to his faults. It was vital to the future of the covenant that it be entrusted to the child who had the right qualities to live by its high demands.

The third possibility is simply that she was guided by the oracle she had received prior to the twins' birth: "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger" (25:23). Jacob was the younger. Therefore, Rebecca must have assumed, he was destined to receive the blessing.

Possibilities two and three make sense, but only at the cost of raising a more fundamental question. Did Rebecca share her thoughts with Isaac? If she did, then why did Isaac persist in seeking to bless Esau? If she did not, then why not?

It is here that we must turn to a fundamental insight of the Netziv (R. Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin, 1816-1893). What is fascinating is that Netziv makes his comment, not on this week's parsha, but on last week's- the first time Rebecca set eyes on her husband-to-be. Recall that Isaac did not choose his wife. Abraham entrusted that task to his servant. Servant and bride-to-be are travelling back by camel, and as they approach Abraham's tents, Rebecca sees a figure in the distance:

"Now Isaac had come from Beer Lahai Roi, for he was living in the Negev. He went out to the field one evening to meditate, and as he looked up, he saw camels approaching. Rebekah also looked up and saw Isaac. She got down from her camel and asked the servant, 'Who is that man in the field coming to meet us?' 'He is my master,' the servant answered. So she took her veil and covered herself." (24:62-65)

On this Netziv comments, "She covered herself out of awe and a sense of inadequacy as if she felt she was unworthy to be his wife, and from then on this trepidation was fixed in her mind. Her relationship with Isaac was not the same as that between Sarah and Abraham or Rachel and Jacob. When they had a

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problem they were not afraid to speak about it. Not so with Rebecca" (Commentary to Gen. 24:65).

Netziv understood that in this description of the first encounter between Rebekah and Isaac, nothing is incidental. The text emphasizes distance in every sense. Isaac is physically far away when Rebekah spots him. He is also mentally far away: meditating, deep in thought and prayer. Rebekah imposes her own distance by covering herself with a veil.

The distance goes deeper still. Isaac is the most withdrawn of the patriarchs. Rarely do we see him as the initiator of a course of action. The events of his life seem to mirror those of his father. The Torah associates him with pachad, "fear" (Gen. 31:42). Jewish mysticism connected him with gevurah, best understood as "self-restraint." This is the man who had been bound as a sacrifice on an altar, whose life had been reprieved only at the last moment. Isaac, whether because of the trauma of that moment or because of the inhibiting effect of having a strong father, is a man whose emotions often lie too deep for words.

No wonder, then, that he loves Rebekah on the one hand, Esau on the other. What these two very different people have in common is that they so unlike him. They are both brisk and action-oriented. Their "native hue of resolution" is not "sicklied o'er by the pale cast of thought." No wonder, too, that Rebekah hesitates before speaking to him.

Just before the episode of the blessing, another scene takes place, apparently unrelated to what follows. There is a famine in the land. Isaac and Rebekah are forced into temporary exile as Abraham and Sarah had been twice before. On G-d's instructions, they go to Gerar. There, just as Abraham had done, Isaac passes off his wife as his sister, afraid that he might be killed so that his wife could be taken into the royal harem. Something happens, however, to disclose the truth: "When Isaac had been there a long time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked down from a window and saw Isaac caressing [metzachek] his wife Rebekah." [26:8]

We tend to miss the significance of this scene. It is the only one in which Isaac is the subject of the verb tz-ch-k. Yet this is the root of Isaac's name, Yitzchak, meaning "he will laugh." It is the one scene of intimacy between Isaac and Rebekah. It is the only episode in which Isaac, as it were, is true to his name.

Yet it nearly brings disaster. Abimelech is furious that Isaac has been economical with the truth. It is the first of a series of disputes with the Philistines.

Did this reinforce Isaac's belief that he could never relax? Did it confirm Rebekah's belief that she could never be fully intimate with her husband? Perhaps so, perhaps not. But Netziv's point remains. Rebekah felt unable to share with Isaac the oracle she had received before the twins' birth and the doubts she had about Esau's suitability for the blessing. Her inability to communicate led to the deception, which brought a whole series of tragedies in its wake, among them the fact that Jacob was forced to flee for his life, as well as the counter-deception perpetrated against him by his father-in-law Laban.

