

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l

Covenant & Conversation

Even before they were born, Jacob and Esau struggled in the womb. They were destined, it seems, to be eternal adversaries. Not only were they different in character and appearance. They also held different places in their parents' affections: "The boys grew up, and Esau became a skilful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was a quiet man, staying among the tents. Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebecca loved Jacob." (Gen. 25:27-28)

We know why Rebecca loved Jacob. Before the twins were born, the pains Rebecca felt were so great that "she went to inquire of the Lord." This is what 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)

It seemed as if God were saying that the younger would prevail and carry forward the burden of history, so it was the younger, Jacob, whom she loved.

But why, in that case, did Isaac love Esau? Did he not know about Rebecca's oracle? Had she not told him about it? Besides, did he not know that Esau was wild and impetuous? Can we really take literally the proposition that Isaac loved Esau because "he had a taste for wild game," as if his affections were determined by his stomach, by the fact that his elder son brought him food he loved? Surely not, when the very future of the covenant was at stake.

The classic answer, given by Rashi, listens closely to the literal text. Esau, says the Torah, "knew how to trap [yode'a tzayid]." Isaac loved him "because entrapment was in his mouth [ki tzayid befiv]." Esau, says Rashi, trapped Isaac by his mouth. Here is Rashi's comment on the phrase "knew how to trap":

"He knew how to trap and deceive his father with his mouth. He would ask him, 'Father, how should one tithe salt and straw?' Consequently, his father believed him to be strict in observing the commands." (Rashi to 25:27)

Esau knew full well that salt and straw do not require tithes, but he asked so as to give the impression that he was strictly religious. And here is Rashi's comment on the phrase that Isaac loved him "because entrapment was in his mouth": "The midrashic

explanation is that there was entrapment in the mouth of Esau, who trapped his father and deceived him by his words." (Rashi 25:28)

The Maggid of Dubnow adds a perceptive comment as to why Isaac, but not Rebecca, was deceived. Rebecca grew up with the wily Laban. She knew deception when she saw it. Isaac, by contrast, had grown up with Abraham and Sarah. He only knew total honesty and was thus easily deceived. (Bertrand Russell once commented on the philosopher G. E. Moore, that he only once heard Moore tell a lie, when he asked Moore if he had ever told a lie, and Moore replied, "Yes").

So the classic answer is that Isaac loved Esau because he simply did not know who or what Esau was. But there is another possible answer: that Isaac loved Esau precisely because he did know what Esau was.

In the early twentieth century someone brought to the great Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Kook, first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of pre-state Israel, the following dilemma. He had given his son a good Jewish education. He had always kept the commands at home. Now, however, the son had drifted far from Judaism. He no longer kept the commandments. He did not even identify as a Jew. What should the father do? "Did you love him when he was religious?" asked Rav Kook. "Of course," replied the father. "Well then," Rav Kook replied, "Now love him even more."

Sometimes love can do what rebuke cannot. It may be that the Torah is telling us that Isaac was anything but blind as to his elder son's true nature. But if you have two children, one well-behaved, the other liable to turn out badly, to whom should you devote greater attention? With whom should you spend more time?

It may be that Isaac loved Esau not blindly but with open eyes, knowing that there would be times when his elder son would give him grief, but knowing too that the moral responsibility of parenthood demands that we do not despair of or disown a wayward son.

Did Isaac's love have an effect on Esau? Yes and no. It is clear that there was a special bond of connection between Esau and Isaac. This was recognised by the Sages: "Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel said: No man ever honoured his father as I honoured my father, but I found that Esau honoured his father even more." (Devarim Rabbah 1:15)

Rabbi Shimon derives this from the fact that usually people serve their parents wearing ordinary clothes while they reserve their best for going out. Esau,

however, had kept his best clothes in readiness to serve his father the food he had gone out to hunt. That is why Jacob was able to wear them while Esau was still out hunting (Gen. 27:14).

