

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A** The memory which plagues Jacob-Israel throughout his life, the seminal act which defines much of what happens to him through his manifold experiences as a son and sibling at home in Israel as a young husband in Laban-land with a wily and grasping uncle - employer, as a father and pater-familias of the nascent and emerging twelve tribes back in Israel, and as an elderly patriarch in the Egyptian exile, was the moment in which he put on the garb of Esau and deceived his father in order to receive the blessings. Our Torah reading describes every word of that fateful meeting between Father Isaac and son Jacob: when Jacob brings his father the venison stew prepared by his mother, his blind father asks, "Who are you, my son," and Jacob responds - seemingly without missing a beat - "I am Esau your first born son." (Gen 27:19).

This is the defining moment of Jacob's life: it justifies his name, which from then on will not merely refer to the physical moment of birth when the younger Jacob leaves his mother's womb holding onto the heel of the elder, Esau, but will rather refer to the non - literal nuance of the verb la'akov, to get around through the back door, to take the circuitous route in order to get there first, to be a deceiver. (Everett Fox, ingenious translator of the Bible into English in accordance with the German translation of the 20th Century philosopher Franz Rosenzweig, takes the word to mean "heel - sneak"). His deception leads to his exile from his parents' house, to his having been deceived by Laban, who gives him the elder rather than his beloved younger daughter, to his having been deceived by his sons when they tell him that Joseph was torn apart by a wild beast, and to his having been deceived even by his beloved Joseph who poses as Grand Vizier, under whose royal garb he conceals his true identity as Jacob and Rachel's eldest son.

But the real question which begs to be asked: Jacob is described in the opening of our Biblical portion as "a whole-hearted (Hebrew tam, also means naïve) person, a (studious) dweller in tents" (Gen. 25:27). How can such a disingenuous personality declare to his old blind father, "I am Esau, your first -born son" - and for what appears to be in order to gain material blessings?! The classical commentary Rashi, attempting to

ameliorate the force of the blatant lie which emerged from Jacob's lips, suggests that Jacob responded to his father's query as to who was standing before him with the words, "It is I", Esau is your first-born son" (27:19, apparently drawing for support from the cantillation - trope. Clearly this is a rather forced interpretation of the words, emanating from the inconsistency of the deception with Jacob's character as the Bible has just described it.

I believe that between the words and lines of the Bible, we are being taught here a most profound lesson concerning fathers and sons, parents and children. The character and identity of the individual is forged by his/her genetic make-up and environment, nature and nurture. It is crucial that each of us attempt to recognize, understand and accept the inner core of our essential being, be true to ourselves and express who we are with all of the integrity we can muster. (As Shakespeare's Polonius declared, "But this above all else: to thine own self be true"). And this is the fundamental meaning of the central commandment in the Bible, "You must love your neighbor like (you love) yourself" (Leviticus 19:18), the obvious corollary being that everyone must first develop and love him/herself before he/she can reach out to love the other.

But how do we learn to love ourselves? From the very fact that those who are most important to us from our very birth - our mothers and fathers - show that they love us, that they consider us loveable, worthy of being loved. This feeling of affection that we receive unconditionally from our parents creates within us a bank account of love from which we can draw to give to others. Woe unto that individual who has not received such love deposits from parents during his/her most formative years; it will be difficult at best for such a person to truly develop him/herself and to give love to others.

The family tragedy, the split between the twin brothers which resulted in Jacob's having to flee for his very life, began with the boldly stated reality, "And Isaac loved Esau since his hunt (Esau's venison meant) was in his mouth; and Rebecca loves Jacob" (25:28). This is stated - and probably felt by the main players in the story - after their respective basic character traits are delineated. Esau the man who knows how to trap (animals, and perhaps also people, the former with weapons, the latter with smooth, sweet talk), the man of

**TORAS AISH IS A WEEKLY PARSHA
NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL AND THE
WORLD WIDE WEB AT [HTTP://AISHDAS.ORG](http://AISHDAS.ORG).
FOR MORE INFO EMAIL YITZ@AISHDAS.ORG**

The material presented in this publication was collected from publicly available electronic mail, computer archives and the UseNet. It is being presented with the permission of the respective authors. Toras Aish is an independent publication, and does not necessarily reflect the views of any given synagogue.