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the Torah is telling us that communication is vital, however hard it is. Rebekah acts at all times out of the highest of motives. She holds back from troubling Isaac out of respect for his inwardness and privacy. She does not want to disillusion him about Esau, the son he loves. She does not want to trouble him with her oracle, suggesting as it did that the two boys would be locked into a lifelong struggle. Yet the alternative-deception-is worse.

We have here a story of the tragedy of good intentions. Honesty and openness are at the heart of strong relationships. Whatever our fears and trepidations, it is better to speak the truth than practice even the most noble deception. © 2011 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

“**T**hese are the generations of Isaac the son of Abraham; Abraham gave birth to Isaac" (Genesis 25: 19). If Isaac is the son of Abraham, isn't it obvious that Abraham parented Isaac? What is the significance of the apparent redundancy?

Is it possible that Abraham could be a biological parent to a son who is not part of his generations? Alternatively, is it possible for one to be part of the "generations" without being a biological child with parental DNA, as in the case of adoption or conversion, for example?

Moreover, Abraham's name has been changed by G-d from "exalted father" (Av-ram) to "father of a multitude of nations" (Avraham - Av Hamon Goyim). Are Ishmael the biological son of Abraham and Esau the biological grandson of Abraham (Isaac's biological son) legitimate children of Abraham and part of the Abrahamic covenantal people? Evangelical Christians certainly see themselves as having been grafted onto the Abrahamic covenant. If so, what if, at all, is the unique status of Israel in the family of Abraham?

Almost from the very beginnings of the narrative of Abraham, the biblical text makes a clear-cut and far

reaching distinction between ben (son, child) and zera (seed). The Hebrew ben is derived from the verb bnh, which means "to build" since one's biological child provides an additional "storey" to the household of the parent, sharing the same parental "foundation stones" or DNA. A child who contains the same genetic background as their parent has literally emerged from the original parental roots.

"Seed," however, refers to the future; beyond biological considerations, it sets the stage for the parents to reproduce their personality, beliefs and ideology into the next generation. Buildings are focused upon earlier foundations, whereas seed promises renewed reproduction.

The Abrahamic covenant is established with G-d after Abraham's victory over the four terrorist kings of the fertile crescent, and His promises that He will remain Abraham's shield and that his reward will be exceedingly great. Abraham remonstrates: "Lord G-d, what can You possibly give me, since I walk about childless... behold, You have not given me seed (zera)" and G-d responds, "...someone who comes out from your loins, he will inherit you... count the stars... so shall be your seed" (Genesis 15:1-5). And then, when G-d additionally promises Abraham's seed a homeland, the Bible concludes the chapter: "On that day, the Lord established a covenant with Abram saying, "To your seed I shall give this land..." (15:18). And so Abraham is promised seed and a homeland - the stuff that nations are made of.

But Abram is still lacking a biological heir. Hence in the very next chapter (16), Sarai brings her servant, Hagar, to him so that she Sarah, may be built up from her in the manner of ancient adoption; "And so Hagar has a son to Abram," a biological son through whom he will be "built"; adding another storey, a "ben" but not yet "seed" (zera).

In the following chapter, Abram becomes Abraham, a father of a multitude of nations. G-d then adds that He will fulfill His covenant with Abraham and his seed, and that this will be expressed through the ritual of circumcision. The son born to Sarah will be their covenantal seed (17:19-21), rather than Ishmael, who will be only a biological heir. When, later on in the narrative, Ishmael taunts and derides Isaac, G-d instructs the patriarch to banish Ishmael "since (only) through Isaac shall your seed (zera) be called (Gen. 21:10). Hence Abraham is to be a father of a multitude of nations; any people who live lives of compassionate righteousness and moral justice (abiding by at least the seven Noahide laws of morality), who believe in the one G-d and who spread His name and His desire for universal redemption throughout the world are to be considered children (banim) of Abraham, and may be our partners in redeeming the world. This is not dependent on acceptance of the Mosaic Code.