We find, much later in the Torah, that God forbids the Israelites to wage war against Esau's descendants. He tells Moses: "Give the people these orders: `You are about to pass through the territory of your brothers the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir. They will be afraid of you, but be very careful. Do not provoke them to war, for I will not give you any of their land, not even enough to put your foot on. I have given Esau the hill country of Seir as his own.'" (Deut. 2:4-5)

And later still Moses commands the Israelites: "Do not abhor an Edomite [i.e. a descendant of Esau], for he is your brother." (Deut. 23:8)

The Sages saw these provisions as an enduring reward to Esau for the way he honoured his father.

So, was Isaac right or wrong to love Esau? Esau reciprocated the love, but remained Esau, the hunter, the man of the field, not the man to carry forward the demanding covenant with the invisible God and the spiritual sacrifices it called for. Not all children follow the path of their parents. If it was Isaac's intent that Esau should do so, he failed.

But there are some failures that are honourable. Loving your children, whatever they become, is one, for surely that is how God loves us. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl zt"l* ©2023 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Torah Lights

“**A**nd they said, we saw indeed that the Lord was with you and we said: let there now be an oath between us, between us and you, and let us make a covenant with you.” [Genesis 26:28] On what basis, and with which type of people, are we encouraged to make treaties? A careful reading of the relationships between Abraham, Isaac and Avimelekh – and especially a study of Chapter 26 in Toldot – provides a significant answer to these questions, which also contains a crucial message for the government of Israel today.

Some background: We first met Avimelekh in Chapter 20 in Vayera, when Abraham wandered over to Gerar, the area where Avimelekh ruled. Gerar was the land of the Philistines, which is part of the divinely promised borders of Israel. Abraham referred to Sarah as his sister, and she was immediately taken into Avimelekh's harem – without anyone asking her or her 'brother's' permission [Gen. 20:2]. Clearly, he was a lascivious and cruel despot, who certainly would have murdered any husband of Sarah. After he was given a dire warning in a dream sent by God, Avimelekh played

the innocent victim, asserting that the fault lies with Abraham since he [Avimelekh] acted 'with purity of heart and innocence of hand' [Gen. 20:5]. Abraham correctly explains: '...there is no fear of God in this place, and I would have been murdered because of my wife' [Gen. 20:11].

Chapter 21 proceeds to tell us about the birth of Isaac and the banishment of Ishmael and then returns to describe a meeting between Abraham, Avimelekh and his general, Piñol. Avimelekh insists that Abraham swear he will not act falsely by taking away his land during the lifetime of his grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Abraham agrees [Gen. 21:24], but then Abraham chastises Avimelekh for having stolen his well. Yet again, Avimelekh plays the innocent victim, remonstrating that 'I didn't know who did this thing, you didn't tell me, and I never heard of it until today' [Gen. 21:26].

Despite Avimelekh's apparent duplicity as a woman-snatcher and well-stealer, Abraham nevertheless makes a treaty with him. Abraham gives him sheep and cattle as well as seven more ewes as a sign that he dug the well at Be'er Sheva (literally 'the well of the oath'). It is remarkable that it is Abraham who does the giving: he receives nothing, although the covenant, the oath, is taken by both of them.

Then with a brief segue 'And it happened after these things...', we read about the terrifying command by God that Abraham offer his only son as a whole burnt offering. Rashbam cites a Midrash suggesting that the sacrifice of Isaac was a punishment to Abraham for his treaty with Avimelekh. Entering into a treaty with a treacherous individual for a number of generations is irresponsible. Abraham has no right to take such a risk and jeopardize his children's lives. More to the point, says Rashbam, Abraham had no right to give away Isaac's patrimony, a portion of the promised land of Israel. Hence, concludes this commentary, God commands Abraham to sacrifice his son; if Abraham was willing to 'treaty away' his son's inheritance to a rogue, Abraham apparently does not value his son anyway.

