

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

"The boys grew up. Esau became a skilful hunter, a man of the outdoors; but Jacob was a mild man who stayed at home among the tents. Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob" (Gen. 25:27-28). We have no difficulty understanding why Rebekah loved Jacob. She had received an oracle from G-d in which she was told: "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" (Gen. 25:23).

Jacob was the younger. Rebekah seems to have inferred, correctly as it turned out, that it would be he who would continue the covenant, who would stay true to Abraham's heritage, and who would teach it to his children, carrying the story forward into the future.

The real question is why did Isaac love Esau? Could he not see that he was a man of the outdoors, a hunter, not a contemplative or a man of G-d? Is it conceivable that he loved Esau merely because he had a taste for wild game? Did his appetite rule his mind and heart? Did Isaac not know how Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of soup, and how he subsequently "despised" the birthright itself (Gen. 25:29-34). Was this someone with whom to entrust the spiritual patrimony of Abraham?

Isaac surely knew that his elder son was a man of mercurial temperament who lived in the emotions of the moment. Even if this did not trouble him, the next episode involving Esau clearly did: "When Esau was forty years old, he married Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and also Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite. They were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebekah" (Gen. 26:34-35). Esau had made himself at home among the Hittites. He had married two of their women. This was not a man to carry forward the Abrahamic covenant which involved a measure of distance from the Hittites and Canaanites and all they represented in

terms of religion, culture and morality.

Yet Isaac clearly did love Esau. Not only does the verse with which we began say so. It remained so. Genesis 27, with its morally challenging story of how Jacob dressed up as Esau and took the blessing that had been meant for him, is remarkable for the picture it paints of the genuine deep affection between Isaac and Esau. We sense this at the beginning when Isaac asks Esau: "Prepare me the kind of tasty food I like and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my blessing before I die." This is not Isaac's physical appetite speaking. It is his wish to be filled with the smell and taste he associates with his elder son, so that he can bless him in a mood of focused love.

It is the end of the story, though, that really conveys the depth of feeling between them. Esau enters with the food he has prepared. Slowly Isaac, and then Esau, realise the nature of the deception that has been practiced against them. Isaac "trembled violently." Esau "burst out with a loud and bitter cry." It is hard in English to convey the power of these descriptions. The Torah generally says little about people's emotions. During the whole of the trial of the binding of Isaac we are given not the slightest indication of what Abraham or Isaac felt in one of the most fraught episodes in Genesis. The text is, as Erich Auerbach said, "fraught with background," meaning, more is left unsaid than said. The depth of feeling the Torah describes in speaking of Isaac and Esau at that moment is thus rare and almost overwhelming. Father and son share their sense of betrayal, Esau passionately seeking some blessing from his father, and Isaac rousing himself to do so. The bond of love between them is intense. So the question returns with undiminished force: why did Isaac love Esau, despite everything, his wildness, his mutability and his outmarriages?

The sages gave an explanation. They interpreted the phrase "skilful hunter" as meaning that Esau trapped and deceived Isaac. He pretended to be more religious than he was.

(He would ask him questions such as, "Father, how do we tithe salt and straw?" knowing that in fact these were exempt from tithe. Isaac thought that meant that he was scrupulous in his observance of the commandments (Rashi to Gen. 25:27; Tanchuma, Toldot, 8).)

There is, though, a quite different explanation, closer to the plain sense of the text, and very moving.



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Isaac loved Esau because Esau was his son, and that is what fathers do. They love their children unconditionally. That does not mean that Isaac could not see the faults in Esau's character. It does not imply that he thought Esau the right person to continue the covenant. Nor does it mean he was not pained when Esau married Hittite women. The text explicitly says he was. But it does mean that Isaac knew that a father must love his son because he is his son. That is not incompatible with being critical of what he does. But a father does not disown his child, even when he disappoints his expectations. Isaac was teaching us a fundamental lesson in parenthood.

Why Isaac? Because he knew that Abraham had sent his son Ishmael away. He may have known how much that pained Abraham and injured Ishmael. There is a remarkable series of midrashim that suggest that Abraham visited Ishmael even after he sent him away, and others that say it was Isaac who effected the reconciliation. (See Jonathan Sacks, Not in G-d's Name, 107-124.) He was determined not to inflict the same fate on Esau.