Only Isaac, however, is considered Abraham's seed, and only Isaac is part of the Abrahamic covenant,

which includes the commandment of circumcision marking the eternal relationship between G-d and His special nation; it is only descendants of Isaac who will enter the second covenant at Sinai and be responsible for keeping the 613 commandments of the Torah.

A ben or biological child has the same DNA as the parent, and so Ishmael has Abrahamic identity. But zera goes one step further; Isaac has covenantal continuity.

A biological son who marries outside the Jewish faith retains his biological identity with his forebears, but sacrifices his covenantal continuity (since his children aren't Jewish). Conversely, a convert who is not biologically part of the family, through his or her acceptance of the Abrahamic and Mosaic teachings becomes a metaphysical child of Abraham (zera), expressing covenantal continuity even without the biological DNA. Similarly, our sages taught that "whoever teaches a person Torah is considered as if they had borne him."

This is what the opening verse of our biblical portion is teaching: "These are the generations of Isaac, the son of Abraham" - Isaac will retain the covenantal continuity; "Abraham gave birth to Isaac" - Isaac also shares his biological identity. ©2011 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**T**he rabbis of the Talmud declared that children - having them, raising them and how they turn out - are dependent on a degree of mazal, good fortune and luck. In this week's parsha, where the twins Yaakov and Eisav are described and contrasted, this cryptic statement is apparently relevant and pertinent. Both are products of the same parents, raised in the same home and apparently given the same type of education yet they turn out to be opposite personalities.

In fact, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch sees in this the cause for Eisav's evil behavior - Eisav who is a completely different personality than Yaakov should not have been given the same education as Yaakov. It was the inability to raise Eisav according to his own tendencies and needs that turned him into the alienated, rebellious and hateful person that he became.

The story of the twin sons of Yitzchak and Rivkah certainly illustrates the uncertainty associated in raising children no matter how pious the parents and how moral the home involved in raising them. It is this element of unplanned and unforeseen mazal that the rabbis of the Talmud are referring to.

This in no way absolves parents of their responsibilities and duties regarding the raising of their children. But, it does point out they have a will of their own and that there are no guarantees as to how they

develop and what their beliefs and actions in later life will be.

In the nineteenth century entire generations and communities of Jewish children turned their backs to Torah life and traditional values. It was due, to a certain degree, to the obvious deficiencies present in Jewish life in Europe - poverty, governmental persecution, social discrimination and the apparent backwardness of the then Jewish society. But I feel that the major driving force of this secularization of Jewish society was the zeitgeist - the prevailing spirit of the times that then was dominant in European society and life.

Perhaps one can say that this zeitgeist is itself the mazal that the rabbis spoke of. We are all products of the ideas and times in which we live - we are influenced by everything. Some, like Yaakov, are able to shut out much of the outside world by sitting in the tents of Torah for decades on end. Eisav, who did not have that ability to sit for years in the tents of study, though he certainly had that opportunity, was swept away by the zeitgeist of the Canaanites, of Yishmael and the allure of power and wealth.

Following the zeitgeist never excuses bad and immoral behavior in the eyes of Torah. But it does explain how such alienation and rebellion, hatred and prejudice is instilled into children who were raised by great parents and in solid homes and families. Since zeitgeist can never be completely eliminated from our home environments it behooves us to be aware of its presence and attempt to deal with it wisely and realistically. And for that to happen, we will all require a large helping of undiluted good mazal. © 2011 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 BENJAMIN YUDIN**

## **TorahWeb**

**P**arshas Toldos is the one parsha that focuses on Yitzchak Avinu. We see the special hashgacha pratis that accompanied him. Unlike his father who in the face of the adversity of famine went down to Egypt, Hashem prohibits the holy Yitzchak from leaving the Holy Land. In just that year of famine we read "Vayizra Yitzchak bo'oretz ha'hee vayimtza bashana ha'hee me'ah shearim vayevaracheihu Adonay-Yitzchak sowed in that land, and in that year he reaped a hundred fold, thus had Hashem blessed him" (Breishis 26:12.) I'd like to focus on the nature of the blessings that Hashem bestowed on Yitzchak.

