

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Parshat 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: 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. © 2013 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

In an earlier Covenant and Conversation I quoted the Netziv (Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin, 1816-1893, dean of the yeshiva in Volozhin), who made the sharp observation that Isaac and Rebecca seem not to have communicated closely. Rebecca's "relationship with Isaac was not the same as that between Sarah and

Abraham or Rachel and Jacob. When they had a problem they were not afraid to speak about it. Not so with Rebecca" (Commentary to Gen. 24: 65).

The Netziv senses this distance from the very first moment when Rebecca saw Isaac "meditating in the field" at which point she "covered herself with a veil." He 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."

Their relationship, suggests Netziv, was never casual, intimate. The result was, at a series of critical moments, a failure of communication. It seems likely that Rebecca never informed Isaac of the oracle she had before the twins, Esau and Jacob, were born, in which G-d told her "the elder will serve the younger." That apparently is one reason she loved Jacob rather than Esau, knowing that he was the one chosen by G-d. If Isaac knew this, why did he favour Esau? Therefore he probably did not know, because Rebecca had not told him.

That is why, many years later, when she heard that Isaac was about to bless Esau she was forced into a plan of deception: she told Jacob to pretend he was Esau. Why did she not simply tell Isaac that it was Jacob who was to be blessed? Because that would have forced her to admit that she had kept her husband in ignorance about the prophecy all the years the children were growing up.

Had she spoken to Isaac on the day of the blessing, Isaac might have said something that would have changed the entire course of their, and their children's, lives. I imagine Isaac saying this: 'Of course I know that it will be Jacob not Esau who will continue the covenant. But I have two quite different blessings in mind, one for each of our sons. I will give Esau a blessing of wealth and power: "May G-d give you the dew of heaven and the richness of the earth... May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you" (Gen. 27: 28-29). I will give Jacob the blessing G-d gave Abraham and me, the blessing of children and the promised land: "May G-d Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples. May he give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now reside as a foreigner, the land G-d gave to Abraham" (Gen. 28: 3-4)'

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Isaac never did intend to give the blessing of the covenant to Esau. He intended to give each child the blessing that suited them. The entire deceit planned by Rebecca and carried out by Jacob was never necessary in the first place. Why did Rebecca not understand this? Because she and her husband did not communicate.

Now let us count the consequences. Isaac, old and blind, felt betrayed by Jacob. He "trembled violently" when he realised what had happened, and said to Esau, "Your brother came deceitfully." Esau likewise felt betrayed and felt such violent hatred toward Jacob that he vowed to kill him. Rebecca was forced to send Jacob into exile, thus depriving herself for more than two decades of the company of the son she loved. As for Jacob, the consequences of the deceit lasted a lifetime, resulting in strife between his wives, and between his children. "Few and evil have been the days of my life," he said as an old man to Pharaoh. Four lives scarred by one act which was not even necessary in the first place since Isaac did in fact give Jacob "the blessing of Abraham" without any deception, knowing him to be Jacob not Esau.

Such is us the human price we pay for a failure to communicate. The Torah is exceptionally candid about such matters, which is what makes it so powerful a guide to life: real life, among real people with real problems. Communication matters. In the beginning G-d created the natural world with words: "And G-d said: Let there be." We create the social world with words. The Targum translated the phrase in Genesis 2, "And man became a living soul" as "and man became a speaking soul." For us, speech is life. Life is relationship. And human relationships only exist because we can speak. We can tell other people our hopes, our fears, our feelings and thoughts.

That is why any leader -- from a parent to a CEO -- must set as his or her task good, strong, honest, open communication. That is what makes families, teams and corporate cultures healthy. Everyone must know what their overall aims are as a team, what their specific role is, what responsibilities they carry, and what values and behaviours they are expected to exemplify. There must be praise for those who do well, as well as constructive criticism when people do badly -- criticism of the act not the person, who must feel respected whatever his or her failures. This last is one

of the fundamental differences between a "guilt morality" of which Judaism is the supreme example, and a "shame morality" like that of ancient Greece (guilt makes a clear distinction between the act and the person, which shame does not).

There are times when much depends on clear communication. It is not to much to say that there was a moment at which the fate of the world depended on it. It happened during the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 when the United States and the Soviet Union were on the brink of nuclear war. At the height of the crisis, as described by Robert McNamara in his film, *The Fog of War*, John F. Kennedy received two messages from the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev. One was conciliatory, the other far more hawkish. Most of Kennedy's advisers believed that the second represented Khrushchev's real views and should be taken seriously.