This context brings us to Toldot, where the most important thing we learn from history is that we never learn from history. Now, it is Isaac, Abraham's son, who is forced by famine to go to 'Avimelekh, the King of the Philistines, to Gerar' [Gen. 26:1]. Immediately, the people of the area ask about his wife and – for self-protection – he too refers to Rebecca as his sister. We discover that Avimelekh is also a voyeur; he looks into Isaac's window and sees him 'playing' with his wife! Yet again, Avimelekh feigns innocence, calling Isaac the deceiver. 'What is this that you did to us by claiming she was your sister? One of my people almost slept with your wife!' [Gen. 26:10]

Isaac goes on to amass a vast accumulation of wealth, including cattle, sheep and servants. He is still living in Gerar, 'And the Philistines were jealous of him'

[Gen. 26:14]. This is the same Avimelekh and these are the same Philistines with whom Abraham made his covenant. Nevertheless, 'the Philistines stopped up all of the wells which were dug by the servants of his father,' and Avimelekh forces Isaac to move away because 'his wealth was amassed from them' [Gen. 26:16]. Isaac passively leaves, but nevertheless insists upon re-digging the wells of his father which had been destroyed. To add insult to injury, Isaac now digs two new wells in his new location – only to have the Philistines arguing with him over the ownership of the water.

The finale of this incident is difficult to imagine. After all that has transpired, Avimelekh comes to Isaac flanked by his general Piñol and ahuzat me-re'ehu – a group of friends – in order to sign another treaty with him. Isaac is understandably surprised, seeing that they have 'hated him and exiled him.' The fork-tongued Avimelekh argues, 'we have done only good towards you because we sent you away in peace.' The Philistine king apparently believes that if a Jew is banished – but is permitted to flee with his life intact – the Jew ought be grateful! And, despite Avimelekh's history, Isaac has a feast with him and they swear yet another oath together. Isaac now renames the place Be'er Sheva in honor of this second oath-treaty.

Is the Torah then teaching us to continue to make treaties, even though our would-be partners have a history of duplicity and treachery? I believe the very opposite to be the case. 'The actions of the ancestors are repeated in the lives of their children.' Unfortunately, Jews are always over-anxious to believe that their enemies have become their friends and the leopard has changed his spots. The very next verse in the Torah – the closing of the story of Isaac and Avimelekh but seemingly without any connection to it – reads:

"And Esau was forty years old and he took as a wife Yehudit the daughter of Be'eri the Hittite and Bosmat the daughter of Eglon the Hittite. And this was a bitterness of spirit to Isaac and to Rebecca." [Gen. 26:34–35]

Now, the one clear prohibition insisted upon by the Patriarchs was that their sons not take Canaanite or Hittite wives. I believe that the Torah is telling us that if Isaac makes a treaty with an inappropriate partner, his son will enter into a marriage with an inappropriate partner.

Just as Abraham is punished for his treaty with Avimelekh, so is Isaac punished for his treaty with Avimelekh. The land of Israel is too important and the preservation of a Jewish future is too vulnerable for us to take risks and make treaties with unconscionable and dishonest rulers. A treaty is only possible when it is made with a partner who fears God in the same way that we do. *The above article appears in Rabbi Riskin's book Bereishit: Confronting Life, Love and Family, part of his Torah Lights series of commentaries on the weekly parsha, published by Maggid. © 2023 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 "haunted" 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 God 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. ©2023 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 AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

As Jacob leaves his parents' home at the behest of his mother, Rebecca, the Torah declares that Rebecca was the mother of both Jacob and Esau (Genesis 28:5). At first blush, this seems to be an unnecessary statement. Anyone who has been reading the text certainly knows this fact.

Even Rashi, the greatest of commentators, writes that he does not know why the Torah mentions this. Rashi's admission of "I do not know" reminds us that we should be prepared to admit lack of knowledge rather than deceive others.

Yet there are commentators who try to understand why the text includes the fact that Rebecca was the mother of Jacob and Esau. The most appealing view, for me, is that of Em la'Mikra, quoted by Nehama Leibowitz.

After Jacob takes the blessing, Esau is outraged. Rebecca overhears Esau's plan to kill Jacob and therefore arranges for Jacob to leave home (27:41-43). Rebecca's concern was clearly for Jacob's well-being, but it is crucial to understand that she was also concerned for Esau. If Esau were to kill Jacob, not only would Rebecca's beloved son be dead, but Esau the murderer, having committed such a heinous crime, would also have "died" in Rebecca's eyes. This fear of losing both children is clearly reflected when Rebecca asks, "Why should I lose both of you [my children] in one day?" (27:45).