Thrice in parshas Toldos Hashem blesses Yitzchak. The first two are most special, but they are what one might characterize as "left handed compliments". In the first blessing (26:4) Yitzchak is assured that his offspring will be like the stars, and they will possess the land. Why? (26:5) "Eikeve asher

shoma Avraham b'kolee vayishmor mitzvotai, chukotai, v'Torosai-because Avraham obeyed My voice and observed My safeguards, My commandments, My decrees and My Torah's." While it is quite explicit that Yitzchak is assured an incredible inheritance, Hashem is not necessarily blessing Yitzchak because he has earned it or deserves it. The second time that Yitzchak is blessed follows the same pattern. In (26:24) Hashem appears to him that night and said "Anochi Elohei Avraham Avicha al tira ki itcha anochi u'bairachticha v'hirbeisi es zaracha ba'avor Avraham avdee-I am the G-D of your father Avraham, fear not for I am with you, I will bless you and increase your offspring because of Avraham my servant." Once again, Yitzchak is assured of a bright future, but not as a reward for any personal accomplishments.

This formula of beracha changes with the third beracha (26:28). Here the Torah expresses the success that Yitzchak has experienced, and the notice thereof amongst the community at large, as articulated by Avimelech king of the Plishtim, "Ra'oh ra'enu ki haya Adonai imach-we have indeed seen that Hashem has been with you." Here there are no strings attached. This time Yitzchak is noteworthy of blessing independent of his illustrious father. What has transpired between the second and the third blessing to manifest this change?

The Seforno in his commentary (26:5) posits the following exciting thesis: when Hashem explains to Yitzchak the first time that he is being blessed in the merit of his father, since his father "v'yishmor mishmarti-observed my safeguards", this does not refer to the stringencies and exactitude in which Avraham fulfilled mitzvot, rather it refers to Avraham partnering with Hashem in advancing and emulating His ways, as referenced by Psalms (25:10) "all the paths of Hashem are kindness and truth". Avraham did so by extending exemplary hospitality and educating the masses regarding monotheism, as the Torah testifies (12:8) "V'yikrah b'shaim Hashem", which is understood by the Ramban to mean that he preached to whoever would listen.

What changes now in the life of Yitzchak, notes the Seforno, is that after the second blessing the Torah highlights (26:25) "Vayiven shom mizbeach vayikra b'shem Adonai-he built an alter there, invoked Hashem by name". Now Yitzchak entered and extended the family business of outreach. Now he is worthy of beracha independently. Moreover, the Seforno explains that we do not ever find Yaakov being blessed in the merit of his father because the description of Yaakov as an (25:27) "Ish tom yoshev ohalim-a wholesome man, abiding in tents" indicates that he both studied and taught knowledge and Torah to the masses, especially at the yeshiva of Shem and Aiver which was the center of spirituality of its day, and as such always independently merited beracha.

A most important lesson emerges from the Seforno. In order to get beracha one has to give.

Commenting on the familiar verse in Aishes Chayil (Mishlei 31:26), "V'toras chesed al l'shonah-and the Torah of kindness is her tongue". The Talmud (Sukkah 49b) comments that a Torah that is shared is a Torah of chesed, and one that is not shared is lacking chesed.

The entering of Yitzchak into the kiruv industry portrays the immutable principle that kiruv-outreach is an endeavor that is open to all and, more succinctly, incumbent on all. One does not have to be an outreach professional to reach out and touch someone. Each and every person who is observant of Torah and mitzvos can by their very persona positively communicate and transmit Torah values and mores. The Talmud (Yoma 86a) understands that the obligation to love Hashem (Devarim 6:5) is not limited to one's own individual relationship with Him, but also requires that as a result of one's pleasant demeanor and manners, others come to love Hashem through you. Thus, the workplace can serve as a positive environment for outreach.

The responsibility of kiruv is certainly included in the Biblical verse (Devarim 22:2) where the Torah obligates a Jew to return a lost object to his fellow. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 73a) deduces that if one must return a monetary object, certainly they must restore if possible one's physical health. The logical but fundamental extension is that one must also endeavor to return the next person's soul to its pristine spiritual state. Avraham's nature was most different than that of Yitzchak. This is precisely what the Torah is teaching us, that each individual in his own way should consciously engage in outreach to the not yet affiliated and not yet observant.