**TO DEDICATE THIS NEWSLETTER PLEASE CALL
973-472-0180 OR EMAIL YITZ@AISHDAS.ORG**

the fields, and Jacob the whole-hearted man, the dweller in tents.

Especially in the Biblical patriarchal society, every son yearns for his father's love and acceptance - a gift which was given to Esau but withheld from Jacob. And the very next verse following the description of parental love and lack thereof seems to be a non sequiter: "And Jacob potted up a pot (of red lentil pottage)" which he agrees to sell to tired hungry Esau in exchange for their father's birthright (25:29-34). The holy Ohr HaHaim (R. Haim Ibn Attar, 19th century, ad loc) suggests that Jacob cooked the pottage for his father; once he saw that Esau earned his father's love by preparing red venison meat for him, Jacob imitates Esau in the best way he is able: by making a red pottage soup for the patriarch. The Bible is thereby reporting that Father Isaac's rebuff made Jacob want desperately to be Esau-like, to re-make his identity from that of a naïve introspective student to that of a more sophisticated and aggressive purveyor of goods and sources. Perhaps such a metamorphous would enable him to finally feel his father's favor.

Once we understand this, Rebecca's suggestion that Jacob dress in Esau's garb, bring his father Esau's venison, declare himself to be Esau is precisely what Jacob yearns to do and who Jacob yearns to be: he wants to be Esau. The birthright is almost secondary, it serves as the tangible expression of the paternal love he so lacks but which he so desires. Of course Jacob resolutely responds, "I am Esau your first-born". He is now seeking to repress his rejected, whole-hearted, studious identity and to assume a new, out-doors and aggressive Esau - like identity. No wonder he answers his father's query without batting an eyelash.

And indeed, this new Jacob out-Esau's Esau during his tenure in Laban-land. It takes two decades for him to realize that Esau is not his true self, that he must find the inner strength to re-discover and re-activate the persona that he really is, with or without paternal love and acceptance - and at that point he will exorcize the false Esau-ism from his being and emerge as Israel. But all of this is profoundly described between the words and the lives of the Biblical portions to come.

© 2006 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah warns us to cherish our relationship with Hashem and never take advantage of it. Although the Jewish people enjoy a special closeness with Hashem, they are reminded to approach Him with reverence. The prophet Malachi addressed them shortly after their return from Babylonia and admonished them for their lack of respect in the Bais Hamikdash. He said in Hashem's name, "I love you...but if I am your father where is My honor? The kohanim disgrace My name by referring to My altar with disrespect." (1:2,6) Rashi explains that the kohanim failed to appreciate their privilege of sacrificing in Hashem's sanctuary. Although they had recently returned to Eretz Yisroel and the Bais Hamikdash it did not take long for them to forget this. They quickly acclimated themselves to their sacred surroundings and viewed their sacrificial portions like ordinary meals. When there was an abundance of kohanim and each one received a small portion he responded with disrespect. (ad loc) Even the sacrificial order was treated lightly and kohanim would offer, at times, lame or sick animals displaying total disrespect to their sacred privileges.

Malachi reprimanded them for their inexcusable behavior and reminded them of the illustrious eras preceding them. The kohanim in those generations had the proper attitude towards Hashem's service and conducted themselves with true reverence. Hashem said about such kohanim, "My treaty of life and peace was with him, and I gave him (reason for) reverence. He revered Me and before My name he was humbled." (2:5) These verses particularly refer to Aharon Hakohain, the earliest High Priest to serve in the Sanctuary. They speak of a man so holy that he was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies. Yet, he always maintained true humility and displayed proper reverence when entering Hashem's private quarters. The Gaon of Vilna reveals that Aharon's relationship extended beyond that of any other High Priest. He records that Aharon was the only person in history allowed access to the Holy of Holies throughout the year, given specific sacrificial conditions. But, this privilege never yielded content and never caused Aharon to become overly comfortable in Hashem's presence.