Likewise he knew to the very depths of his being the psychological cost on both his father and himself of the trial of the binding. At the beginning of the chapter of Jacob, Esau and the blessing the Torah tells us that Isaac was blind. There is a midrash that suggests that it was tears shed by the angels as they watched Abraham bind his son and lift the knife that fell into Isaac's eyes, causing him to go blind in his old age. (Genesis Rabbah 65:10) The trial was surely necessary, otherwise G-d would not have commanded it. But it left wounds, psychological scars, and it left Isaac determined not to have to sacrifice Esau, his own child. In some way, then, Isaac's unconditional love of Esau was a tikkun for the rupture in the father-son relationship brought about by the binding.

Thus, though Esau's path was not that of the covenant, Isaac's gift of paternal love helped prepare the way for the next generation, in which all of Jacob's children remained within the fold.

There is a fascinating argument between two mishnaic sages that has a bearing on this. There is a verse in Deuteronomy (14:1) that says, about the Jewish people, "You are children of the Lord your G-d."

Rabbi Judah held that this applied only when Jews behaved in a way worthy of the children of G-d. Rabbi Meir said that it was unconditional: Whether Jews behave like G-d's children or they do not, they are still called the children of G-d. (Kiddushin 36a)

Rabbi Meir, who believed in unconditional love, acted in accordance with his view. His own teacher, Elisha ben Abuya, eventually lost his faith and became a heretic, yet Rabbi Meir continued to study with him and respect him, maintaining that at the very last moment of his life he had repented and returned to G-d. (Kiddushin 36a)

To take seriously the idea, central to Judaism, of Avinu Malkeinu, that our King is first and foremost our parent, is to invest our relationship with G-d with the most profound emotions. G-d wrestles with us, as does a parent with a child. We wrestle with him as a child does with his or her parents. The relationship is sometimes tense, conflictual, even painful, yet what gives it its depth is the knowledge that it is unbreakable. Whatever happens, a parent is still a parent, and a child is still a child. The bond may be deeply damaged but it is never broken beyond repair.

Perhaps that is what Isaac was signalling to all generations by his continuing love for Esau, so unlike him, so different in character and destiny, yet never rejected by him -- just as the midrash says that Abraham never rejected Ishmael and found ways of communicating his love.

Unconditional love is not uncritical but it is unbreakable. That is how we should love our children -- for it is how G-d loves us. ©2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd Isaac loved Esau, because the game was in his mouth; but Rebekah loved Jacob" (Gen. 25:28) Of all the myriads of questions which rise up from this week's portion of familial intrigue, sibling rivalry, filial deception and maternal manipulation, perhaps the one that gives rise to all the others is why the Patriarch Isaac prefers the more aggressive, extroverted hunter Esau over the wholehearted, introspective and studious Jacob.

I believe it is superficial, even a bit crass, to suggest that it was because Esau provided his father with his favorite dish of food, venison; after all, what is at stake at this moment is who was to continue the Abrahamic legacy, who would be the standard bearer of "the blessing to all the nations of the earth," commanding his progeny and his future household to guard the pathway of the Lord by living a life dedicated to compassionate righteousness and moral justice (Gen.18:18-19). Who was the more likely candidate for that task: the burly and materialistic Esau or the gentler and more bookish "tent dweller" Jacob? So why does

Isaac favor Esau? In order to properly respond to this query, we must take another look at Abraham's legacy. Yes, he was so inspired, "inspired" if you will, with the Divine pathway of compassionate righteousness and moral justice that with missionary zeal he would erect altars wherever he went, not in order to offer sacrifices, but rather to call humankind to the service of G-d (see Maimonides, Mishne Torah, Laws of Idolatry, 1-3 and Book of Commandments, Positive Commandment 3). To this end, he functioned like a Chabad emissary, opening his tent to dislocated wanderers, hosting them and teaching them about ethical monotheism; and because of his passion, he even castigates G-d Himself for punishing all the inhabitants of wicked Sodom and Gomorrah: "Will G-d then destroy the righteous together with the wicked...? Far be it from You, the moral judge of all the world, not to act with moral justice" (Gen. 18:23, 25).