However one man, Llewellyn Thompson Jr., had been American ambassador to the Soviet Union from 1957 to 1962 and had come to know the Russian president well. He had even spent a period of time living with Khrushchev and his wife. He told Kennedy that the conciliatory message sounded like Khrushchev's own personal view while the hawkish letter, which did not sound like him, had probably been written to appease the Russian generals. Kennedy listened to Thompson, gave Khrushchev a way of backing down without losing face, and the result was that war was averted. It is fearful to imagine what might have happened had Thompson not been there to establish which was and which wasn't the real act of communication.

Parents and leaders must establish a culture in which honest, open, respectful communication takes place, and that involves not just speaking but also listening. Without it, tragedy is waiting in the wings.
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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“Now my son, listen carefully and do what I tell you: Go out 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." (Genesis 27:8-10)

One of the most difficult-to-understand stories in the Bible is Rebekah's act of deception when she persuades her beloved son Jacob to masquerade as Esau and receive the blessings of the firstborn. How can we justify a matriarch of Israel deceiving her husband in such an underhanded manner? I believe that Rebekah never planned to deceive her husband, Isaac. To understand what lay behind her actions, we must return to last week's portion, to Abraham's initial appointment of Eliezer to find the proper wife for Isaac - who turned out to be Rebekah: "I bind you by an oath to G-d, the Lord of the Heavens and the Lord of the Earth,

that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites." (Genesis 24:3)

The major task of our founding parents is to provide a suitable next generation to carry on our narrative. Abraham understands that it may be the wisdom of the wife who will recognize the most worthy person to provide continuity. After all, had it not been for Sarah, Abraham might have handed the baton to his firstborn, Ishmael.

It is likewise important to remember that the first Hebrew had two very special characteristics. First, he was a man of great spiritual magnitude, a seeker and a discoverer of G-d and a practitioner of compassionate righteousness and moral justice; second, he was an accomplished warrior, equipped with farsighted strategic ability as well as physical prowess and courage. Did he not best the large armies of four terrorist kings? Abraham united spirit of the soul with strength of hand.

Hence, when Abraham charges Eliezer with what to look for in the next matriarch, he adjures him by calling on "G-d, the Lord of the Heavens and the Lord of the Earth." Why is it not sufficient to refer to Him as the G-d of Israel? I would suggest that Abraham is hinting that the potential matriarch must understand the essence of the Jewish narrative: To enable the G-d of love, morality and peace to dwell within a world committed to love, morality and peace.

Isaac believed that his heir apparent had to be active and aggressive, an individual who would not fear the use of power to defeat evil and terrorism. He did not believe that Jacob, the wholehearted and naïve dweller in the tent of learning, would be able to navigate his way through the international corridors of power. Rebekah, on the other hand, was certain that Jacob could rise to that challenge. She knew that in order to receive the blessings which he had purchased and which Esau had forfeited by marrying Canaanite wives, he demonstrated the ability to utilize the hands and the rough exterior of Esau in order to gain necessary mastery. She understood that Esau would soon return with the meat ready to receive the blessings - and then the ruse would be over. But by then Isaac would have realized that Jacob was capable of donning the exterior of Esau.

Rebekah was successful. When Isaac realizes what has happened, he nevertheless says, "Indeed, he [Jacob] shall be blessed." (Genesis 27:33) And we are the children of Jacob/Israel, not the children of Esau. The ideal she has set before us is not a neo-Platonic division between the material and the spiritual, the Earth below and the Heavens above. To be sure, connecting the spiritual voice of Jacob to the physical hands of Esau can be a dangerous enterprise—often the external and aggressive, wily hands of Esau can choke into silence the inner spiritual voice of the G-d within.

However, Rebekah's point is well-taken: if compassionate righteousness and moral justice are to

rule the day, they often need the back-up of military strength and prowess.

Lord Acton taught "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely" - but powerlessness corrupts even more! In the play *The Edge of Night*, someone who has achieved great success as a businessman and patron of the Jewish community is sitting at the family Passover Seder when one of the guests accuses him of having been a kapo in Auschwitz. "Yes," he replies, tears filling his eyes. "I am guilty as charged, but just remember, you who dare to condemn me: There were no heroes in Auschwitz. There were those who survived and those who did not survive - and you who never knew that hellhole have no right to judge how we survived."