Finally, the lack of time is no excuse. Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l (Igros Moshe, Evan Haezer 4:26) states that just as one is obligated to tithe their physical resources, so too are they obligated to invest a tenth of their time and activities to enhance and enrich the Torah life of others. Oftentimes one's hosting guests for a Shabbos or Yom Tov meal can make a significant impact on their lives. I'm not sure that kiruv came easily or naturally to Yitzchak, but I do know that it made a significant and blessed difference in his life. © 2011 Rabbi B. Yudin & The TorahWeb Foundation

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd Yitzchok trembled an extremely great trembling” (B'raishis 27:33). There are numerous explanations as to what caused Yitzchok to tremble so much after discovering that he had given Yaakov the blessings he had intended for Eisav (see Rashi, Rashbam, Radak, Ramban and Chizkuni; see also <http://www.aishdas.org/ta/5767/toldos.pdf>, pg. 7.) Midrash Tanchuma (Yoshon 23) says that Yitzchok had planned on giving a blessing to both of his sons, but trembled because he thought that he had deviated from the proper order, blessing his

younger son before blessing the older one. Upon hearing that Eisav had sold his status as the firstborn to Yaakov, Yitzchok was relieved, as it turned out that he had given the blessings in the proper order. [Although Eisav was initially told that there was no blessing left to give him, and if Yitzchok's intent was to bless both sons he should have been able to give Eisav whatever blessing was planned for Yaakov, since the blessing intended for Yaakov was for spiritual success, which Yitzchok knew was not appropriate for Eisav, once the blessing for material success was given to Yaakov there was nothing left for Eisav.]

Midrash Rabbah (67:2) has a similar thought to explain why Yitzchok trembled: "because our forefather Yitzchok was afraid, and he said 'they will say I did things inappropriately, treating a non-firstborn (Yaakov) as a firstborn;' since [Eisav] said 'he (Yaakov) took my birthright,' [Yitzchok] said 'I blessed appropriately.'" This Midrash refers to Eisav and Yaakov as "firstborn" and "non-firstborn" (as opposed to "the older one" and "the younger one"), but Yitzchok being concerned about how it would be perceived (rather than what was actually done) shows that the issue was who was blessed first. Nevertheless, another suggestion can be made based on Yitzchok not having known that Yaakov had purchased the rights and status of the firstborn. [It should be noted that Midrash Lekach Tov mirrors B'raishis Rabbah, but does not indicate that it was how others would perceive things that caused Yitzchok to tremble.]

When Yitzchok asked Eisav to "hunt game for me" (Beraishis 27:3), the word for game ("tzayid") has an extra "hey." Tosfos says (as does Radak, Rabbeinu Bachye, Rosh and Chizkuni, see also Midrash Agada and Midrash Lekach Tov) that this extra "hey" represents five (the numerical value of "hey") laws of slaughtering, with the "behind the scenes" message being that Yitzchok was telling Eisav to make sure that he performs a valid "sh'chita" (ritual slaughter). Similarly, Rashi (27:3) says that the term used when Yitzchok gave Eisav his instructions was a reference to performing a valid "sh'chita." Rav Yitzchok Sorotzkin, sh'lita (G'vuras Yitzchok and Rinas Yitzchok II) asks why Yitzchok had to communicate this to Eisav now, since Eisav had often prepared a "tasty meat dish" for his father (see Targum Unkoles on 25:28). Weren't there already standing instructions that the animal had to be killed according to Jewish law? If so, why did they have to be repeated here, and if not, why not?

Rav Sorotzkin quotes Tosfos (Chulin 91a), who says (actually, raises the possibility that) our forefathers did not keep the laws of "sh'chita," only "nechira" (a different, less stringent and less complicated way of killing the animal). Therefore, there hadn't been a need to make sure Eisav followed the laws of "sh'chita." The question then becomes why Yitzchok insisted that Eisav start following the laws of "sh'chita" now, before giving him the blessings.

