

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

It's a haunting question. Why did Isaac love Esau? The verse says so explicitly: "Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebecca loved Jacob" (Gen. 25:28). Whichever way we read this verse, it is perplexing. If we read it literally, it suggests that Isaac's affections were governed by no more than a taste in a particular kind of food. Surely that is not the way love is earned or given in the Torah.

Rashi, citing a Midrash, suggests that the phrase translated as, "who had a taste for wild game," and referring to Isaac, in fact refers to Esau, and should be read "there was hunting in his mouth," meaning that he used to entrap and deceive his father by his words. Esau deceived Isaac into thinking that he was more pious and spiritual than in fact he was.

Bolstering this interpretation, some suggest that Isaac, having grown up in the household of Abraham and Sarah, had never encountered deception before, and was thus, in his innocence, misled by his son. Rebecca, who had grown up in the company of Laban, recognised it very well, which is why she favoured Jacob, and why she was later so opposed to Isaac's blessing going to Esau.

Yet the text suggests undeniably that there was a genuine bond of love between Esau and Isaac. The Zohar says that no one in the world honoured his father as Esau honoured Isaac. (Zohar 146b) Likewise, Isaac's love for Esau is evident in his desire to bless him. Note that Abraham did not bless Isaac. Only on his deathbed, did Jacob bless his children. Moses blessed the Israelites on the last day of his life. When Isaac sought to bless Esau, he was old and blind, but not yet on his deathbed: "I am now an old man and don't know the day of my death" (Gen. 27:2). This was an act of love.

Isaac, who loved Esau, was not deceived as to the nature of his elder son. He knew what he was and what he wasn't. He knew he was a man of the field, a hunter, mercurial in temperament, a man who could easily give way to violence, quickly aroused to anger, but equally quickly, capable of being distracted and forgetting.

He also knew that Esau was not the child to continue the covenant. That is manifest in the difference between the blessing Isaac gave Jacob in

Genesis 27 (believing him to be Esau), and the blessing in Genesis 28 that he gave Jacob, knowing him to be Jacob.

The first blessing, intended for Esau, is about wealth -- "May God give you of the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth" -- and power, "Let peoples serve you, and nations bow to you." The second blessing, intended for Jacob as he was leaving home, is about children -- "May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples" -- and a land -- "May He give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of... the land God gave to Abraham." The patriarchal blessings are not about wealth and power; they are about children and the land. So Isaac knew all along that the covenant would be continued by Jacob; he was not deceived by Esau. Why then did he love him, encourage him, wish to bless him?

The answer, I believe, lies in three extraordinary silences. The most pointed is the question, What happened to Isaac after the Binding? Look at the text in Genesis 22 and you will see that as soon as the angel has stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son, Isaac drops out of the picture completely. The text tells us that Abraham returned to the two servants who accompanied them on the way, but there is no mention of Isaac.

This is a glaring mystery, tantalising the commentators. Some go so far as to say that Isaac actually died at the Binding and was brought back to life. Ibn Ezra quotes this interpretation and dismisses it (commentary to Gen. 22:19). Shalom Spiegel's *The Last Trial* is a book-length treatment of this idea. Where was Isaac after the trial of the Binding?

The second silence is the death of Sarah. We read that Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and weep for her. But the primary mourner in Judaism is traditionally the child. It should have been Isaac leading the mourning. But he is not mentioned in the entire chapter 23 that relates to Sarah's death and its



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consequences.

The third is in the narrative in which Abraham instructed his servant to find a wife for his son. There is no record in the text that Abraham consulted with Isaac his son, or even informed him. Abraham knew that a wife was being sought for Isaac; Abraham's servant knew; but we have no idea as to whether Isaac knew, and whether he had any thoughts on the subject. Did he want to get married? Did he have any particular preference as to what his wife should be like? The text is silent. Only when the servant returns with his wife-to-be, Rebecca, does Isaac enter the narrative at all.