But there is also another side to the leadership of Abraham, another aspect to the legacy which must be perpetuated by Abraham's heirs. One cannot enthrone compassionate righteousness without denuding cruel corruption; the good can never hope to triumph if the evil is quietly countenanced.

And so the Bible records-within the context of Lot leaving the more ethical and spiritual Abraham for the greener pastures of materialistic Sodom-how four marauding kings attacked the other five kings within the Fertile Crescent (Gen. 14). Chedorlaomer, the king of Elam (Persia)-apparently the most powerful of the four aggressors-subjugated the conquered five for twelve years.

For the next thirteen years, the enslaved kingdoms rebelled; in the fourteenth year, Chedorlaomer struck back with a vengeance and the five kings fled, three to nearby mountains with the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, falling into bitumen pits. The four aggressor kings went into Sodom and seized all their assets and took their people captive including Lot, Abraham's nephew-a weak act of terrorism, abusing the weak and unprotected.

Abraham sprang to action against the four terrorist kings-together with 318 men from his household (apparently his converts). He won a resounding victory, returned all the captives and refused to take any of the booty. Melchizedek the king of Shalem (Jerusalem) greeted Abraham with bread and wine, "blessing Abraham to G-d Supreme, Possessor of heaven and earth, and blessing G-d Supreme who delivered Abraham's enemies into his hands" (Gen. 14:19-20). Abraham emerged a great international military hero-who fought together with G-d against the enslaving terrorist kings to free the captives. After this second legacy, the battle against terrorism, comes chapter 15 containing Abraham's Covenant with G-d.

Now let us return to patriarch Isaac. Abraham's

legacy was that of the spirit as well as the sword. Could Isaac ever measure up? Could anyone ever measure up? One more piece remains before we can answer our initial question; we must read between the lines of the Bible. Our portion of Toldot deals with familial strife in the struggle to appoint the right successor to Isaac. Chapter 25 concludes with Esau spurning the legacy of the first-born; chapter 27 opens with an aged and blind Isaac, who requests venison from his beloved Esau before he gives him the blessing of the firstborn. Chapter 26 seems to be completely misplaced, totally interrupting the story line and harking back to an earlier incident between Isaac and Abimelech, the Philistine king of Gerar. Now Abraham had also encountered Abimelech, made a treaty with him, received permission for him and his progeny to dwell in Gerar and dig wells in Gerar. All of this seemed forgotten when Isaac now meets Abimelech.

Abimelech stopped up Abraham's wells, and as soon as Isaac prospered, Abimelech tells him, "Go away from us, because you have become more powerful than us"-or "your power has come from what you have taken from us" (Gen. 26:16).

Isaac leaves quietly. Abimelech again confronts Isaac, desirous of making another treaty; he now claims that, after all, he had only done well to Isaac; he did not harm him and he allowed him to leave (sent him away) intact, be'shalom. And Isaac concludes another treaty. The chapter ends with Esau marrying two Hittite wives, and the next chapter begins with Isaac's request of Esau to bring him venison so that he may give him the blessings.

I believe the Bible is explaining to us in this chapter 26 why Isaac prefers Esau over Jacob. The legacy of Abraham demands military prowess alongside ethical integrity; if "Abrahamism" is to succeed, we must teach ethical monotheism and defend it militarily.

Since the latter ability was lacking in Isaac, he is drawn to the more aggressive Esau. He understands that Jewish survival-and ultimate triumph-requires power alongside piety. ©2015 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states: "And Isaac loved Esau because he was a was a trapper with his mouth..." (Gen. 25:28). This means that Esau successfully deceived his father regarding his level of righteousness.

Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler cited the Arizal (a famous kabbalist) that it is a mistake to think that Esau was a complete hypocrite and just tried to deceive his father. If Isaac made an error, there must have been good reason for such an error. The problem with Esau was that he kept all his spirituality "in his mouth," without swallowing it. He spoke spiritual words, but did

not become a spiritual person.

Therefore, said Rav Dessler, anyone who speaks ethical and spiritual words without allowing them to penetrate his heart and soul is a colleague of the evil Esau.