Parenthetically, Malachi draws special attention to the stark contrast between the Jewish nation's relationship with Hashem and that of other nations. Their relationship with their Creator is one of formal respect and reverence. Malachi says in Hashem's name, "From the east to the west My name is exalted amongst the nations...But you (the Jewish people) profane it by referring to Hashem's altar with disgrace." Radak (ad loc.) explains the nations exalt Hashem's

name by recognizing Him as the supreme being and respectfully calling Him the G-d of the G-ds. (1:12) They afford Him the highest title and honor and never bring disgrace to His name. This is because they direct all their energies towards foreign powers and false deities and never approach Hashem directly. Their approach allows for formal respect and reverence resulting in Hashem's remaining exalted in their eyes. The upshot of this is because their relationship with Him is so distant that it leaves no room for familiarity or disgrace.

The Jewish people, on the other hand, enjoy a close relationship with Hashem. We are His beloved children and the focus of His eye. We are permitted to enter His sacred chamber and sense His warmth therein. This special relationship leaves room for familiarity and content, and can lead, at times, to insensitivity and disrespect. During the early years of the second Bais Hamikdash this warmth was so tangible that the kohanim lost sight of their necessary reverence and respect. This explains Malachi's message, "Hashem says, 'I love you... but where is My honor?'" The Jewish people are always entitled to His warm close relationship but are never to abuse it. Malachi therefore reminded them to be careful and maintain proper respect and reverence for the Master of the universe.

This contrast between the Jewish and gentile approach to Hashem finds its origins in their predecessors' relationship to their venerable father. The Midrash quotes the illustrious sage, Rabban Shimon Ben Gamliel bemoaning the fact that he never served his father to the same degree that the wicked Eisav served his father, Yitzchok. Rabban Shimon explained, "Eisav wore kingly robes when doing menial chores for his father, but I perform these chores in ordinary garments." (Breishis Rabba 65:12) This proclamation truly expresses Eisav's deep respect and reverence for his father. However, there is a second side to this. This week's sedra depicts their relationship as one of formality and distance. We can deduce this from the Torah's narrative of Eisav's mode of speech when addressing his father in pursuit of his coveted bracha. The Torah quotes Eisav saying, "Let my father rise and eat from the provisions of his son." (Breishis 27:31) Eisav always addressed his father like a king in a formal and distant-albeit respectful-third person. Yaakov, on the other hand, did not serve his father with such extraordinary reverence. He undoubtedly showed his father utmost respect but related to him with closeness and warmth. His association was too internal to allow for formal speech. The Torah therefore quotes Yaakov's words to his father during his bracha, "Please rise and eat from my preparations..." (27:19) Even when attempting to impersonate Eisav, Yaakov could not bring himself to speak to his father in any other tone

than warm and love. (comment of R' Avrohom ben HaRambam ad loc.)

We, the Jewish people follow the footsteps of our Patriarch Yaakov and relate to our Heavenly father with warmth and closeness rather than coldness and distance. Although Yaakov never reached Eisav's ultimate levels of reverence he showed his father true respect through love, warmth and deep appreciation. We approach Hashem in a similar manner and relate to Him with our warmth and love and deep appreciation. The nations of the world follow their predecessor and approach the Master of the universe in a very different way. They maintain their distance and relate to Him in a formal and cold- albeit respectful and reverent way.

This dimension expresses itself in our approach towards our miniature Bais Hamikdash, the synagogue. Although it is truly Hashem's home wherein His sacred presence resides a sense of warmth and love permeates its atmosphere. We, the Jewish people are privileged to feel this closeness and enjoy His warmth and acceptance. However, we must always remember Malachi's stern warning, "Hashem says, 'I love you like a father does his son, but if I am your father where is My honor?'" We must always follow in our forefather Yaakov's footsteps and maintain proper balance in our relationship with our Heavenly father. We should always approach Him out of warmth and love, yet never forget to show Him proper respect and reverence.

Our turbulent and troubling times reflect Hashem's resounding wake up call. They suggest that Hashem seeks to intensify His relationship with His people. Hashem is calling us to turn to Him and realize that all existence depends on Him. Let us respond to His call and show our loyalty to this relationship. Let us show Him our true appreciation by affording Him proper respect and reverence in his sacred abode. Let it be Hashem's will that we merit through this to intensify our relationship with Him and ultimately bring the world to the exclusive recognition of Hashem. © 2006 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI BARUCH LEFF

Kol Yaakov

If someone approached you and guaranteed that you would receive 100 million dollars if you simply follow what they asked of you, would you agree to the deal? You may be cautious because you never know what this person has in mind for you to do (something evil perhaps) or if he can really deliver.