The text itself is significant: "Isaac had come from Be'er Lahai Roi." What was this place? We have encountered it only once before. It is where the angel appeared to Hagar when, pregnant, she fled from Sarah who was treating her harshly (Gen. 16:14). An ingenious Midrash says that when Isaac heard that Abraham had sent his servant to find a wife for him, he said to himself, "Can I live with a wife while my father lives alone? I will go and return Hagar to him." (Midrash Hagadol to Gen. 24:62) A later text tells us that "After Abraham's death, God blessed his son Isaac, who then lived near Be'er Lahai Roi" (Gen. 25:11). On this, the Midrash says that even after his father's death, Isaac lived near Hagar and treated her with respect. (Midrash Aggadah and Bereishit Rabbati ad loc)

What does all this mean? We can only speculate. But if the silences mean something, they suggest that even an arrested sacrifice still has a victim. Isaac may not have died physically, but the text seems to make him disappear, literarily, through three scenes in which his presence was central. He should have been there to greet and be greeted by the two servants on his safe return from Mount Moriah. He should have been there to mourn his departed mother Sarah. He should have been there to at least discuss, with his father and his father's servant, his future wife. Isaac did not die on the mountain, but it seems as if something in him did die, only to be revived when he married. The text tells us that Rebecca "became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death."

That seems to be the message of the silences. The significance of Be'er Lahai Roi seems to be that Isaac never forgot how Hagar and her son -- his half-

brother Ishmael -- had been sent away. The Midrash says that Isaac reunited Hagar with Abraham after Sarah's death. The biblical text tells us that Isaac and Ishmael stood together at Abraham's grave (Gen. 25:9). Somehow the divided family was reunited, seemingly at the instigation of Isaac.

If this is so, then Isaac's love for Esau is simply explained. It is as if Isaac had said: I know what Esau is. He is strong, wild, unpredictable, possibly violent. It is impossible that he should be the person entrusted with the covenant and its spiritual demands. But this is my child. I refuse to sacrifice him, as my father almost sacrificed me. I refuse to send him away, as my parents sent Hagar and Ishmael away. My love for my son is unconditional. I do not ignore who or what he is. But I will love him anyway, even if I do not love everything he does -- because that is how God loves us, unconditionally, even if He does not love everything we do. I will bless him. I will hold him close. And I believe that one day that love may make him a better person than he might otherwise have been.

In this one act of loving Esau, Isaac redeemed the pain of two of the most difficult moments in his father Abraham's life: the sending away of Hagar and Ishmael and the Binding of Isaac.

I believe that love helps heal both the lover and the loved. *Covenant and Conversation 5780 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2019 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**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." (Gen. 26:28) On what basis, and with which types of people, can we make peace treaties? A careful reading of the relationships between Abraham, Isaac and Avimelekh -- and especially a study of Parshat Toldot -- provides a significant answer to these questions, and contains a crucial message for the government of Israel in our time.

Some background: We first meet Avimelekh in Parshat 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, Avimelekh 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' [ibid. 20:5]. Abraham correctly explains: '...there is no fear of God in this place, and I would have been murdered because of my wife' [ibid. 20:11].

Despite Avimelekh's apparent duplicity as a woman-snatcher and well-stealer [ibid. 26:25], 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.

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' [ibid. 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!' [ibid. 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' [ibid. 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' [ibid. 26:16]. Isaac 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 Pikhol 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 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.

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, like us, lives in awe of God. ©2019 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Sibling rivalry is the name of the game. In fact, the entire book of Bereishis can be described as a narrative of sibling rivalry. We have Kayin and Hevel, Avraham and his nephew Lot, Yishmael and Yitzchak, Yaakov and Eisav and Yosef and his brothers. It is as though the Torah wishes to inform and impress upon us the true nature of human beings.

I often think that that is what is meant when the Torah said that the nature of human beings is bad from its onset. We are by nature competitive creatures and the competition always begins at home and with those who are closest to us. We should not think of our children as being angelic but rather deal with their true nature and recognize the pitfalls that natural sibling rivalry will always engender.

Every child is a different world and no two – even identical twins – are the same. Because of this fact of human nature, competitiveness is built into the structure of all children. It is the task of education and the home to channel this competitiveness into positive behavior and creative goals. This is what the Rabbis meant by their statement that the competitiveness between scholars and wise men is a method for increasing wisdom and understanding generally. Without competitiveness there can be very little creativity or advancement in all forms of life – technology, healthcare, finance, politics and human nature. The task is to direct this competitiveness towards positive aims and to limit it so that it does not descend into violence and tyranny.

Part of the problem with Eisav is not competitiveness but rather insecurity. He always feels his younger brother tugging at his heel and preventing him from achieving the greatness that he feels is his due. Because of this insecurity, he seeks fame and fortune in opposing the ideas and lifestyle of his own very family. He scorns his birthright because he feels

that fulfilling its demands will only inhibit him. He feels that only by being different than Yaakov can he achieve permanent respect. As all his plans crumble, he cries out in anguish to his father that he wants the blessings that Yaakov has received. He realizes that only in those blessings, which he will have to share always with Yaakov, can his destiny truly be fulfilled.