Hence, the Torah emphasizes that Rebecca is both Jacob and Esau's mother. In other words, she insists Jacob leave not only because she loves Jacob but also because she loves Esau. She is the beloved mother of both.

This message continues to resonate today. Too often it is the case that our children rebel; they abandon values and priorities that parents hold dear. Some leave the faith or engage in behaviors that upset and even outrage parents. While parents should certainly articulate their feelings to their children, the Torah teaches that no matter the nature or the actions of the child, a parent is a parent, and love for a child must be

endless and unconditional.

Like Rebecca's love for Esau. ©2023 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 DOV KRAMER

Jewish Geography

"And he called it שבע; therefore the name of the city is באר שבע till this very day" (Bereishit 26:33). The implication is that because Yitzchok named the well "שבע," the city where it was located is called "באר שבע." However, the name באר שבע was already given in Avraham's time (21:31). Why was it named twice?

Besides the large gift of sheep and cattle that Avraham gave Avimelech, seven ewes were given separately as a testimony that Avraham had dug the well that Avimelech's servants had stolen (21:25-30). Since this is followed by "therefore that area was called באר שבע," the implication is that באר שבע means "the well of seven," referring to the seven ewes. However, the verse continues, "for they both swore there," implying that באר שבע means "the well of the oath" because of the oath made to uphold the covenant that was enacted there. Which one was it, and why the ambiguity?

The commentators discuss why Yitzchok named the well "שבעה." Rashi says it was for the covenant that Yitzchok and Avimelech just swore to uphold (26:31), while Seforno says it was because this was the 7th well that Yitzchok dug; six in Gerar – three that Avraham had dug but were covered/filled in by the P'lishtim (26:15), two that Yitzchok dug but the P'lishtim contested (26:19-21), one that they didn't contest (26:22) – plus this one (באר שבע הו). Similar to the "שבע" in באר שבע הו, does "שבעה" refer to the oath or to the number seven?

Some interesting suggestions have been made to explain why it was named באר שבע twice. Seforno says they are not the same name; Avraham's was pronounced shuh-vah, with a kumatz, and referred only to the oath, while Yitzchok's is pronounced sheh-vah, with a segol, referring to both the oath and the number seven. This is a difficult approach, as Avraham's definitely had a number seven involved – the seven ewes – while Yitzchok's may have been the seventh well (we don't know for sure that only three of Avraham's wells were undone by the P'lishtim), but this isn't mentioned explicitly. Besides, the vowel change is based on the cantillation, as a segol in even proper names changes to a kumatz at an esnachata or sof-pasuk. [When Yaakov left 28:10 באר שבע הו, it once again has a kumatz, even after Yitzchok "renamed" it!]

Rashbam says that Yitzchok's באר שבע is not the same one as Avraham's. He quotes M'lachim I 19:3, where באר שבע is referred to as "the one in Yehuda," implying that there must be a second one. However,

since both Avraham's and Yitzchok's were in the same area, they would both have been in Yehuda (or in Shimon, whose portion was within Yehuda). Radak points out that referencing that it is "in Yehuda" does not mean that there were two; it was meant to convey that Eliyahu went to a city where Achav could not harm him, in the southern kingdom ("in Yehuda"). Nevertheless, there was a באר שבע (Bersabe) in the north (see Josephus, Wars 3:3:1) on the border of Upper and Lower Galilee, but it likely wasn't around during biblical times. Besides, the Galil is nowhere near Gerar, so that one couldn't be either Avraham's or Yitzchok's באר שבע.

Chizkuni (21:31) and Bechor Shor (26:33) point out that for Avraham it was "the place" that was called באר שבע, whereas for Yitzchok it was "the city," suggesting that the area referred to as באר שבע expanded after the second covenant. Radak and Ibn Ezra (in his first suggestion) also say that the name became more strongly associated with the area after both father and son enacted covenants there, but do not say that the area expanded the second time.