Thank G-d, the great difference between 1943 and now is the fact that we have the hands and the arsenals of Esau. May we continue to use that power with restraint and ethical sensitivity, as we have heretofore. © 2013 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The troubling question that has persisted throughout the ages of biblical commentary on this week's parsha is: What is Yitzchak thinking in regard to giving the blessings and heritage of Avraham to Eisav? Basically the comments and explanations fall into two categories. One of them is that Yitzchak is fooled by Eisav and is really unaware of his true nature and wanton behavior.

Rashi, quoting Midrash, interprets that Eisav "hunted" his father with his pious speech and cunning conversation. Yitzchak is fooled by Eisav and believes that Eisav, the man of the world and the physically powerful figure is better suited to carry on Avraham's vision than is Yaakov, the more studious and apparently more simple of the brothers.

The other opinion, more popular among the later commentators to the Torah, is that Yitzchak is aware of the shortcomings of behavior and attitude of his elder son. His desire to give the blessings to Eisav is due to his wish to redeem and save his son, and to enable Eisav to turn his life around and become a worthy heir to the traditions of his father and grandfather. He thinks that by somehow giving the blessings to Eisav, Yaakov will not really suffer any disadvantage in his life's work, while Eisav will find his way back to holiness through the blessings that he has now received.

These two divergent attitudes towards the wayward child in Jewish families is one that is enacted daily in Jewish family life. Later Yitzchaks either willfully allow themselves to be deluded regarding the behavior and lifestyle of children or they are aware of the problem and attempt to solve it with a giving nature and a plethora of blessings.

Rivkah, Eisav's mother, is not fooled by her son's apparently soothing words nor does she believe that granting him blessings will somehow accomplish any major shift in his chosen lifestyle. To a great measure she adopts a policy of triage, saving Yaakov and blessing him while thus abandoning Eisav to his own chosen wanton ways.

The Torah does not record for us the "what if" scenario - what if Eisav had received the blessings would he then have been different in behavior and attitude, belief and mission. However, from the words of the later prophets of Israel, especially those of Ovadiah, it appears to be clear that G-d somehow concurred with Rivkah's policy and holds Eisav to be redeemable only in the very long run of history and human events.

The verdict seems to be that one must be clear eyed and realistic about the painful waywardness and misbehavior of enemies of Yaakov, be they from within or without our immediate family and milieu. There are many painful choices that need to be made within one's lifetime and especially in family relations.

There are few pat answers to varying and difficult situations. Perhaps that is why the Torah itself does not delve too deeply into the motives of Yitzchak and Rivkah but is content merely to reflect the different emotional relationships each had with their two very different sons. The Torah emphasizes the role that human emotions play in our lives and does not consign all matters to rational thought and decision-making.

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RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

This 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 Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

The Search for Blessings

This week's parsha begins the saga of the long, almost endless struggle between Yaakov and Esav. Yaakov buys the birthright from a hungry Esav and then, coached by his mother, Rivka, he dresses like Esav and receives blessings from his father Isaac.

I have received numerous letters throughout the years pondering those actions. Indeed, Yaakov himself is wary of acting in a seemingly devious manner and is reassured by his righteous mother who accepts full responsibility for his actions.

When Esav arrives for the blessings, his father tells him that his younger brother cleverly took all the blessings, but Esav, despondent as he may be declares to his father, "He (Jacob) took away my birthright and see, now he took away my blessing!" He adds, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me? Isaac answered, and said to Esau, "Behold, a lord have I made him over you, and all his kin have I given him as servants; with grain and wine have I supported him, and for you, where -- what can I do, my son?". And Esau said to his father, "Have you but one blessing, Father? Bless me too, Father!" And Esau raised his voice and wept. (Genesis 27:36-38).

I often wondered about the lesson of this repartee. Esav, clearly angered by Yaakov's cunning, still has clarity of mind to ask for a blessing. Yitzchak seems to demur, inferring that there is nothing left. But Esav prevails by pleading, even crying for a blessing. And only then does his father acquiesce and bless him as well.

Was there a blessing left or not? Can pleading with the saintly patriarch produce a previously non-existent blessing? Maybe Esav's tears taught a lesson even for the children of Yaakov?