This is what Yaakov himself tells Eisav at their last meeting, which we will read about in a few weeks. Eventually Yaakov will come to the mountain of Eisav and then Eisav will be redeemed by his acceptance of Yaakov and of the moral values and tradition of his family. Throughout the books of Tanach, we find this constant struggle of insecurity versus acceptance and competitiveness versus conformity. We are uncomfortable when we see people who are different than we are. But the only way to achieve personal greatness is by realizing that our own inner security need not be weakened by competitiveness with others. ©2019 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

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 quoted by Nehama Leibowitz)

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 37:31,32)

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 realized through one's children. This may have occurred to Ya'akov as reflected in the life of his favorite son, Yosef.

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. It seems that Yosef is going out of his way to make sure his father is not deceived, making clear who was the older and who the younger son. (Genesis 48:17)

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, Yosef is the tikkun (repairing) for Ya'akov. Ya'akov had deceived his father and suffered for that misstep all of his life. Only when 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. ©2019 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 SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Parshat Toldot tells the story of Rivka bearing twins, Esav and Yakov, and how Esav was drawn to brothels when she walked them, and Yakov was drawn to study halls when she walked by those (25:22). Considering the Midrash that babies learn the entire Torah inside the womb (and forget it once born), Rav Chaim Shmulevitz asks why Yakov would want to leave his situation to enter a study hall.

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz explains that while in utero Yakov was able to learn Torah, he was still missing the effort and challenges associated with gaining that knowledge. It is natural for us to appreciate challenges once we overcome them, but adopting this attitude will help us embrace life's hurdles and enjoy the process of overcoming them. © 2019 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ Z"L

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states, "And Yitzhak called Ya'akov, and blessed him, and commanded him saying, 'You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan'" (Genesis 28:1). What is the connection between Yitzhak blessing his son and then admonishing him?

The Chofetz Chaim, Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan, a great rabbi of the last generation, commented that we learn from here the most effective manner in which to reproach someone. Show that you truly care about his welfare; he will more readily listen to your reprimand.

Often people who mean well give reproof in a harsh manner or by yelling -- particularly if the recipient is one's own child. Every person wants to do the right thing. If we can focus on our love for the other person, our desire to genuinely help and our knowledge that the other person wants to be good, then we can speak softly and give admonition that will be heard. *Dvar Torah Based on Love Your Neighbor by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin © 2019 Rabbi K. Packouz z"l*

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"**A**nd the shepherds of Garar fought with the shepherds of Yitzchak saying, "The water is ours!"..." (Beraishis 26:20) When Avraham dug wells, the Plishtim were jealous of him and stuffed up the wells. Instead of stealing them and taking them for themselves, they filled them in so no one could have them; hence Yitzchak had to dig them anew.

When Yitzchak dug the first well, the shepherds fought over it saying the water was theirs. This was quite preposterous as Yitzchak dug a well and found a spring of water. The Plishtim argued that the spring was fed by the valley they owned so the water in his well was theirs. Yitzchak said nothing and moved on. He dug another well and they fought over that one too. Finally, he moved a distance away and dug another well. This time they left him alone.

Hashem praised this behavior to Moshe. The Gemara in Sanhedrin (111a) says that He lamented, "Woe for those who were lost but not forgotten. Avraham was told the land would be his but he had to purchase land to bury Sarah. I told Yitzchak to dwell in the land [and not go to Egypt] and I will be with you and bless you. His servants couldn't even get a drink of water before a fight broke out over it, and yet Yitzchak never questioned Me."

What is the essence of this ability to accept what Hashem sends our way without questioning it? If we contrast Yitzchak's behavior to the shepherds, we can gain insight into what Hashem loved so much.

They saw Yitzchak experiencing good fortune. They couldn't take it. They clamored that he was taking what rightly theirs. This jealousy stems from 'tzarus ayin,' a stingy or jaundiced eye. The Ben Ish Chai writes that they themselves knew this was an ignoble character trait.

Originally, he says, the shepherds all got along. It would be unseemly for them to be unhappy at someone else's good fortune so they instigated a fight with the shepherds of Yitzchak to hide their stinginess. This is alluded to by the posuk's use of the word

'laimor,' to say. The purpose of the fight was to be able to have a reason to complain about his good fortune without admitting their own shortcomings!