Netziv and Meshech Chuchma say that originally, it was called באר שבע because of the oath made to uphold the covenant, but the P'lishtim didn't adhere to it. They filled in the wells that Avraham dug (although some suggest this wasn't for nefarious reasons), sent Yitzchok out of Gerar, and fought with him over wells he dug outside Gerar. Once the covenant was broken, the name no longer applied, so wasn't used. But when Yitzchok and Avimelech renewed it, and swore to uphold it, the old name was once again valid, so was reinstated. And this time it stuck. It was named באר שבע because of the oath between Avraham and Avimelech, but the city regained the name because of the oath between Yitzchok and Avimelech.

With this, we can explain the dual meaning of באר שבע. Knowing that the covenant might be broken, Avraham built in an alternate meaning for באר שבע, giving the local population the opportunity to still refer to it as באר שבע because of the seven ewes, in the hope that there would still be some memory of the covenant. But even that was too much, and the name wasn't used again until the second oath was taken. Following his father's lead, Yitzchok called the well שבעה, having two references in mind. He hoped the covenant would remain intact, but built in an alternate meaning, since it was the 7th well he dug.

Although Ramban thinks it's likely that the well Yitzchok called שבעה was the same well that Avraham called באר שבע, a simple reading, with Yitzchok having already finished re-digging Avraham's filled-in wells (especially since this one was not in Gerar), is that שבעה was a different, brand new well. [This is bolstered by the fact that Yitzchok made a point of giving the wells he re-dug the same names that his father had given them (see 26:18), and this has a different name.]

About three miles east of the Old City of modern

Beersheba is an archeological site known as Tel Be'er Sheva, which most archeologists and governmental agencies associate with biblical באר שבע. Yoel Elitzur ("Places in the Parasha," Vayigash) is among those who disagree, since the area is too small for a city that was constantly referenced as a major city in the south. [Besides, Sh'muel's sons, when they became the nation's primary judges (Sh'muel I 8:2), judged from Be'er Sheva, indicating that it was a major city.] Additionally, the only archeological finds there are from the Iron [Israelite] Age, not the Bronze [Patriarchal] Age. He points out that its Arabic name is "es-Sab," while the Arabic name of the Bedouin Shuk in the Old City of modern Beersheba is "Bir es-Sab." His conclusion is that biblical באר שבע was [the southeastern part of] modern Beersheba, while the area now referred to as Tel Be'er Sheva is the biblical town of שבע, listed (Y'hoshua 19:2) as another city assigned to Shimon, along with שבע באר.

Assuming that Avraham's "באר שבע" and Yitzchok's "שבעה" are not the same well, perhaps באר שבע is where Avraham dug his well while שבע was where Yitzchok dug the well he called שבעה. Another possibility is that the biblical town of שבע, currently known as Tel Be'er Sheva, was where Avraham dug the well he called באר שבע, while the well Yitzchok dug was in the city called באר שבע. ©2023 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI SHAFRAN

Cross-Currents

As the tale goes, a learned non-Jewish cleric challenges the town's Jewish populace to have its greatest scholar meet him on a bridge over a raging river, each a heavy weight tied to his foot. The first to be stumped by a question about the Torah will be cast by the other into the waters.

The only volunteer is Shmiel, a decidedly unlearned tailor. He insists he can better the priest and, well, he's the only candidate.

At the appointed time, Shmiel and his opponent take their positions on the bridge, ball and chain attached to each man's foot, a crowd on the river bank.

The non-Jewish cleric benevolently offers Shmiel the first shot. "What does `aini yode'a' mean?" Shmiel booms out.

The cleric, not pausing a second, accurately answers: "I do not know!" The crowd gasps and Shmiel, beaming triumphantly, pushes his momentarily confused opponent off the bridge into the raging waters.

Back at the shtetl town hall, Shmiel is roundly congratulated for his ploy. "How did you come up with so brilliant an idea?" he is asked. Radiating modesty, Shmiel explains, "Well, I was reading the `teitch' (the once-popular Yiddish translation of Rashi's commentary on the Torah) and I saw the words `aini yode'ah' in Rashi's commentary. I didn't know what the phrase meant, and so I looked at the teitch and saw, in Yiddish, the words `I don't know'."