This past summer 30,000 Boy Scouts joined together in Virginia for a national Boy Scout Jamboree. Among the myriad groups of scouts who attend this event that occurs every four years are many Jewish Scouts as well. Mike Paretsky, a Vice Chairman of the GNYC Jewish Committee on scouting, was the kosher food liaison to the jamboree. Special food was ordered from O'Fishel caterers of Baltimore, so that the Jewish scouts would be able to nourish their bodies as well.

One of the scoutmasters, a Jewish man caught a glimpse of the kosher offerings. He had never eaten a kosher meal in his life, yet when he saw the special meals, something stirred. He and his troops were being served pork-this and bacon-that for breakfast, lunch and supper, and all of a sudden this man decided he was sick of the monotonous treif stuff. He wanted to eat kosher. Scoutmaster Paretsky gladly let him partake in a meal, but that was not enough for the fellow. The man decided to keep kosher during the entire jamboree!

Mr. Paretsky agreed to accommodate the neophyte kosherphile, but a skeptic approached him. "Mike," he said, "why are you wasting your kosher food on this fellow? He is not going to eat kosher after this is over, and he observes absolutely nothing! Why waste the food on him?"

Mike answered with an amazing story of the Chofetz Chaim. When Russian soldiers entered the town of Radin, Jewish townfolk prepared kosher meals for the Jewish soldiers in the Czar's army. Soon their

acts of charity seemed to fly in their face as they saw the soldiers devour the food and then stand on line to receive the forbidden Russian rations.

When they complained to the Chofetz Chaim and threatened to stop preparing kosher food, he reflected with an insight that must be passed on to generations.

"Every mitzvah that a Jew does, every good deed and every bit of kosher that he eats is not a fleeting act. It is an eternity. No matter what precedes or ensues, we must cherish each proper action of a Jew."

The wayward son, Esav is at first told by his father that there are no blessings. But he cries bitterly and cannot fathom that fact. "Is there nothing left?" He asks. It cannot be. And he was right. There is always some blessing left to be found. No matter how far one has strayed, no matter how bleak a situation looks. There is always blessing. We must pursue it, even cry for it, and when we receive the tiniest blessing it may seem trivial, even fleeting, but it is with us for eternity. © 2013 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

DR. ARNOLD LUSTIGER

Torah Musings

“Let the days of mourning for my father draw near, I will then kill my brother Jacob.” (Genesis 27:41)

There are two mitzvos governing the obligations of a child towards his parents. One of these mitzvos is kibud, honoring one's parents (Ex.20:12), while the other is morah, having fear and reverence for one's parents (Lev.19:3). Kibud involves taking care of the parents' physical needs: providing food, drink, clothing, covering, taking the parent in and out. Morah means respect, recognizing their authority. Maimonides states: One should not stand or sit in his place, nor contradict him, and should not try to get him to change his mind (Hilchos Mamrim, 6:7).

Esau exceeded Jacob in fulfilling the mitzvah of kibud. R. Shimon ben Gamliel said that he wished that he could provide kibud to his parents to the same extent as Esau. Kibud often arises out of an instinctive feeling of self-preservation, as the son knows that a time will come when he himself will require the same services as his father. Kibud can be found in the animal kingdom as well: young eagles provide for older eagles that can no longer fly. Chazal portrayed Esau as a master of kibud. A strong instinct drove Esau to honor Isaac.

How then could Esau later threaten to kill Jacob and so blatantly violate Isaac's will? Esau would argue that while his father was alive, he had an instinctive weakness for him. Esau himself did not understand the reason for this strange attraction: after all, Isaac was old-fashioned, blind, did not truly understand. But once Isaac died, Esau would forget him as if he never existed.