The Avos had no jealousy of anyone because, as Avraham said, "I lift my hands to Hashem." Everything they had came from Hashem as did all that anyone else had. The idea that someone else could take from you as the shepherds claimed was preposterous to Yitzchak which is why he simply moved on to the next well.

The equilibrium of the Avos came from concrete faith and confidence in the Al-mighty as the doer of all (see Rambam's Ani Maamins #1.) Being able to put that confidence into such practice that one does not even question or believe that anything is outside of Hashem's plan is the attribute Hashem appreciated so much and wants us to emulate.

A printer had an established long-time business in a town in Eretz Yisrael. One day, a young fellow opened up a new printing business not too far away. The established printer's family was outraged. "How dare he come in and try to take away the business?!" and tried to force him out.

The old printer, however, did not do so and he was not upset. Instead, he invited the new competitor over and shared with him insights into that community and taught him the tricks of the trade. The older man's family was dumbfounded.

"Why should I not teach him the business?" he asked. "My livelihood doesn't come from my work, but from HaShem. If this fellow takes half my work, I will still make my destined portion, but with less effort. Should I not then gladly teach him what I know?" © 2019 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Voice Discernment

Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

The voices of both Yaakov and Esav were different and distinct yet Yitzchak was unable to discern the difference between the two. According to Nachmanides (the Ramban) Jacob actually changed his voice so that he would sound like his brother. Thus many of our sages conclude that one may not bear witness against one's neighbor based only on the sound of their voice. This applies as well if one heard a husband give instructions to write a bill of divorce to his wife because the testimony is based on the voice of the husband which is difficult to rely upon. The Torah specifically states "and he is a witness for he saw or Knew" which includes only instances of seeing or knowing- having seen with one's own eyes and not hearing. For this reason as well a blind person's testimony is excluded.

However according to the Rambam we can infer that only a blind person would be excluded as a

witness because of a specific heavenly decree, (gezeirat hakatuv). But someone else may bear witness based on their discernment of a voice. Thus we may carry out the death penalty for someone who curses G-d (mekallel) or one who influences people to idle worship, (Maycit) based on hearing their words. Anyone therefore, is permitted to be with their wife when it is dark based on his discerning of her voice.

There are still other sages however, that do not accept one's voice, when there are other considerations at stake. A story is told of a man who returned to his town after many years of absence and was identified based on his voice though his appearance had changed drastically. He then died and some of the sages did not allow his wife to remarry because his only identification was his voice because his appearance had changed so much. On the other hand there were those who permitted it because it is logical that a person's appearance would change over the years and thus the recognition of his voice would be sufficient for his wife to remarry.

Given the above, that one's voice can be used to identify someone, how was Yaakov able to change his voice so that it appeared as the voice of his brother Esav?

To this the Marcheshet answers that Yaakov was successful in changing his voice for he was the brother of Esav. Hence one might conclude that if we would allow a woman whose husband had died to remarry and the only proof of his identification prior was from his voice, we would need to verify as well that the voice was not the voice of his brother. ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

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 Paretzky, a Vice Chairman of the GNYC Jewish Committee on scouting, was the kosher food liaison to the jamboree. Special food was ordered from O'Fisheh 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 Paretzky 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. Paretzky agreed to accommodate the neophyte kosherphile, but a skeptic approached him. "Mike," he said, "why are you wasting your kosher food on this fellow? He is not going to eat kosher after this is over, and he observes absolutely nothing! Why waste the food on him?"

Mike answered with an amazing story of the Chofetz Chaim. When Russian soldiers entered the town of Radin, Jewish townfolk prepared kosher meals for the Jewish soldiers in the Czar's army. Soon their acts of charity seemed to fly in their face as they saw the soldiers devour the food and then stand on line to receive the forbidden Russian rations.