[Even if our forefathers kept the laws of sh'chita," as most understand the verse Tosfos discusses to be implying, it is possible that Yitzchok wouldn't have insisted that Eisav keep them too. The concept that "our forefathers kept the Torah" refers to the fact that they fulfilled G-d's will, and the Torah is the manifestation of G-d's will. Therefore, in order to fulfill G-d's will, they would have had to keep the Torah (Written and Oral). They weren't obligated to, they wanted to because of their intense desire to fulfill G-d's will. Although once the laws became obligatory we don't have the same wiggle room (and need a prophet, such as Eliyahu at Mt. Carmel, to make exceptions), there were circumstances where our forefathers determined that G-d's will was not to follow the letter of the law. This is how Yaakov could tell Eisav that he "had kept all 613 commandments while living in Lavan's house," even though he married two sisters there; Yaakov realized that G-d preferred that he didn't embarrass Leah (or abandon Rachel) just so he can keep a commandment that had not yet been commanded. Here too, it is possible that Yitzchok not only didn't insist that Eisav follow his personal "chumros" of keeping the Torah, but didn't force him to do so even when he was trying to help his father. Therefore, Yitzchok didn't make Eisav do a kosher "sh'chita" when he hunted and cooked, allowing "nechira" instead. Still, the question remains as to why, before giving him the blessings, Yitzchok insisted that "sh'chita" be done. It's possible that Yitzchok was telling Eisav that in order to receive the blessings he has to start keeping the Torah. However, it doesn't seem likely that Yitzchok would expect him to do so, or to be truthful about whether he had actually started to.]

Our editions of Rashi say that Rivka told Yaakov to bring two goats (rather than just one) because it was Pesach, and the second goat would be the "Korban Pesach" (Passover offering). Although this thought doesn't appear in earlier editions of Rashi, it can be found in Pirkay d'Rebbe Eliezer (32, with the first goat serving as the main course so that the Korban Pesach is eaten on a full stomach), as well as in Targum Yonasan and Hadar Zekaynim (where the first goat is the Korban Chagiga, eaten before the Korban Pesach so that the latter is eaten on a full stomach). If the "tasty foods" Rivka prepared were holiday offerings, it would follow that the "tasty foods" Yitzchok asked Eisav to prepare for him would be those same offerings. (Rav Sorotzkin quotes Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, zt"l, who wondered whether Eisav was asked to prepare karbanos for his father or if Yitzchok intended on "filling up" on the meal Eisav prepared before bringing his own Korban Pesach.)

Rav Sorotzkin then quotes the Meshech Chochma (B'raishis 31:54), who writes that even Noachides, who ate meat from animals killed via "nechira," would do "sh'chita" on any animal they brought as an offering to G-d. (The context of the

Meshech Chochma's comments, that Yaakov was the first to do sh'chita on an animal that was not a "korban," supports Tosfos' suggestion that our forefathers did not do "sh'chita," only "nechira.") If so, even if up until that point Yitzchok did not make sure that Eisav did a kosher "sh'chita," if the meat he asked Eisav to prepare before the blessing was a "korban," Yitzchok would make sure that this time he did.

When Yaakov bought the birthright from Eisav, Eisav had asked (rhetorically) "why do I need the birthright?" Rashi (25:32) explains Eisav's concern to be that he will die ("behold I am going to die") while performing one of the primary duties of the birthright-being the "priest" who brings offerings, a dangerous activity because not following the proper halachic procedure could result in death. (If this conversation between Yaakov and Eisav was about who should be the "priest," the implication is that both would be part of the Nation of Israel; if Eisav was always going to be an outsider, the only purpose of his birthright would be having the primary responsibility for the well-being of the family and getting a double-portion. It would follow, then, that Yitzchok still held out hope that Eisav would "rejoin the fold.")