But what if you knew with absolute clarity that this person would only ask you to carry out acts of kindness and good deeds in return for 100 million? It seems like the decision would be quite simple.

This leads us to a perplexing situation in this week's Torah portion as well as in the entire book of Genesis. G-d tells Isaac:

"Live in this land (of Israel) and I will be with you and bless you. I will give these lands to you and your children and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham, your father. I will increase your offspring like the stars in the heavens and I will give these lands to your children. All the nations of the world will bless themselves through your offspring." (Genesis 26:3-4)

Isaac (as did Abraham and Jacob) knows that G-d is talking to him. He has no doubts. When G-d wants you to know that He is talking to you, He appears in such a way that does not leave room for any reservations. G-d then promises abundant and amazing blessings to Isaac if only Isaac walks in His path.

Where is Isaac's challenge? Would it not be obvious and clear to Isaac what he is to do with his life? If everything is so simple, how would Isaac earn great rewards? Reward from G-d is based upon man exercising his free will. Isaac's free will would be quite limited once he had heard G-d himself say that he would be greatly rewarded. How could Isaac's free will continue to function? What is Isaac's test?

The solution teaches us a fundamental concept in service of G-d. But, as is often the case in Jewish learning, we must first ask a few more questions.

Pirkei Avot (1:3) states: "Be not like servants who serve their master for the sake of receiving reward. Rather, be like servants who serve their master not for the sake of receiving reward." (Some texts actually say: "for the sake not to receive reward.")

We are instructed to serve G-d for 'the sake of heaven'. Ideally we are not to concentrate on rewards that we might attain. Yet, we are supposed to know that we will receive reward for the observance of the Torah. The Talmud tells us in numerous places that the rewards mentioned in the Torah (for example, Deuteronomy 22:7 and Talmud Chullin 142a) do not refer to life in this world but to life in the next world. This itself would be a difficult intellectual tension to live with. But not only do we study Jewish texts that constantly inform us of reward, we pray for reward daily!

"May it be Your will, Hashem, our G-d and the G-d of our fathers, that we observe Your decrees in this world, and merit to live, see, and inherit goodness and blessing in the years of Messianic Times and for life in the World to Come." (Uba LeZion prayer, end of Shacharit Morning Prayers, Artscroll Siddur, p. 154)

It is one thing to demand that we try to ignore rewards while we serve G-d. But how can we be expected to ignore rewards when we are praying for them? We are supposed to concentrate intently and sincerely on our prayers! Do we mean what we pray for concerning rewards or not?

Have you ever visited your mother after being away for a long time? Your mother is thrilled to see you and she makes you a feast fit for a king. As you indulge in each course she serves, you enjoy the special home

cooked meal. But certainly part of you takes pleasure in the fact that you are giving your mother pleasure by eating her well-prepared meal. She enjoys watching you enjoy her food. And you eat, intending not only to enjoy the food, but to please your mother as well.

G-d created the world in order to give us pleasure. The most intense pleasure is in the Next World. (See the beginning of Ramchal's *Mesilas Yesharim*.) It is His desire to see us receive pleasure. Our challenge in life is to perform the Mitzvot, G-d's instructions for living, with intent to receive the reward that G-d wants us to receive. Ideally we are not to have in mind selfish reasons for observing the Torah. We are not to concentrate on our rewards for our sake. Instead, we are to think of the fact that it gives G-d satisfaction and 'nachas' to give us pleasure. Therefore, we should listen to His laws- for His sake, not ours.

There is a legend about the Baal Shem Tov (the Besht), the founder of Chassidut, which is impossible to believe.

The story goes that the Baal Shem Tov once ascended to Heaven and received certain secrets of the Torah on the condition that he would not divulge these secrets to anyone. When the Baal Shem Tov returned to this world, he found the secrets so sweet and profound that he could not resist telling his students. Soon after, a voice from Heaven was heard saying, "Baal Shem Tov has just lost his portion in the Next World!" The Baal Shem Tov could not contain his immense joy and began dancing uncontrollably because he now had the opportunity to serve G-d 'for His sake' without any thought of reward. When G-d saw the Baal Shem Tov's reaction, a heavenly voice proclaimed, "Baal Shem Tov has earned his place in the Next World again!"