The true gauge of the relationship between son and father is not in the mitzvah of kibud, but the mitzvah of morah, an imperative that Esau ignored. Kibud is a mitzvah that can only be fulfilled while the parent is alive. The morah imperative, however, is actually stronger in death than in life: as blurred as our memories become regarding our parent's physical appearance, the greater the gap in time, the stronger the bond. While kibud wanes with distance, morah actually grows with distance. (Yahrzeit Shiur, 1953) (*This is the first in a series of Torah insights from Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik ("the Rav"), excerpted from the recently published Chumash Mesoras HaRav.*) © 2013 Rabbi D. Siegel and torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd the men of the area asked his wife (or about his wife), and he said, 'she is my sister' (B'reishis 26:7). Just as Avraham had told the Egyptians, and then the people of G'rar, that his wife Sara was his sister (12:13 and 20:2), Yitzchok told the people of G'rar that his wife Rivka was his sister. Nevertheless, there were significant differences between the two. [It should be borne in mind that people were treated very differently then. This applies not only to the concept of slavery, gender differences, and how captives were treated, but also to how those who were mistreated were perceived. The willingness to risk a spouse being mistreated in order to avoid being killed takes on a different perspective when considering that there was not the same stigma attached to victims as there may be now. This concept deserves a much more in-depth treatment, but is not the focus of this piece. Nevertheless, when discussing Yitzchok (and Avraham) putting the virtue of their wives at risk in order to save their own lives, this point is important enough to mention, at least in passing.]

One of the main differences between Avraham presenting his wife as his sister and Yitzchok doing the same is that Avraham initiated the notion even before he came in contact with those he feared would kill him for her. Yitzchok, on the other hand, only said that she was his sister after he (or she, depending on how you read the verse, and there are commentators that read it both ways) was asked whether they were married. It is quite possible, even likely, that Yitzchok thought that the suffering endured by the people of G'rar on account of Sara being taken (see 20:17) would be enough of a deterrent that he didn't need to present Rivka as his sister (see Midrash Lekach Tov and Midrash Seichel Tov on 26:7). However, upon seeing that they still asked about her, he realized that his life might still be in danger ("for he was afraid, saying, 'lest the men of the area kill me over Rivka'"), so followed the same game plan as his father (see Midrash HaGadol).

Another difference is that Avraham calling Sara his "sister" was much closer to the literal truth than Yitzchok calling Rivka his sister. After all, Sara was his brother's daughter; just as his nephew Lot was accurately called his "brother" (14:14), Lot's sister, his niece, could be called his "sister." Rivka, on the other hand, while being Yitzchok's blood relative too (his first cousin once removed), was much more distantly related to him than Sara was to Avraham. Nevertheless, if the term "brother" can be used to refer to a relative who is not part of the immediate family, the term "sister" can be used that way as well. It can be suggested that Yitzchok called Rivka his sister not only because it could be said to be literally true (by using the more liberal definition), but because doing so would be a not-so-subtle reminder about what had happened the last time a "sister" was taken by the leader of G'rar. And this seems to have worked, as this time the "sister" was not taken into anyone's home. Rather, Avimelech waited to see whether Yitzchok treated Rivka as a spouse or as a relative (26:8), keeping his distance until he could verify what Rivka's status really was.

Discussing Rashi's comment (25:20) that Rivka was three years old when she got married, Rabbi Shimon Schwab cites several reasons why this is difficult to accept at face value. First of all, would a three year old be physically able to draw water for all of the men with Eliezer and their camels? How could the Torah call her a "na'ara," a young maiden (24:16), a term used for a girl who is 12 years old, if she was much, much younger than that? And how could she be praised for her virtuosity (ibid) if the whole concept of being modest and virtuous doesn't apply before the age of three?

Rabbi Schwab then quotes several sources (e.g. Midrash HaGadol and Seder Olam) who say explicitly that Rivka was 14 years old when she got married. He also references Y'feh To'ar's commentary on Koheles Rabbah (7:3), who proves that she was 14 by subtracting Yaakov's age when she died (98.5; he was 63 when he left home, spent 14 years hiding in the Yeshivos of Shem and Ever, worked for Lavan for 20 years, and was traveling for 1.5 years when Rivka died) from the age Rivka was when she died (133, the same age as K'has when he died, see Sh'mos 6:18 and Sifre, V'zos Hab'racha 357), meaning that she was 34.5 when Yaakov was born. Since Yaakov was born 20 years after Rivka and Yitzchok got married (see B'reishis 25:20 and 25:26), Rivka must have been 14.5 when she got married.

What, then, does Rashi mean when he says that Rivka was three? Rabbi Schwab quotes Rabbi Michael Forshlager (a student of the Avnay Neizer; you can read a fascinating profile about him at http://jewishlife.com/news/print.php?ARTICLE_ID=35276), who says that when Rivka was born, she did not yet have the special, holy soul that would allow her to be Yitzchok's mate and the mother of the Nation of Israel.

