

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l**

### Covenant & Conversation

It is the deep, reverberating question at the heart of Toledot. Why did Rebecca tell Jacob to deceive Isaac and take Esau's blessing? Her instruction is brisk and peremptory: "Now, my son, listen carefully and do what I tell you: Go now to the flock and bring me two choice young goats, so I can prepare some tasty food for your father, just the way he likes it. Then take it to your father to eat, so that he may give you his blessing before he dies." (Gen. 27:8-10)

Rebecca's reaction was extraordinary. Although the situation had only just arisen—she could not have known in advance that Isaac was about to bless Esau, or that he would request some venison first—yet her plan was immediate, detailed and complete. She had no doubts or hesitations. She was determined to seize the moment. When Jacob raised concerns—What if Isaac is not deceived? What if he touches my skin and knows immediately that I am not Esau? -- her reply is brief and blunt. "My son, let the curse fall on me. Just do what I say; go and get them for me" (27:13).

Our question tends to be: how could Jacob deceive his father? Yet the real question is about Rebecca. It was her plan, not his. How did she consider it permissible [1] to deceive her husband, [2] to deprive Esau of his father's blessing, and [3] to order Jacob to commit an act of dishonesty? Jacob on his own would not have conceived such a plan. He was an *ish tam*, meaning "a simple, straightforward, plain, quiet, innocent man, a man of integrity" (25:27)? How then did Rebecca come to do what she did?

There are three possible answers. The first: she loved Jacob (25:28). She preferred him to Esau. She knew Isaac felt otherwise. So she was driven by maternal instinct. She wanted her beloved son to be blessed.

This is an unlikely answer. The patriarchs and matriarchs are role models. They were not driven by mere instinct or vicarious ambition. Rebecca was not Lady Macbeth. Nor was she Bat-sheva, engaging in court politics to ensure that her son, Solomon, would inherit David's throne (see 1 Kings 1). It would be a serious misreading to read the narrative this way.

The second possibility is that she believed strongly that Esau was the wrong person to inherit the blessing. She had already seen how readily he had sold

his birthright and "despised" it (25:31-34). She did not believe a "hunter" and "a man of the field" fitted the template of the Abrahamic covenant. She knew that this was one of the reasons why God chose Isaac not Ishmael, because Ishmael was destined to be "a wild ass of a man" (16:12). She knew that Isaac loved Esau but felt—for various reasons, depending on which commentary one follows—that he was blind to his faults. It was vital to the future of the covenant that it be entrusted to the child who had the right qualities to live by its high demands.

The third possibility is simply that she was guided by the oracle she had received prior to the twins' birth: "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" (25:23). Jacob was the younger. Therefore, Rebecca must have assumed, he was destined to receive the blessing.

Possibilities two and three make sense, but only at the cost of raising a more fundamental question. Did Rebecca share her thoughts with Isaac? If she did, then why did Isaac persist in seeking to bless Esau? If she did not, then why not?

It is here that we must turn to a fundamental insight of the Netziv (R. Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin, 1816-1893). What is fascinating is that Netziv makes his comment, not on this week's parsha, but on last week's—the first time Rebecca set eyes on her husband-to-be. Recall that Isaac did not choose his wife. Abraham entrusted that task to his servant. Servant and bride-to-be are travelling back by camel, and as they approach Abraham's tents, Rebecca sees a figure in the distance:

"Now Isaac had come from Beer Lahai Roi, for he was living in the Negev. He went out to the field one evening to meditate, and as he looked up, he saw camels approaching. Rebekah also looked up and saw Isaac. She got down from her camel and asked the servant, 'Who is that man in the field coming to meet us?' 'He is my master,' the servant answered. So she took her veil and covered herself." (24:62-65)

On this Netziv comments, "She covered herself out of awe and a sense of inadequacy as if she felt she was unworthy to be his wife, and from then on this trepidation was fixed in her mind. Her relationship with Isaac was not the same as that between Sarah and Abraham or Rachel and Jacob. When they had a

problem they were not afraid to speak about it. Not so with Rebecca" (Commentary to Gen. 24:65).

Netziv understood that in this description of the first encounter between Rebekah and Isaac, nothing is incidental. The text emphasizes distance in every sense. Isaac is physically far away when Rebekah spots him. He is also mentally far away: meditating, deep in thought and prayer. Rebekah imposes her own distance by covering herself with a veil.

The distance goes deeper still. Isaac is the most withdrawn of the patriarchs. Rarely do we see him as the initiator of a course of action. The events of his life seem to mirror those of his father. The Torah associates him with pachad, "fear" (Gen. 31:42). Jewish mysticism connected him with gevurah, best understood as "self-restraint." This is the man who had been bound as a sacrifice on an altar, whose life had been reprieved only at the last moment. Isaac, whether because of the trauma of that moment or because of the inhibiting effect of having a strong father, is a man whose emotions often lie too deep for words.

No wonder, then, that he loves Rebekah on the one hand, Esau on the other. What these two very different people have in common is that they so unlike him. They are both brisk and action-oriented. Their "native hue of resolution" is not "sicklied o'er by the pale cast of thought." No wonder, too, that Rebekah hesitates before speaking to him.