Since Yitzchok was unaware that Eisav had sold the birthright to Yaakov, he was under the impression that the one who should bring offerings for the family (aside from Yitzchok himself) would be Eisav. And on this "Leil Pesach" (Passover Eve), he asked Eisav to bring at least one of the holiday offerings. (Rav Sorotzkin discusses how an offering could be brought from a hunted animal. In short, it has to do with the different requirements of an offering brought by a Noachide and by an Israelite.) Had Eisav been an upstanding person, he would have informed his father that he was not qualified to bring an offering, as he had sold the birthright to Yaakov. But rather than risk disappointing his father for having done so-and perhaps losing the blessing his father was planning to bestow upon him-Eisav says nothing.

When Yaakov shows up, presenting the holiday offerings, Yitzchok thinks it was Eisav who prepared them. He digs in, and feels a surge of spirituality as he partakes of the offerings. Then he finds out that it wasn't Eisav who prepared them after all. Wait a minute! If Eisav didn't prepare them, then it was a non-priest (a "zar") who did, a very serious offense. "And Yitzchok trembled an extremely great trembling." Did he just eat from a "korban" that was prepared illegally? Was the "spiritual surge" he felt just an illusion? Eisav tells him that Yaakov had "tricked him" twice, taking his birthright and his blessings, and everything becomes clear. Yaakov was the right person to bring the offerings, as he was the one who had the status of "firstborn." The spiritual surge Yitzchok felt was real, as the blessings, even the ones for material success, were really intended for Yaakov. And Yitzchok finally realized that Eisav was not going to part of the nation that would

carry out the mission started by his parents, Avraham and Sara. © 2011 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. © 2010 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and President of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School - the Modern and Open Orthodox Rabbinical School. He is Senior Rabbi at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, a Modern and Open Orthodox congregation of 850 families. He is also National President of AMCHA - the Coalition for Jewish Concerns.

**RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND**

## RavFrاند

**P**arshas Toldos teaches a few short episodes from the life of the Patriarch Yitzchak. After the incident with Avimelech, Yitzchak planted in the land and the Torah relates that he found the yield from that crop to be 100 fold (meah-shearim) the normal expectation, an extremely bountiful harvest. The pasuk concludes "and Hashem Blessed him" [Bereshis 26:12].

Rav Elyakim Schlessinger (in his sefer "Beis Av") makes the interesting observation that the pasuk describing this scenario appears to be inverted. We would have expected the pasuk to write that Yitzchak planted, G-d blessed him, and he then had a bountiful crop. Surprisingly, the phrase "And Hashem blessed him" appears at the end of the pasuk, almost as an afterthought, rather than in the middle of the pasuk as part of a cause and effect.

Shlomo HaMelech [King Solomon] writes, "There is a sickening evil which I have seen under the sun; riches hoarded by their owner to his misfortune." [Koheles 5:12] Sometimes a person can merit receiving tremendous wealth, but the wealth turns out to be a curse rather than a blessing. What determines whether wealth will be a blessing or a curse? It all depends on what the wealth does to the person. If it inspires him to give greater amounts to charity, if it convinces him that he is now more comfortable and can cut back on his working hours to spend more time to spiritual matters, then he takes that wealth and he turns it into a blessing from G-d. However, as happens all too often, if the wealth consumes the person or changes him to become a more conceited person, then the wealth becomes a curse (shamur l'balav l'ra-aso). Rather than using his wealth to learn more Torah, do more chessed, and do

all the positive things one can do with money, he turns it into a curse.

Perhaps our pasuk in Toldos is alluding to this concept. Yitzchak was blessed with a tremendous crop, and the RESULT of that was "And G-d blessed him". Rashi mentions that this bountiful crop came on the heels of a tremendous famine. In those days, when there was a tremendous famine, the poor did not get their due. The poor are only able to collect the tithe, the corner of the field (Peah), the forgotten gleanings (shikcha) and so forth. When nobody ate, the poor did not eat either.

Rashi comments, based on a Gemara [Tanis 8b] that when Yitzchak saw that he was having a bumper crop he had already given out the money to Tzedakah. This is an example of using the wealth one acquires for blessing. This explains why "And Hashem blessed him" appears at the end rather than the middle of the pasuk. The blessing was not the cause of his successful crop; it was the result of it. © 2011 Rabbi Y. Frand & torah.org

**RABBI DAVID LAPIN**

## How to Unlock Spiritual Energy

**R**ecovering from a bout of flu (yes, I did get the shot,) I found myself asking for energy and thinking about it a lot. I thought of the different forms of energy, and how most of these different energy forms are encased in matter and need to be released. There is thermal energy in fuel, kinetic energy in movement, caloric energy in food, emotional energy in the human heart and spiritual energy in our souls and the souls of everything around us.