The essence of an elevated person is to be totally integrated: the Torah ideals that one talks about must be part of his very being. There are many different levels along a continuum. Some people are unaware of how far they are from actually feeling what they say. Such a person can say he loves everyone deeply, but a perceptive person can tell that although he believes that he feels that way, in actuality he is very far from it. It is not sufficient to just repeat words like a parrot or a tape recorder. Whenever you learn a new idea, keep reviewing it until little by little it penetrates your soul and your words truly become part of you. *Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin.*
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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

This week's Torah reading continually raises for us the unbelievable fact that two such divergent personalities and worldviews could have been raised in the house of Yitzhak and Rivkah. We can understand how a person such as Yaakov could have come from their home. After all, he is studious, serious and obedient to the wishes of his parents, especially to those of his mother.

He is not an outdoorsman and prefers the study hall to that of the sports field and the hunt. Later on in life he will acquire the traits of a warrior, an entrepreneur, and a strong leader who will endure much but remain steadfast in his beliefs and way of life.

However, it is very difficult for us to fathom how a murderer, rapist, idolater and feared hunter and tyrant could grow up and be raised in this very same household and by the very same parents that raised Yaakov. All of the commentators to the Torah have questioned this and every generation of scholars have attempted to address it and give it relevant meaning.

Yet, as is often the case regarding the human condition, the questions and problems involved defy logical answers and human understanding. The entire field of psychiatry and psychology is devoted to attempting to unravel behavior patterns and the mysteries of the human personality.

In my experience, psychology can, in the main, help identify the problem. But in most cases the true cause that triggers aberrant behavior remains hidden even from the most knowledgeable of us. Human beings are very complicated, have ultimate freedom of choice and behavior and only G-d in heaven can read the secrets of one's soul and personality.

And yet, we are all held responsible for our behavior and actions. Whatever it was that made Eisav

the person he became, is solely his responsibility.....his deeds in life and the havoc that he created. Generally speaking, Judaism does not allow for excuses. Unforeseen circumstances can acquit someone in specific instances from performing a mitzvah. But Judaism never grants carte blanche excuses and forgiveness because of natural dysfunction and problems of life, especially of family life.

In our current society there are many who believe that parents and home atmosphere are responsible for wayward children. This may be true in particular instances, but it is certainly not the case in every instance or even in most instances.

From the moment we are born, we are granted the power to do what we wish to do. Those are our choices. We are taught that the rebellion of David's children against him came from the lack of discipline that David enforced upon them in their youth. Nevertheless, the blame and punishment visited upon those children was of their own doing and a result of their choices and behavior in life.

Eisav will weep at his father's feet and beg for his eternal blessing. He will be given a blessing but not the one that he wishes for. That other blessing had to be earned through his behavior and the choices he made. Ultimately that was up to Eisav alone. And that perhaps is the main message that we can glean from this otherwise mysterious person and situation. ©2015 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. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"And G-d said to [Rivkah]" (B'reishis 25:23). Although these words would seem to indicate that there was a direct communication from G-d to Rivkah, Rashi, based on B'reishis Rabbah 63:7, tells us that the message was given to Rivkah through Shem (Noach's son). Later in our Parasha, however, G-d did communicate directly with Rivkah. When Rivkah "heard" Yitzchok tell Eisav to hunt food for him so that he could bestow a blessing upon him (27:5-7), although she might have (over)heard this directly, Midrash Tanchuma (10) and Targum Yonasan tell us that she heard it through the "Divine Spirit," the same expression used by Rashi for how G-d communicated with Shem to give Rivkah her answer. After the blessing was given to Yaakov instead and Eisav planned on killing Yaakov (27:41), Eisav's "thoughts" were "told" to Rivkah by the "Divine Spirit" (27:42, see Rashi and Targum Yonasan). Why did Rivkah need to go to Shem to find out from G-d what was going on with her pregnancy if she was worthy of receiving the same divine communication that Shem was.