The reason why we cannot accept this story as true should now be obvious. If indeed, the Baal Shem Tov had lost his portion in the Next World, that would be one of the greatest tragedies for G-d! Such a holy man, and G-d would not be able to take pleasure in rewarding him.

It is G-d's greatest pleasure to give pleasure to the righteous people of the world. The Baal Shem Tov losing his place in the Next World would certainly not be a cause for celebration! Why would the Baal Shem Tov rejoice in G-d's pain?

In terms of serving G-d for 'His sake', not for ours, this does not mean that we hope not to receive reward. The Torah is replete with indications and reminders of our reward. Rather, we have to want the reward because G-d wants us to have it, not because we want to get it.

This most difficult task, to want personal goodness for non-personal gain, is one that Patriarchs and Matriarchs can master. This was their challenge and test. Sure, they knew they would get much reward as G-d had told them. But what their intent would be

when they earn the reward was the issue they had to struggle with. Would they do it for G-d's pleasure, or their own?

This balancing act, of performing G-d's will for the purpose of pleasing G-d, and thereby earn reward but wanting the reward for G-d's sake, is our struggle as well.

Let us always try to think about helping G-d give us pleasure, allowing Him to accomplish what He truly wants for the world. He gets pleasure giving us pleasure. Let's let Him do it. ©2006 Rabbi B. Leff & aish.com

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. ©2006 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 BENJAMIN YUDIN

TorahWeb.org

The gemara (Bava Kamma 65b) cites the passuk (Vayikra 22:27), "When an ox or sheep or goat is born", to teach, "shor ben yomo karui shor-an ox immediately upon birth is called an ox". Chazal are teaching us that whatever the ox needs in the way of intelligence and self preservation has been given to it from birth. This is also the norm regarding the rest of nature. A fish immediately upon being hatched no longer recognizes its parent. Moreover, it has the radar to know which fish are friendly and are foe. It is propelled naked into cold water and survives. Similarly, a bird might need the nurturing of its mother for a month, but afterwards is completely independent. Without being taught or shown by others, it knows how to construct a home for itself. In fact, an experiment was done in which a bird was taken away from its mother prior to hatching and lo and behold, exactly the same day that the mother flew southward, so did its young. The cat needs its mother for three months.

How different is man! A young child even of five years, if left alone might well die, not yet possessing the maturity and know-how of self-preservation. Why did Hashem make the human being the exception to the rule? Man too could have been born self-sufficient like the rest of nature!

An answer is that though man is endowed with the greatest mind, intelligence and potential, he begins the journey of life weak, defenseless and completely dependent on others. As he is influenced by parents, teachers and his environment from conception, so he grows and absorbs knowledge, values, and understanding throughout his life. Man enters this world dependent upon others, and ideally never loses the recognition that there is always much to learn from others. As he grows from infancy to adolescence to maturity in a physical manner, so does he grow in his realm of understanding, until he too not only takes but also gives to others.

This is the norm. Rav Hirsch (Breishis 25:25) and the Minchas Yehuda, by Rav Yehuda Horowitz zt"l note that the name given to the first son of Yitzchak and Rivkah is Esav, which comes from "asui"-an already finished and completely made man. This name was given in response to the fact that his hair was more fully developed than that of a newborn, and similarly were his nails. The Targum Yonasan ben Uziel adds to this list that Esav was born with teeth and developed gums. That Rabbis understand that it is not just his physical demeanor that was unique, but that this was a portend of his philosophy of life, "I am complete, know it all, don't need your input and guidance." Indeed, when Esav meets his brother approximately one hundred years later (Breishis 33:9) he describes himself as "yesh li rav-

I have plenty". In sharp contrast is his brother Yaakov, the yosheiv ohalim. After being charged by his parents to go to Lavan's house and marry one of his cousins, he detours for fourteen years to the yeshiva of Shem and Ever. Yaakov is constantly growing.

Rabbeinu Bachya in Chovos Halevavos (Shaar Habechina chapter 5) draws our attention to the wisdom that Hashem displays in every facet of man's being and development. He notes that even the painful experience of teething for a baby is to teach us to learn from infants that there is no gain without pain.