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

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

The wayward son, Esav is at first told by his father that there are no blessings. But he cries bitterly

and cannot fathom that fact. "Is there nothing left?" He asks. It cannot be. And he was right. There is always some blessing left to be found. No matter how far one has strayed, no matter how bleak a situation looks. There is always blessing. We must pursue it, even cry for it, and when we receive the tiniest blessing it may seem trivial, even fleeting, but it is with us for eternity.
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RABBI ZVI SOBOLOFSKY

TorahWeb

Avraham is described in Parshas Toldos (26:5) as one who observed the Torah of Hashem. Chazal (Kiddushin 82a) explains that this passuk is teaching us that Avraham observed the entire Torah even before it was given. The Ramban in his commentary on this passuk elaborates on this statement of Chazal. Yaakov also observed the mitzvos prior to them being given but only did so in Eretz Yisroel. This was the justification for Yaakov marrying two sisters, and as such Rachel actually died as he returned to Eretz Yisroel. The Ramban adds that although mitzvos are binding outside of Eretz Yisroel, the primary place for mitzvah observance is in Eretz Yisroel. Thus, the voluntary observance of the avos was limited to when they were present in Eretz Yisroel.

This premise of the Ramban, that there is a fundamental distinction between mitzvos performed in Eretz Yisroel and those performed outside of Eretz Yisroel, appears difficult to understand. Agricultural mitzvos such as terumah, ma'asros, and shemita are linked to the land and do not apply in Chutz La'aretz. Mitzvos which are chovas haguf, those performed with one's body, have to be observed outside of Eretz Yisroel and yet the Ramban understands them to be on a higher level if done in Eretz Yisroel. Why should mitzvos which are not connected to the agriculture of Eretz Yisroel still take on an additional dimension when done in Eretz Yisroel?

Chazal (Keilim, chapter 1) delineate the ten level of geographic kedusha that exists in the world. The place with the most intense kedusha is the Kodosh haKodoshim. Different areas of the Beis Hamikdash and Yerushalayim are each endowed with various degrees of kedusha. The tenth and final area mentioned is Eretz Yisroel. Each area has its own halachos that differentiates it from the other areas. The kedusha of Eretz Yisroel which separates it from the rest of the world is the fact that the korbanos of the omer and the shte'i halechem offered on Pesach and Shavuos can only be brought from grain that was grown in Eretz Yisroel. Rather than the obvious halachik distinctions between Eretz Yisroel and Chutz La'aretz such as terumah, ma'asros, and shemita, why do Chazal highlight the halachos that are related to korbanos?

The mefarshim explain that the theme of these

mishnayos which differentiates between different levels of kedusha is the gradations of kedusha emanating from the Beis Hamikdash. Beginning with the Kodosh haKodoshim and ending with Eretz Yisroel, there are ten levels of kedushas ha'aretz. It would be irrelevant for the mishna to highlight the agricultural mitzvos that apply only in Eretz Yisroel as the mishna is not focusing on those distinctions. The omer and the shte'i halechem are korbanos that must come from an area endowed to some degree with kedushas ha'aretz. Eretz Yisroel has sufficient kedushas ha'aretz to enable these korbanos to be brought from grain grown in its borders.

Eretz Yisroel is distinct from Chutz La'aretz in two ways. It is agriculturally different which results in a practical difference concerning mitzvos pertaining to the land and it is also different in that it has kedushas ha'aretz which Chutz La'aretz does not. It is this second dimension of Eretz Yisroel that results in its unique status concerning all mitzvos. The primary location for the performance of all mitzvos is in the Beis Hamikdash, the place dedicated for avodas Hashem. The outermost precincts of the Beis Hamikdash end at the borders of Eretz Yisroel. Thus, the entire land is the primary location for mitzvah observance. Although the Torah clearly obligates us to fulfill mitzvos even in Chutz La'aretz, the Ramban understands this to mean that these mitzvos are still not at the level of mitzvos performed in Eretz Yisroel.

The avos who volunteered mitzvah observance only did so in Eretz Yisroel where the highest level of fulfillment of the mitzvos could be achieved.

This aspect of Eretz Yisroel as an extension of kedushas ha'aretz explains another halacha that does not apply in Chutz La'aretz. Chazal teach us that the declaration of Rosh Chodesh must be done by a beis din in Eretz Yisroel. The Rambam elaborates upon this theme by applying this even to our observance of Rosh Chodesh today. In the absence of the process of witnesses testifying that they saw the new moon and the subsequent declaration of Rosh Chodesh by beis din, Rosh Chodesh today is "declared" by the Jewish people observing it as Rosh Chodesh. The Rambam states that it is this observance-declaration of the Jewish community in Eretz Yisroel that determines the day of Rosh Chodesh which establishes Rosh Chodesh worldwide. Why is Eretz Yisroel so central to the observance of Rosh Chodesh, given that Rosh Chodesh has nothing to do with the agricultural uniqueness of Eretz Yisroel?