Mizrachi (25:23) says that Rivkah had to go to Shem to find out why she was in such distress because she was not a prophetess, as evidenced by Rivkah not being one of the seven prophetesses listed in the Talmud (Megilla 14a). Which makes Rashi saying that Rivkah knew what Eisav was thinking through the "Divine Spirit" even more puzzling. Nevertheless, when Rashi (29:34, see B'reishis Rabbah 67:9 and 72:6) says that all of our foremothers were prophetesses, Mizrachi (on 29:34), in order to defend his opinion here, says that this is a matter of dispute between sources, with Rashi following one opinion here (25:23) and the other opinion there (29:34). Putting aside the discussion about whether Rashi quotes conflicting opinions on different verses, since Mizrach is clearly of the opinion that he does, Rashi's comments on 27:42 could also be following the opinion that all of our foremothers, including Rivkah, were prophetesses, while his comments here follow the opinion that the only foremother who was a prophetess was Sara.

B'er Hatorah (27:42) gives a different answer, suggesting that when Rashi says Rivkah "heard" through the "Divine Spirit" it wasn't referring to prophesy, but to her wisdom, which is a gift from G-d, as she figured out (from other clues) that Eisav's intent was to kill Yaakov. [The notion that this could be described as being "told" to Rivkah is not that different from when Avraham was "told" that Rivkah was born (22:20-23), with Rashi telling us that it was G-d who had informed him that Yitzchok's mate had been born because Avraham was concerned about Yitzchok getting married. If G-d told Avraham not to worry about who Yitzchok will marry because Rivkah, his future spouse, had just been born, the whole mission of his servant, including (and especially) his not knowing who he was looking for, seems rather superfluous -- unless Avraham put Eliezer through the whole ordeal because he knew that "finding" Rivkah miraculously would impress Rivkah's family much more than knocking on their door and saying "I'm here to take Rivkah to Canaan to marry Yitzchok because G-d told Avraham that they were meant for each other." If, on the other hand, as Eitz Yosef suggests (in his commentary on B'reishis Rabbah 57:3), Avraham being "told" by others that his brother Nachor's family had grown made him realize that a potential spouse for Yitzchok could be in Charan (see Eitz Yosef on 57:1), and this can be equated with G-d "telling" him that Yitzchok's mate had been born (since G-d had caused this information to become known to Avraham at that point in time), Eliezer's trip to Charan without knowing the ending makes sense. Similarly, Rivkah being made aware of other comments of Eisav (or other actions) that led her to conclude that he wanted to kill Yaakov, which caused her to send him away, could be attributed to G-d and His "Divine Spirit" without Rivkah being a prophetess.] It is worth noting, though, that the same

expression, "Divine Spirit" ("Ruach haKodesh") is used by Rashi to describe how Shem knew why Rivkah was in distress, and the information he relayed, that she is carrying two nations, who would constantly be at war with each other, with the younger ultimately coming out on top, is too specific for Shem to have just figured it out based on his wisdom.

Another point worth noting is that just as Rivkah was not included in the Talmud's list of prophetesses, Shem is not listed in Rashi's list of the 48 prophets the Talmud alluded to. [Even though Nachalas Yaakov, on 25:23, suggests that Shem and Ever are the two whom Rashi was unsure were included in the 48 prophets, Rashi does not list them, and if he thought Shem was one of the 48, he would have.] So Rivkah not being able to answer her own query because she was not one of the seven prophetesses should apply to Shem too, and should have prevented him from being able to answer her query as well, at least according to Mizrachi's formulation. Which brings us back to the question of why Rivkah had to go to Shem in the first place if she was a conduit for "Ruach haKodesh" herself, and also leaves us wondering how Shem was able to provide the answer if he wasn't one of the 48 prophets, as well as how to reconcile the Midrash that says our foremothers were all prophetesses with the Talmud, which only includes Sara in its list.

Rinas Yitzchok (II, on 27:13) references Nedarim 38a, which lists the qualifications necessary to be a candidate for prophecy, and the Rosh's commentary there (see Kesef Mishneh on Rambam's Hilchos Y'soday Hatorah 7:1), that these qualifications are only necessary for those who receive prophecy on a regular basis, but not for those who receive occasional prophecy. He therefore suggests that Rivkah did receive occasional prophecy (including what Eisav's intentions were), but did not qualify as a "permanent" prophetesses, and was therefore not included in the Talmud's list (which only included those who received prophecy on a regular basis). This would also explain why Rivkah went to Shem, as this wasn't one of the occasions where she received prophecy. The Midrash could be referring to the fact that all four foremothers received prophecy at least occasionally, while the Talmud lists only Sara because she was the only one of the four who did so regularly. And even if Shem didn't receive prophecy on a regular basis, we don't know if Rivkah knew that, and if she did, she could have still hoped that this was one of the occasions when he would receive prophecy (and it was).