Rather, in the merit of the "akeida," when Yitzchok was bound by Avraham to be slaughtered for G-d, this elevated soul entered her body. This occurred three years before Rivka got married, so she is described as being "three" when she got married, referring to how many years this holy soul was within her.

Rabbi Schwab takes this a step further, suggesting that it was actually Sara's soul that entered Rivka after the "akeida," as this was precisely when Sara had died (see Rashi on 23:2). He uses this to explain Rashi's wording when Yitzchok brought Rivka into Sara's tent (24:67); "behold she was his mother Sara," meaning it was literally Sara, as it was Sara's soul inside Rivka.

Based on this, we can add another dimension to Yitzchok saying that Rivka was "achoso," which literally means "his sister." Whether intentionally or through ru'ach ha'kodesh, Yitzchok was telling Avimelech and the rest of the men in G'rar that they better be careful, because the woman they were asking about was "achoso," i.e. the same person (or at least the same soul) that his father had described as "achoso." He was reminding them of their being afflicted when Sara was taken by Avimelech, and hinting to them that the same circumstances apply now as well; not only because he is Avraham's son but because she is the "achoso" who brought punishment upon them the last time. By doing so, Yitzchok was hoping they would stay away from her. And, although it took some additional verification, they did. © 2013 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

What is the secret to happiness in marriage? My beloved friend, Dr. Ron Goldstein, has 3 tips for his fellow man that with sincerity will help for harmony in marriage. If one's wife is upset with something he did, first, he should admit his mistake and if he isn't sure, he should err on the side of caution and say, "Yes, Dear." There can't be an argument if one agrees with his spouse. If that doesn't work, he offers an apology, "I'm sorry, Dear." Usually, that helps because a person believes that he or she is right and wants that recognition from others, especially his or her spouse. And if his wife is still upset, he should just explain, "I'm only a man"... hoping that it will bring out the natural compassion and forgiveness for those who see the error of their ways. We are all fallible. By admitting that one is not perfect and makes mistakes, it can ameliorate the anger.

In truth, marital happiness starts much earlier with whom you choose as your spouse. Our forefather Avraham sent his servant, Eliezer, a long distance to Haran to choose a wife for his son, Yitzhak, Why? The people of Canaan were idol worshippers and the people of Haran were idol worshippers. What was Avraham seeking by choosing a daughter in law from the people

of Haran? Avraham knew that those living in his old country were raised with respect for people and taught to do kindness. Sure, the people may be idol worshippers, but education can correct mistaken ideologies. However, character traits are imprinted at a very early age and they are very hard to change.

There is a seemingly strange verse in the Torah regarding love and marriage. The Torah tells us, "He (Yitzhak) married Rivka, she became his wife, and he loved her" (Gen. 24:67). Isn't the "natural" order of life that one loves another person... and then marries her or him? The Torah is giving us a great insight: Real love is developed after making a total commitment to one's spouse. Love is the pleasure one has in focusing on the good in someone else. With total commitment, one will be sure to see those virtues.

We all want love and we seek someone who will make us happy. What often passes for love is infatuation and blind passion... or at best, self-centered love. What we have are two self-centered people looking to make themselves happy. Without that total commitment, then if one's spouse does things that upset you or one thinks there is someone else who can please him or her more -- then there is a breakdown of the relationship.

Love has to transcend the self-centeredness to the realization that true and greater happiness comes from doing for one's spouse, rather than using one's spouse as a means for one's own gratification. For that to happen, the commitment must be total.

My teacher, Rabbi Noah Weinberg, of blessed memory, used to liken the commitment to one's spouse to the commitment one has to his own hand. One does not cavalierly chop off his hand because it displeased him. However, there is a time when he will have it amputated -- when it has gangrene and threatens his life.

We need to understand that marriage is a means, not a goal. A depressed, aimless, lonely single person will likely end up in marriage as a depressed, aimless, lonely married person. The Torah teaches us that Adam, the first man, was completed by marrying Eve (Chava): "a man shall... cling to his wife and they shall become one flesh" (Gen. 2:25).

One has to figure out what he values in life, what he wants in life -- and then look for someone who has the right character traits of kindness and truth and who has the same values.

According to the Torah, the purpose of a marriage is to create an entity that will grow one's relationship and closeness with the Almighty -- and to raise children through whom they can transmit the legacy of a Torah way of life.