It is interesting to note that while Esav was born differently, perhaps gifted, it is what he did with this phenomenon that counts. Moshe too was born differently; "she saw that he was good" (Shemos 2:2) is understood by Chazal that he was born circumcised and the home was filled with light. Moshe channeled his Divine gift towards the service of G-d and Esav allowed himself to not only be pampered and self-centered as a result of his differences, but also to rebel against man and G-d. In fact, the Ohr Hachayim (Devorim 32:1) notes that Moshe is called Ish HaElokim because he constantly worked on his character development. He was not naturally a modest man, but became the most modest man. He is endowed with the coveted title of Ish HaElokim upon blessing the very same people that challenged him personally throughout his four decades of leadership. Both Esav and Moshe had free will.

Interestingly, notes the Maharal, that while all the animals came forth from the adama, none are called Adam but man. He notes that each animal remains the same, retaining its characteristics. Similarly, if one plants wheat or an apple tree, the best one could hope for would be the growth of wheat or apple trees. Man is different. He comes from adama but is unlimited in terms of his potential.

The very growth of man is most exciting. By being the beneficiary of parents' love, teaching, and direction, a child, as is explained in mitzvah thirty-three of the Sefer HaChinuch, not only has thanksgiving to his parents, but is able to transfer this positive appreciation to Hashem.

The navi says that Hashem loves Israel-"ki na'ar Yisroel voa'haveihu"- because he is a na'ar. This is understood by Rav Yisroel Salanter to mean that just as a young man, a na'ar, is always questioning, probing, studying, and growing, so are the Jewish people. Make time to incorporate more chessed in your life. Make time for yourself and incorporate more Talmud Torah in your life. This is the way of Yaakov-a life of growth. Esav who didn't need and had it all, didn't give or grow. Yaakov who realized how much he received from others never stopped giving and growing.

© 2006 Rabbi B. Yudin and TorahWeb.org, all rights reserved

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak, Yeshivat Har Etzion

The Torah gives a simple reason for Yitzchak's positive attitude towards Eisav: "And Yitzchak loved Eisav because he brought hunted food to his mouth" [Bereishit 25:28]. But it gives no reason for Rivka's attitude: "And Rivka loved Yaacov" [ibid]. Later on, when Rivka initiated a bold plan to fool Yitzchak by Yaacov having replace Eisav, the Torah does not explain her actions. It is true that Eisav's marriage to the women of Canaan upset her, but it upset Yitzchak too (26:35). It seems likely that there was no significant difference between the reactions of Yitzchak and Rivka to Eisav's personality, but that Yitzchak wanted to give Eisav a material blessing based on a deep-felt educational approach. However, if so, why did Rivka try to fool Yitzchak?

Evidently the main thing that guided Rivka was the prophecy she heard while she was pregnant, when she went to seek out G-d: "There are two nations in your womb, and two nations will separate from your womb. One nation will be stronger than the other, and the older one will serve the younger one" [25:23]. Before they were born, Rivka knew that while her two sons would establish two separate nations, the younger one had an advantage over the older one, and the older one would later on serve the younger one. It seems that Rivka kept this prophecy to herself, since the Torah does not tell us that she ever shared it with Yitzchak.

We can thus easily understand Rivka's apprehension when she heard Yitzchak asking Eisav, his "older son," to bring him hunted prey so that he would be able to bless him before he died. Rivka understood that Yitzchak intended to bless Eisav that "other nations will serve you" [27:29]. But she knew that this was the opposite of G-d's plan, which was that in the end "the older one will serve the younger one." And this understanding is what led her to initiate her unique plan.

This idea is noted in two places in the Torah portion. In the beginning of the affair, when Rivka dressed Yaacov in Eisav's garments, the Torah gives us a hint of why she was doing it: "And Rivka took the clean clothing of Eisav, her older son, and she dressed Yaacov, her younger son" [27:15]. The different description of the two sons indicates the reason for her actions, since she knew that her older son-Yitzchak's older son-would serve the younger one, and not the other way around, as Yitzchak wanted. So Rivka put her plan into effect, and Yitzchak indeed blessed Yaacov that "nations will serve you." And then, Rivka saw that once again the prophecy that "the older one will serve the younger one" was in danger. Eisav was planning to murder Yaacov! So Rivka immediately came to Yaacov's aid, and once again the Torah hints at her motive: "And Rivka was told of the words of Eisav, her older son, so she sent for Yaacov, her younger son" [27:42]. Rivka sent Yaacov to her brother Lavan, so that instead of "losing both of you in one day" [27:45], her prophecy would be fulfilled. Each son would struggle against the other one, but in the end the older one would indeed serve the younger one.