A similar possibility is based on the Talmud's answer as to why it didn't include more prophets on its list despite there being more than only 48; it only included those whose prophecy was needed for future generations. If Rivkah's prophecy (that she knew that Eisav wanted to kill Yaakov) wasn't needed by future

generations, she wouldn't have been included in the Talmud's list. Although this doesn't address all the issues raised above, there might be other reasons why, even if Rivka was a prophetess, she had to go to Shem for help regarding her troublesome pregnancy.

First of all, there is the Talmudic concept of "a prisoner not being able to get himself out of prison" (B'rachos 5b), meaning that even if she had the ability to help others in distress via her ability to receive prophecy, she may not have been able to help herself. Additionally, "the Divine Presence does not rest [on a person] in sadness" (Shabbos 30b), which is why Elisha needed a musician to play for him before he received prophecy (M'lachim II 3:15); even if Rivkah was normally able to receive prophecy, while she was in distress she couldn't, and had to reach out to Shem. And, there was a long period of time between the two episodes. Yaakov was blessed by Yitzchok when he was 63 years old (see Rashi on 28:9), which was when Rivka heard through Ruach haKodesh that Eisav wanted to kill him. Since she was pregnant with Eisav and Yaakov when she went to Shem, at least 63 years had passed from the time that Rivkah had to rely on Shem's Ruach haKodesh until she relied on her own Ruach haKodesh to be "told" about Eisav's intentions. For all we know, at the time of her pregnancy (which was before she was a "foremother") she wasn't yet on the level of receiving prophecy. As she continuously grew in her spirituality, though, she attained that level, and became a prophetess. ©2015 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

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

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

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

Ya'akov of Yosef's death. (Genesis 37:31)

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

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

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

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

As it relates to our narrative, Yehudah and Yosef are the tikkun (repairing) for Ya'akov. Ya'akov had deceived his father and suffered for that misstep all of his life. Only when Yehudah and finally Yosef reject deception, has Ya'akov come full circle. His sin has finally been fixed—he has seen his children repair his wrong—only then could he feel truly shalem, truly whole. ©2015 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, "what 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. © 2002 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RAV SHLOMO WOLBE ZT"L

Bais Hamussar

In this week's parsha, the Torah introduces us to Yaakov Avinu and describes him as, "a wholesome man residing in tents" (Bereishis 25:27). While Rashi explains that the tents referred to here are the tents of Sheim and Eiver, Rav Wolbe (Shiurei Chumash, Daas Shlomo) cites the mekubalim who explain that the Torah is referring to the tents of Avraham and Yitzchak. Avraham personified the attribute of chessed and Yitzchak personified the attribute of yir'ah/din (fear of Hashem/strict judgment).

In essence, these are two contradictory middos, since chessed implies overflowing kindness even to the undeserving, while din implies sticking to the letter of the law, and possibly even punishing those undeserving of kindness. Yaakov is referred to as the chosen of our three Avos because he took the attribute found in the tent of Avraham and the attribute found in the tent of Yitzchak and blended them together thereby creating within himself the middah of emes.

When Yaakov, disguised as Eisav, entered Yitzchak's tent in order to receive his blessings, Yitzchak declared, "The fragrance of my son is like the fragrance of a field which Hashem has blessed". Rashi explains that the fragrance of a field refers to the delicious smell of an apple orchard. How did the smell of apples personify Yaakov? Rav Wolbe explains that an apple is red on the outside and white on the inside. Red symbolizes din while white represents chessed. An apple combines both chessed and din into a single entity, thus it parallels Yaakov who combined both these middos into a single middah of emes.

The mixture of both chessed and yir'ah is imperative in a person's daily avodas Hashem. The Mesillas Yesharim writes that all aspects of this world are in reality various different trials to determine a person's level of Torah adherence: "Poverty poses a test and affluence poses a test, as Shlomo Hamelech

stated, 'Lest I become satiated and declare 'Who is Hashem?' and lest I become impoverished and steal'...