"So I figured," Shmiel explained sagely, "if the holy teitch didn't know what the words meant, there was no way some priest would!"

The story is good for more than a laugh. It raises the significant fact that Rashi, the "father of all commentaries," occasionally, including in our parsha, writes that he "doesn't know" the reason for something - in our case, about why the Torah has to reinform us that Rivka was the mother of Yaakov and Esav (Beraishis 28:5).

"I don't know" is a phrase as important as it is rare these days, when self-assuredness seems all too often to stand in for self-respect, when opinions are routinely proffered as unassailable fact, when people are permitted - even expected - to state without doubt what they cannot possibly know to be true.

Rashi's modest example is one we would be wise to more often emulate. As the Gemara puts it: "Teach your tongue to say 'I do not know'" (Berachos, 4a). ©2023 Rabbi A. Shafran and torah.org

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"He relocated from there and dug another well [which they didn't fight over, and he called it Rehoboth] and said, "For now Hashem has granted us ample space" (Ber. 26:22) Of all the patriarchs, Yitzchak is shrouded by the most mystery. Or, perhaps, there is not much to know about him. The Torah doesn't relate much of his life story, other than a few incidents in which he was involved, usually not even as the protagonist, but in a supporting role, such as the Akeida which was a test of his father Avraham.

This week, we discuss that, after many years, his prayers for children are answered, and then that there was a famine in the land, similar to the one that had occurred in the previous generation. His time in Gerar seems to be among the most eventful the Torah recounts, and we find him flourishing, which arouses the jealousy of the Philistines, and Yitzchak keeps moving away from them.

After his servants dug two wells which the Philistines contested, Yitzchak moved again and dug a new well, which this time remained uncontested. He praised Hashem for having given him space to succeed and grow.

What we do see about Yitzchak from all these actions is that he is the ultimate "baal bitachon," man of faith. When things happen, he recognizes that it is Hashem's will, and he takes them in stride. They stopped up the well of Avraham? He has it redug. They argue that it's their water? Yitzchak moves elsewhere and tries again. When he finally has a well with no contention, he attributes it all to Hashem, and not to his own wisdom in finding a new place. In addition, he is optimistic that this is a Heavenly sign of future prosperity.

Yitzchak is known as the symbol of gevura,

strength. However, the strength of Yitzchak is not external, but internal. He, like his father before him and his son after him, is a warrior. The difference is that Yitzchak's battles take place in his mind and heart. Given many reasons to become negative or angry, he instead doesn't let things faze him, and calmly proceeds through life, taking what Hashem sends his way with equanimity.

He is an ish matzliach, a prosperous man, much as Yosef will be described. Yitzchak's success similarly comes from the fact that Hashem's name is always in his mouth, and wherever he looks, Yitzchak sees only Hashem and His actions. This causes him to be envied by the nations around him. They are not envious of his wealth, per se, but rather of the "charmed" life he seems to lead, where everything seems to go in his favor.

This wasn't the case as they saw it, but indeed, since Yitzchak accepted whatever happened to him as coming from Hashem's loving hand, it seemed that he had no problems. We, as descendants of Yitzchak, have this inner strength in our DNA, and if we work to cultivate it, then all our enemies will shrink into the background and we will be able to remain focused on Hashem, alone, and live lives of serenity and peace.

When R' Paysach Krohn was 21, his father became very ill. The hospital was in Washington Heights and he spent Shabbos with R' Shimon Schwab z"l, who was friendly with the senior Rabbi Krohn. R' Schwab asked young Paysach how his father was doing.

"It doesn't look so good," replied the young man, "but I have bitachon, (faith) that he will be OK." R' Schwab quietly corrected him. "That is not what bitachon means," he said. "Bitachon is not trusting that everything will be OK. Bitachon is believing that EVERYTHING happens because Hashem wants it to happen."