Whatever one's goals, he must choose a spouse with good character who has the same values and goals. Then with total commitment there is hope for great happiness! © 2013 Rabbi K. Packouz and aish.com

RABBI YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

This week we read the parsha of Toldos. "V'aileh Toldos Yitzchak ben Avrohom {And these are the generations of Yitzchak the son of Avrohom}. [25:19]" The parsha tells us about the birth of Yaakov and Esav, their development and the blessings that Yitzchak gave his sons.

Rivkah had been told through prophecy that the elder son would be subservient to the younger. She understood that the blessing had to go to Yaakov. She therefore sent in Yaakov, disguised as Esav, in order that the prophecy would be fulfilled and he would receive the blessings.

"And Yitzchak, his father, said to him: 'Come close and give me to drink, my son.' And he (Yaakov) drew close and gave him to drink and he (Yitzchak) smelled the smell of his garments and blessed him. [27:26-7]"

Rashi quotes the Medrash that teaches that the *raiach* {scent} of Gan Eden {the Garden of Eden} entered along with Yaakov.

Rav Yerucham zt"l in his *Daas Torah* explains this *raiach* {scent} in the following manner.

Chaza"l teach that Eliyahu Hanavi {the prophet} was once walking along with another person. They passed a corpse that had deteriorated and was emitting a very foul odor. This person covered his nose commenting about the smell while Eliyahu commented how white the teeth were. When they later passed a sinner, Eliyahu now covered his nose from the stench that was coming from that person while the person accompanying him noticed nothing at all.

Rav Yerucham explains that there is a spiritual reality that is actually quite tangible. Mitzvos and good deeds give off an actual smell! A remarkable fragrance that affects the whole surrounding area. Similarly, sins actually emit an odor that individuals of high spiritual stature can actually sense.

When Yaakov came before his father, Yitzchak, for the blessing, Yitzchak was somewhat unsure of his true identity. However, once he smelled the scent of Gan Eden that accompanied him, he was confident that this person truly deserved the blessing.

This spiritual reality can even be detected in our generation. At an early stage of their commitment to mitzvos, a number of boys from my yeshiva went to the Steipler Gaon, zt"l, to ask for a blessing. Although his vision was so weak that he had to hold a note literally in front of his eyes in order to read it, the moment these boys entered, he called from across the room asking why they weren't wearing tzitzis. One of the boys called back that it was already night (and as such, there is no obligation). The Steipler quickly countered, "You don't wear during the day either..."

Another time, three friends of mine went for a blessing from the Baba Sali, zt"l. The accepted custom was to immerse oneself in a mikveh {ritual bath} before going to see him. At the bathhouse, two of the boys immersed themselves while the third simply wet his hair under a sink. They then went to his house and waited their turn to see him. The moment they entered his room, he pointed to the boy who had wet his hair instead of immersing himself and said, "Faker, get OUT of here!"

Rav Eliyahu Lopian, zt"l, was once sharing a Shabbos meal with the administrator of the yeshiva. At his urging, Rav Eliyahu relayed an incident that had occurred many years before.

"When I was still a young man, my wife had gotten so ill, all of the doctors said that there was nothing to be done. The whole family was crying by her bed and I was in the adjacent room when the door suddenly opened. A man walked in and asked why everyone was crying. When I explained the situation he instructed me to go to a certain place, pluck the vegetable that grows there, cook it and give it to her to drink. I did that and she immediately started to get better. I'm sure that it was Eliyahu Hanavi who had come in the merit of my righteous wife."

When the administrator said that he had heard that there was more to the story, Rav Eliyahu remained silent. He then asked if he could relay what he had heard and Rav Eliyahu would let him know if it was correct.

The administrator then said: "A few years later you (Rav Eliyahu) went to the Sfas Emes, zt"l, {one of the great Chassidic Masters of Gur} for a blessing. The Sfas Emes said to you, 'Someone who merited a revelation of Eliyahu Hanavi doesn't need a blessing from me!' You responded, 'If the Rebbe on his own knows what happened, then I'm definitely interested in a blessing!'" The administrator then asked Rav Eliyahu if it was correct. Rav Eliyahu didn't answer. When he asked him again, Rav Eliyahu responded, "Those great Chassidic Masters had a real sense of smell..." © 2013 Rabbi Y. Ciner & torah.org