Thus whichever way one turns he is faced with a test. If he is a warrior and victorious on all fronts, he has achieved his goal and reached perfection."

Accordingly, perfection is a result of prevailing over the many challenges that come a person's way. How does one accomplish such a feat? He achieves this goal by employing both the middah of chessed and the middah of yir'ah. Chessed -- kindness -- affects all of one's interpersonal relationships. A kind person will not steal from others -- the test which faces the impoverished. On the other hand, yir'ah is the key to mitzvos bein adam laMakom since one who fears Hashem will do everything possible not to rebel against Him -- the test which faces the affluent.

Unbridled chessed can be dangerous. Helping another person at the expense of one's bein adam laMakom, such as offering to shop for someone in a store which compromises one's religious standards, is not a true chessed. Conversely, yir'ah which prompts someone to double park in order to get to mincha, on time thereby causing another person aggravation, is not true yir'ah. The middah of Yaakov is truth because a combination of chessed and yir'ah is the truest manifestation of both of these middos. We all have the ingredients needed, we just have to create the perfect blend. © 2015 Rav S. Wolbe & The AishDas Society

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

RavFrand

We read in this week's Parsha "And it was when Yitzchak became old his eyes dimmed and he summoned Esav his older son..." [Bereshis 27:1] We know the rest of the story. As a result of his blindness, he was not able to discern whether he was talking to Yaakov or Eisav. Therefore, Yaakov was able to receive the blessing destined for his brother, Eisav.

The Medrash tells a story that Avraham requested an elderly appearance. Avraham said: "Master of the universe, a father and son will come into a town and people will not know who the father is and who is the son, in order to give proper respect to the elder of the two." Up until the time of Avraham, people did not show their age. No one had gray hair, no one had arthritis, and no one had to walk with a walker. It was not apparent that people were aging. Avraham complained about the situation and demanded, as it were, that G-d institute a new phenomenon in the world-that of old age. Avraham argued that if an older person was crowned with the physical signs of old age, then people would give him the respect he deserves vis a vis his son.

The Almighty acquiesced to Avraham's request and told him that this phenomenon would begin with him. The first place where "ziknah" is mentioned in the Torah is the pasuk "And Avraham was old (zaken),

coming of days" [Bereshis 24:1].

As we get up there in years and we see and feel the signs of old age, we might begin to wonder-was this such a great idea that Avraham came up with after all? Obviously, it was a good idea because the Almighty responded to Avraham "You have asked for something worthwhile." (Davar tov ta'va'ta). Why is it so important that old age be recognizable? Why would it not have been sufficient if the world had continued as it began-with no difference in appearance between one who was 17 and one who was 75?

Rav Simcha Zissel notes the following: The Torah is replete with the concept of "Ask your father and he will tell you; your elders and they will relate it to you" [Devarim 32:7]. It is taken for granted that a certain wisdom comes with old age. This is so axiomatic that the Gemara in Kidushin teaches in the name of Isi ben Yehudah that the principle "You shall get up before an old person" [Vayikra 19:32] applies to any old person. The great Amora, Rabbi Yochanan, used to get up when an elderly Gentile would pass him by. Why? The Gemara explains that even such a person has witnessed many events in his lifetime. A person with many decades of life experience has been through so much that inevitably he achieves a degree of wisdom. The Torah wants us to recognize that wisdom which accrues only through old age.

As a young man, when I have a question what to do, I am directed to consult with an elderly person. Now if everybody looks like they are 20 years old, how will I know who to ask? The Torah wants us to recognize elderly people easily. The Torah wants us to honor elderly people and in order to do so, it is necessary to recognize them first. This is so important for the welfare of society that G-d instituted the concept of old age, that had not existed at the beginning of Creation. "It is a good idea, Avraham. It is an INDESPENSIBLE idea!"

With all of our complaints about old age and all the troubles associated with it, it is worthwhile for society that the younger generation be able to recognize the elders. This is important so that they can give the elders the respect and courtesies they deserve by virtue of the fact that they have experienced so much. They can give the new generation insights that they would not otherwise possess.

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