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd Yitzchok trembled greatly” (Beraishis 27:33). "Why was Yitzchok, our father, so shaken at that moment? Because of the Day of Judgment. For when Yitzchok was going to bless Aisav, he didn't know that he was bad - as Aisav would come and ask his father whether water and salt needed to be tithed, and Yitzchok would say that if he wants to tithe water and salt, certainly he is tithing everything else! Once [Aisav's] actions became known to him, [Yitzchok] was afraid of the Day of Judgment" (Pesikta d'Rav Kahana 32). If Yitzchok hadn't realized Aisav's true nature, we can understand how he could have attempted to give him the blessings. However, there are numerous things that should have made Yitzchok aware that the promises made to him and to Avraham would be fulfilled through Ya'akov, and not Aisav, including things that should have made it obvious that Aisav was very far from being a righteous person.

We know that Avraham knew that Aisav was unworthy, as G-d had told him that not all of Yitzchok's, children will called his (Avraham's) children (see

Nedarim 31a) Additionally, Avraham was afraid to bless Yitzchok because doing so would also have to include the "poisonous" Aisav (see Rashi on 25:11). It is hard to imagine that Avraham didn't share this information with Yitzchok.

Even when Rivka was expecting, it was evident that one child was inclined to do evil while the other was inclined towards good (see Rashi on 25:22). G-d informed her that the two children will be different from the moment they are born, one being righteous and the other wicked (see Rashi on 25:23) and that "the elder will serve the younger" (25:23), i.e. Aisav will be secondary to Yaakov. It would be similarly difficult to say that Rivka never had a conversation about this with her husband.

Rashi (25:29) tells us G-d shortened Avraham's life by 5 years so that he wouldn't see his grandson's wicked ways. If Avraham couldn't be around because it would become obvious that Aisav was wicked, how could Yitzchok not have known his true nature? Didn't he see the same things Avraham would have seen if he were still alive?

Rivka and Yitzchok were distraught about Aisav's marriages (26:35) as his wives were idolaters (see Rashi on 26:35 and 27:1). It is clear that Yitzchok was well aware of the fact that his son married idol worshippers and remained with them.

When Yaakov, pretending to be Aisav, thanks G-d for helping him succeed, Yitzchok immediately becomes suspicious that it is not really Aisav. After all, Aisav never talks that way, nor is he ever as courteous as Yaakov was (see Rashi on 27:21 and 22). It sure seems that Yitzchok knew which son was the righteous one!

Tosfos (25:25) brings a midrash that says that because Aisav was so red, Yitzchok was afraid that he wouldn't survive a circumcision. Because he wasn't circumcised on the eighth day, even after realizing that Aisav was naturally red (and therefore healthy enough to be circumcised) Yitzchok decided to wait until he was 13 (the same age Yishmael was) to circumcise him. However, when he turned 13, Aisav refused. Obviously, Yitzchok knew that Aisav never had a circumcision, and couldn't be righteous.

(There are other midrashim that indicate that Aisav was circumcised (and only refused to circumcise his own sons), but we still need to explain how Yitzchok could have believed that Aisav was worthy enough to receive the blessings instead of Yaakov.)

When Avraham sent his other sons away (25:6), the commentators ask how he could have gone against the Torah's wishes of how a person's belongings are to be inherited. The Taz says that G-d must have explicitly told Avraham to do so, while others suggest that because the other sons were not from Sara (the Torah calls them "sons of the concubines"), they were not considered part of his inheritance. Since

Yitzchok was not told explicitly to exclude Aisav, and both of his sons had the same mother, this wouldn't have applied to Aisav. Yitzchok therefore thought that not only should Aisav inherit him, but (because he was the firstborn) he should receive twice as much as Yaakov. The righteousness of Aisav was not relevant to this issue, so even if Yitzchok knew he was wicked, he would have to allow Aisav to remain the firstborn heir.