The declaration of Rosh Chodesh emanates from the Beis Hamikdash, as all Torah ultimately comes from the Beis Hamikdash which housed the aron and was the seat of the Sanhedrin. From Eretz Yisroel, the outermost area endowed with kedushas ha'aretz, goes forth the declaration of Rosh Chodesh. Whether by the formal announcement of beis din or the observance of the people, the new moon is sanctified in Eretz Yisroel.

As we are about to observe Rosh Chodesh this coming week, we turn to Eretz Yisroel and realize its centrality in our lives. From the days of the avos until today, Eretz Yisroel remains the primary location for mitzvah observance. Even as we follow the commandment of the Torah to continue performing mitzvos in Chutz La'aretz, we look forward to the day when mitzvos will be performed in their complete glory in Eretz Yisroel blessed with the Beis Hamikdash rebuilt in its midst.
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RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

What would you think if you saw a luxury car being offered for sale for a ridiculously low price? You would undoubtedly wonder what was wrong with it. The price a seller demands reflects his opinion of the object he is selling. It would take a large sum to make him part with a cherished possession. As for his children, who are more precious than anything else in the world, he would not sell them for any sum at all. But something he holds in low regard he would give away for a pittance.

In this week's Torah portion, we encounter the struggle over the firstborn birthright of Israel between Esau and Jacob, Isaac's two sons. As it turns out, it is not much of a struggle. This firstborn birthright signifies the privilege of becoming the chosen people of Hashem, and Esau, being the older of the two sons, holds first claim to it. It is Jacob, however, who yearns for this birthright with all his heart. One day, Esau returns from his exertions in the field thoroughly famished, and he agrees to sell the birthright to Jacob for a bowl of red lentil soup. And so, the Torah concludes, Esau ate, drank, rose and left, having disgraced the birthright.

Let us think for a moment. At which point did Esau disgrace the birthright? When he actually ate the soup or when he agreed to sell the birthright for a bowl of soup? It would seem that as soon as he agreed to give it away for a pittance he had already shown his utter contempt for the spiritual birthright of Israel. Why then does the Torah accuse him of disgracing the birthright only after he ate, drank, rose and left?

Our Sages explain that Esau might have been so famished that his behavior could be excused. It is quite possible that his discomfiture caused him to lose his sense of proportion momentarily and agree to sell his birthright for a bowl of soup. Perhaps he was not thinking clearly at the time and agreed to do something on the spur of the moment that went against his better judgment.

But if so, what happened later when his hunger was sated and his thirst assuaged? Did he protest that his agreement had been made under duress and that the transaction was null and void? Did he rant and rage at what Jacob had done to him?

Not at all. He just gulped down the soup, stood up and stomped out. This was when he demonstrated his disdain for the birthright. Had he shown any regret he would have defined himself as an upright person, but he didn't. Therefore, the Torah records this moment for posterity as the act of contempt for the birthright.

A rich man once visited the town's poorest man late one night.

"Listen, my good fellow," said the rich man. "You know I have everything a person could possibly want. I have estates and carriages and the finest horses. But one thing I do not have is a child. Your situation is the exact opposite of mine. You live in this little hovel and you cannot even put a few crusts of bread on the table. But you do have children. Ten of them." The rich man paused.

The poor man looked at the rich man curiously. "So what is the point?"

"I want to propose a deal," said the rich man. "You give me one of your ten children, and I will give you one tenth of everything I possess. What do you say?"

The poor man was taken aback. He stood up and looked at the faces of his sleeping family behind the partition. Which child could he give away? This one? Surely not. That one? Impossible. And thus he looked at the faces of all his children and finally decided he could give none of them away. He had no choice but to reject the rich man's offer.

The next day, overcome with remorse for even having considered the arrangement, he poured his heart out to his wife.

"Do not tear yourself down," she told him. "It was the pressure of our poverty that drove you to think about it. But when it came right down to it, you couldn't do it. You are a good man."

In our own lives, we all know full well how we are driven by impulse, by the spur of the beguiling moment. But what do we do when the moment passes? Do we listen to that little voice of guilt that Hashem has so kindly implanted deep in our brains, showing ourselves to be essentially good people? Or do we plunge on ahead, heedless and thoughtless, the helpless captives of our impulses? It is this moment, when we have had the chance to pause and reflect, that truly defines who we are and what we are worth. ©2007
Rabbi N. Reich