A few weeks later, young Paysach's father passed away, but before he did, his son learned to see the Divine nature of occurrences, and gained a new appreciation for Hashem's hashgacha. ©2023 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

The Mother of Ya'akov and Eisav

The Torah can sometimes tell us many different things from one simple sentence. It is not a question of how many words or phrases are in that sentence. Nor is it necessary for that sentence to contain a significant word or a word that is spelled with an added letter or a letter missing. These are all things to which we have become accustomed in previous discussions. Questions can arise from the text by examining problems within the context of a sentence or within a minor concern with the order of the sentence. One such sentence occurs in our parasha this week.

Early in the parasha, we saw the conflict between Ya'akov and Eisav, the selling of the birthright,

and eventually the stealing of the blessing intended for Eisav. Eisav swore that he would kill his brother when Yitzchak would die. When Rivka heard of this plot, she decided to send Ya'akov away to her brother, Lavan, where he would be safer. Rivka still had to convince Yitzchak to let Ya'akov go without telling Yitzchak about Eisav's plans, so she used the excuse that Ya'akov could not take a wife from the people of Canaan, as Eisav had done, and he should travel to her brother to choose a wife from the same place where she was raised. When Yitzchak agreed, the Torah tells us, "And Yitzchak sent off Ya'akov, and he went toward Paddan-Aram, to Lavan the son of Betuel, the Aramite, the brother of Rivka, the mother of Ya'akov and Eisav."

This sentence raises many questions, primarily because all the facts that are reported within the sentence have already been taught. The most striking of these "facts" is that Lavan is the brother of Rivka and the son of Betuel and Rivka is the mother of Ya'akov and Eisav. Four sentences earlier the Torah expressed Yitzchak's instructions to Ya'akov, "So Yitzchak summoned Ya'akov and blessed him, and said to him, 'You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. Arise, go to Padan-Aram, to the house of Betuel, your mother's father, and take a wife from there from the daughters of Lavan, your mother's brother.'" While one could dismiss this repetition as Yitzchak clarifying the instructions completely, indicated by the mention of each fact that each fact was important, most commentators indicate that the repetition teaches more than clarification.

One example that might explain this repetition is based on the explicit reiteration of the relationships each time a name is mentioned. It is clear that both Yitzchak and Ya'akov knew these names and their relationships. Without directly stating his message, Yitzchak was giving Ya'akov a warning. The Ohr HaChaim explains that when Avraham sent Eliezer to find a wife for Yitzchak, Avraham did not instruct Eliezer to choose a bride from his family, only from his birthplace. Avraham knew his brother, Nachor, and Nachor's son, Betuel, and he assumed that Betuel would have some of the same negative qualities of his brother. Betuel was a wicked man, but he was not well-known for his wickedness because his community was similar to him. Eliezer was able to witness Betuel's wickedness, but was struck even more by the greater wickedness of Lavan. Eliezer had reported this to Yitzchak and Avraham. Still, Yitzchak sent his son to Lavan's house for a wife. Yitzchak's warning to Ya'akov was to be very careful in his dealings with Lavan so that Lavan could not trick him. But Yitzchak also wanted to assure Ya'akov that he would be able to find a righteous bride in Lavan's house. Therefore, Yitzchak explained that, just as his righteous mother and his wicked uncle came from the same mother, so too it was likely that at least one of Lavan's daughters was also righteous. This idea is repeated in

the words, "the mother of Ya'akov and Eisav." Just as a wicked child and a righteous one came from the same mother, so was it possible that one of Lavan's daughters could also be righteous.

The Ramban has a different approach to the inclusion of the words "the mother of Ya'akov and Eisav." When it was time for Yitzchak to marry, Avraham sent Eliezer to find him a wife. Avraham could have made the same demands on Yishmael, but he understood from Sarah that only Yitzchak would inherit from him. When it was time for Yitzchak to marry off Ya'akov, Eisav had already taken two wives from Canaanite women, from the same Canaanite women that Yitzchak insisted that Ya'akov not take a wife. Eisav's wives brought idols into Eisav's house and brought sacrifices to those idols which aggravated both Yitzchak and Rivka. The Ramban tells us that the Torah included these words to indicate that, although he and Rivka had two sons, only Ya'akov would inherit and be the leader of the Jewish people. Only Ya'akov was sent to Padan-Aram to find a wife, only Ya'akov was instructed on whom not to marry, and only Ya'akov would lead the Jewish people.