Chazal tell us that Aisav did have one good quality, the extent to which he honored his father. Yitzchok knew this, and also experienced first hand his own spiritual pursuits being enhanced by the scrumptious meals that Aisav provided. He was confident that Aisav was providing kosher meals, as he even asked whether the water and salt had to be tithed before they were served. That Aisav was personally wicked, giving in to his physical desires, was known to Yitzchok. Nevertheless, he envisioned Aisav's role to be the provider that allows the righteous to concentrate on spiritual growth without having to worry about the physical necessities (see Mishnas Rebbe Aharon). The Kesav Sofer suggests that Aisav led his father to believe that he wanted that role, as the tenth he took off from his food would be given directly to Yaakov, and wanted so much to support him that he asked if he could/should give him even from things like salt and straw that are not really required to be tithed.

It seemed like a perfect solution. His eldest son could have a share in serving G-d by supporting Yaakov, and he could give Aisav a blessing to be extremely prosperous so that he could maintain that support. Rivka, however, understood that Aisav was only trying to fool his father. Sure he wanted the prosperity the blessings would bring, but he didn't really want, or intend, to support Yaakov. She therefore convinces Yaakov to take on the responsibility of the learning and the fundraising by "stealing" the blessings for prosperity. Yaakov's only hesitation is that the plan might backfire, if Yitzchok figures out who he is before giving the blessing. He is not afraid that he will find out after the blessing is given (when Aisav will surely tell him) as by that time Yitzchok will realize that this was what needed to happen.

Sure enough, Yitzchok blesses Yaakov thinking that it was Aisav, and can tell that the blessing was given to the right person. When he finds out that it wasn't Aisav, he realizes that he was mistaken. Not that he gave the blessing to the wrong person, but mistaken in believing that Aisav could (or would) take on the role as a Torah supporter. And that scares him, for two reasons. First of all, he had believed that the meals Aisav provided were helping his spiritual growth. If, however, this was not what Aisav could do, then perhaps they were having the opposite affect. "And Yitzchok trembled greatly," because he was afraid that on judgment day he would have to answer for accepting all of those meals. Could he even trust

Aisav's kashrus if his "salt and water tithe" questions weren't real questions? Secondly, he had just given the blessing to the younger son, rather than to the firstborn. This concern was soon alleviated, as Aisav admits that Yaakov bought the firstborn rights (see Yalkut Shimoni 115).

Yitzchok had to know all along that Aisav was wicked, but thought that he had a redeeming quality of being able to support Torah (his father's and his brother's). Perhaps this is what the Pesikta d'Rav Kahana meant, telling us that he believed this up until the time that it became known that the blessing was given to Yaakov, not Aisav. It then became apparent that even in this regard, Aisav was not worthy. © 2006 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

This week's parashah focuses on the life of our Patriarch Yitzchak. Like his father Avraham, Yitzchak experienced a famine. Unlike his father, Yitzchak was not permitted to leave Eretz Yisrael to avoid the famine. G-d told him (26:2-3), "Do not descend to Egypt; dwell in the land that I shall indicate to you. Sojourn in this land and I will be with you and bless you; for to you and your offspring I will give all these lands, and establish the oath that I swore to Avraham your father." Our Sages explain that Yitzchak had been set aside as a korban olah / burnt offering to Hashem. Just as no part of a korban olah may leave the Temple grounds, so Yitzchak could not leave Eretz Yisrael.

Hashem said in the quoted verse, "To you and your offspring I will give all these lands, and establish the oath that I swore to Avraham your father." R' Zvi Yehuda Kook z"l (1891-1982; rosh yeshiva of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav in Yerushalayim) notes that Yitzchak was promised not only that his descendants would inherit the land but also that this was the fulfillment of the oath that Hashem had made to Avraham. Yitzchak was the chosen one.

R' Kook notes further: Hashem said, "To you and your offspring I will give all these lands [i.e., plural]." Why not, "To you and your offspring I will give this land [i.e., singular]." This, R' Kook, explains alludes to the incredible variety of climates and sceneries that Eretz Yisrael offers. Virtually any setting that one could desire and find in another land, he could find in Eretz Yisrael as well. (Sichot Harav Zvi Yehuda) © 2006 Rabbi S. Katz & Project Genesis, Inc.