I thought of the Nefesh Hachaim's understanding of the term for G-d, Elokim, as the source of all energy. I reflected on energy as a spiritual force, a force of G-d Himself, that through tzimtzum and hishtalshelus (two kabalistic terms for the materialization of spirituality) He has enclosed in different physical casings for us to access, unlock and release. We know how to unlock physical energy from fuel, food and even from a nuclear atom. But how do we unlock and access the spiritual energy encased in everything around us?

And then I found it in a Midrash (Rabbah 64:3 on Yitzchak's blessing to his son Ya'acov) I would have missed were it not for the Seffas Emmes (Toldos 5639) highlighting it. The Midrash takes the word "Ha'ellokim" (G-d) in the verse: Ve'yitten lechah Ha'ellokim mittal hashomayim inishemanei ha'aretz (May G-d give you of the dew of the heaven and the fat of the land-Bereishis 27:28) not as the subject of the sentence but as it's object, and reads it in the following way: May He give you of his G-dliness (his Divine energy-see Rashi and Reb Ze'ev Volf on the Midrash) derived from the dew of the heaven etc. The blessing then is not for the physical

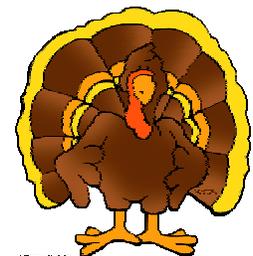
dew but for the spiritual energy that Ya'acov is now able to extract from the dew and the fat of the land using the unique power given to him and his descendants by his father, Yitzchak. Eisav later also receives a blessing, but his is just for the physical fat of the land and dew from the heaven, not for the energy able to be extracted from them. Ya'acov's blessing is the gift of being able to unlock spiritual energy from its physical casing.

The Seforno (28:27) shows how Yitzchak actually demonstrates this skill of extracting spiritual energy from its material casing. He explains that fragrance is a sense that the soul appreciates, not the body, and how Yitzchak used the aromas of the dish Ya'acov had prepared to uplift his soul and stimulate it into a prophetic space so that he could more effectively bless his son. Accessing the finer tastes and aromas of food and the fragrances of herbs and spices is a useful exercise, and a first step in extracting the spiritual from the physical.

The same Midrash also refers to the fat of the land mentioned in Yitzchak's beracha, as the korbanos (sacrifices) we would later bring in the Temple. This is because there is a close link between the avodah (Temple service) of the Kohanim and our everyday avodah as Mamleches Kohanim (a nation of Kohanim). Our avodah each day is to unlock the potential spiritual energy locked in every atom of the beriah (creation) and channel it into the world. Food is the set of objects most available to us for energy release. When food is combusted, whether by fire on the Mizbeach or by human consumption, its spiritual energy is released. The Kohanim, when they serve in the Temple, have the ability to capture the spiritual energy released from the korban and direct it to the wellbeing of the owner of the korban or the community as a whole. Korbanos are referred to as lechem ellokim (G-d's food), it does not mean food that G-d, so to say, consumes. Rather it means food of G-d that He gives to us not for its nutritional value but for the spiritual energy we can release from it through proper avodah. In the same way, everything we eat or drink is lechem ellokim, it all contains ellokus, divine energy, and using Yitzchak's beracha to us we can all access that energy & unlock it.

It is helpful to be mindful of this as we say our berochos over food. Reflect for a moment on the food, how it came from its origins to your table, the processes it has gone through, the people who have made it possible.

Consider, notice and appreciate its myriad subtle tastes and aromas. And think about the spiritual energy, the elokkus locked in it, which, using the gift of Yitzchak, your act of eating it will unlock. © 2011 Rabbi D. Lapin & iAwaken.org



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