Rashi is probably the most famous commentator on the Torah, and Rabbis say that one cannot learn Torah properly without understanding Rashi's comments. Rashi always endeavored to present the simplest, most exact explanation of the phrases of the Torah. In many cases, Rashi quoted from the Talmud and the Midrash if he felt that the most straight-forward explanation was found there. On the words, "Rivkah, the mother of Ya'akov and Eisav," Rashi writes a cryptic comment, "I do not know what to teach (you from these words)." The Siftei Hachamim explains that Rashi did not feel that any one explanation for the inclusion of these "extra" words was more definitive than any other.

Many years ago, when teaching a Second Grade class, I purposefully showed this Rashi to my students so that they would understand that sometimes one cannot be satisfied with only one answer to a question. One student raised his hand and said, "I know the answer even if Rashi doesn't. No mother would send her son away, especially Rivka who loved Ya'akov. But Rivka knew that if Ya'akov remained near her, Eisav would kill him. Then we would have been forced to punish Eisav by killing him. Then she would have no sons. The only way to remain the mother of both Ya'akov and Eisav was for her to send Ya'akov away." This young boy had just single-handedly destroyed Piaget's hierarchy of learning skills.

Nurture or Nature has been a discussion among the psychologists. This section of the Torah could be used to support the idea of Nature over Nurture: two children raised in the same home, yet one is a tzaddik and one is a rasha (evil person). The Torah, however, says that both are important. One's environment can play as large role in one's character development as how one is raised. May we seek to live with righteous people

and raise our children through the Laws of the Torah. And may our children's character reflect the effort we give to both. © 2023 Rabbi D. Levin

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Voice Identification

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

The voices of Yaakov and Esav were different and distinct, yet Yitzchak was unable to discern the difference between the two. According to Ramban (Nachmanides), Yaakov intentionally disguised his voice so that he would sound like his brother. Based on this, some halachic authorities (*poskim*) conclude that one may not testify to a person's identity based solely upon voice. Thus if someone overheard someone else giving instructions to write a bill of divorce (*get*) for his wife, and he identified the husband based on his voice, we do not rely upon this testimony. The Torah specifically defines a witness as one who saw or knew about something that happened (*Vayikra* 5:1). This means that we can rely only on what someone has seen. It may also explain why we cannot accept testimony from someone blind.

In contrast, Rambam (Maimonides) does not seem to agree with this exegesis. He maintains that the reason a blind person's testimony is not accepted is because the verse requires a witness to be able to see. However, someone sighted may identify someone else by voice. Thus we may carry out the death penalty for someone who curses G-d (*mekallel*) or someone who persuades people to worship idols (*meisit*), based on the testimony of someone who heard them. Additionally, a husband is permitted to be intimate with his wife based on his recognizing her voice, even if the room they are in is dark (or the husband is blind) and he cannot see her.

Nevertheless, some rule that one should not rely upon voice identification if there are reasons to doubt the identification. A story is told of a married man who returned to his town after many years of absence. He was identified based on his voice, though his appearance had changed drastically. He then died. Some rabbinic authorities ruled that his wife should not be allowed to remarry, because of the possibility that he had been misidentified based on his voice, leaving open the possibility that her husband was still alive. Others permitted her remarriage because they felt that the change in appearance could be reasonably attributed to aging, so the identification of the husband based on his voice could be relied upon.

If voices are unique to individuals and can be used to identify them, how was Yaakov able to change his voice so that he sounded like his brother Esav?

The *Marcheshet* suggests that Yaakov was able to do this successfully only because he and Esav were brothers. It would seem, then, that if we wish to permit a woman to remarry based on testimony about her husband's voice, we would need to verify that the voice

heard could not have been the voice of her brother-in-law. © 2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

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