Just before the episode of the blessing, another scene takes place, apparently unrelated to what follows. There is a famine in the land. Isaac and Rebekah are forced into temporary exile as Abraham and Sarah had been twice before. On God's instructions, they go to Gerar. There, just as Abraham had done, Isaac passes off his wife as his sister, afraid that he might be killed so that his wife could be taken into the royal harem. Something happens, however, to disclose the truth: "When Isaac had been there a long time, Abimelekh king of the Philistines looked down from a window and saw Isaac caressing [metzachek] his wife Rebekah." [26:8]

We tend to miss the significance of this scene. It is the only one in which Isaac is the subject of the verb tz-ch-k. Yet this is the root of Isaac's name, Yitzchak, meaning "he will laugh." It is the one scene of intimacy between Isaac and Rebekah. It is the only episode in which Isaac, as it were, is true to his name. Yet it nearly brings disaster. Abimelekh is furious that Isaac has been economical with the truth. It is the first of a series of disputes with the Philistines.

Did this reinforce Isaac's belief that he could never relax? Did it confirm Rebekah's belief that she could never be fully intimate with her husband? Perhaps so, perhaps not. But Netziv's point remains. Rebekah felt unable to share with Isaac the oracle she had received before the twins' birth and the doubts she had about Esau's suitability for the blessing. Her inability to communicate led to the deception, which brought a

whole series of tragedies in its wake, among them the fact that Jacob was forced to flee for his life, as well as the counter-deception perpetrated against him by his father-in-law Laban.

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the Torah is telling us that communication is vital, however hard it is. Rebekah acts at all times out of the highest of motives. She holds back from troubling Isaac out of respect for his inwardness and privacy. She does not want to disillusion him about Esau, the son he loves. She does not want to trouble him with her oracle, suggesting as it did that the two boys would be locked into a lifelong struggle. Yet the alternative-deception-is worse.

We have here a story of the tragedy of good intentions. Honesty and openness are at the heart of strong relationships. Whatever our fears and trepidations, it is better to speak the truth than practice even the most noble deception. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly sponsored by the Schimmel Family in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel zt"l © 2024 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust rabbisacks.org*

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

“**A**nd Rebecca spoke to her son Jacob, saying...And now, my son, obey my voice according to which I command you...” (Genesis 27:5, 7) One of the many glories of the Bible is that it recognizes the complex personality especially of great individuals, and the fact that strength and weakness, virtue and vice, can sometimes both reside in the very same soul. Even more significantly, that which may superficially appear to be dishonest – an act of deception – may very well provide the necessary ingredient which ultimately creates grandeur. It is this understanding which supplies the real motivation for what appears to be Rebecca's deception according to the profound interpretations of the Malbim and Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch.

The most obvious question which strikes us, as we read the Torah portion, is why Rebecca had to deceive her husband by dressing her younger son Jacob in the garb and in the skins of her older son Esau? Why could she not merely have explained to her husband that Esau, although he was the elder brother, was simply not worthy of the birthright? From a textual perspective, this doesn't seem to have been a difficult task at all. After all, right before Isaac summons Esau requesting venison meat as the hors d'oeuvre of the blessing, the Bible specifically records that Esau had committed the one great sin of the patriarchal period: he married two Hittite women, which was 'a bitterness of spirit to Isaac and to Rebecca' (Genesis 26:35).

Moreover, Rebecca could certainly have argued that the son who had been willing to sell his birthright to Jacob for a mere bowl of lentil soup, could not possibly be worthy of the mantle of Abrahamic leadership.

Furthermore, Rebecca had heard from the Almighty that 'the elder son would serve the younger' (Genesis 25:23) during her frighteningly difficult pregnancy. So why didn't she make her convincing case to her husband after coffee one evening rather than resort to an act of trickery?

Malbim suggests that indeed such a conversation between husband and wife did take place. And after Rebecca marshalled her arguments, Isaac then explained to his wife that he was as aware of Esau's shortcomings as she was. In fact, he understood that the spiritual blessing of family leadership, the blessing of Abraham which we know as the birthright, must certainly go to Jacob; indeed when Jacob is later forced by the wrath of his deceived brother Esau to leave his home and go into exile with Laban, after his father warns him not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan, he is blessed with the messianic dream of becoming a congregation of nations and he is given the blessing of Abraham, to inherit the land of Israel [Gen. 28:3, 4]. But, argues Isaac, he must make a split between the birthright of spiritual leadership which rightfully belongs to Jacob and the physical blessing of material prosperity and political domination which he has decided to give to Esau: "May the Lord give you from the dew of the heavens and the fat [oil] of the land and much grain and wine... Be the political master over your brother and may the daughters of your mother bow down to you." (Genesis 27:28-29)

The more spiritual brother must receive the religious-spiritual birthright (bekhora) and the more physical brother must receive the material-political blessing (berakha). After all, argues Isaac, the bookish, naive, and spiritual Jacob (ish tam, yoshev ohalim) would not begin to know how to maneuver in an economically driven, militaristically guided society. Give Esau the oil and the sword; give Jacob the books and the Temple.

Rebecca strongly disagrees. She understands that the world at large and the human nature of individuals dare not be so simplistically divided between the spiritual and the material, God and Caesar. If religious leadership is to emerge supreme, it requires the infrastructure of economic stability; in an imperfect world of aggression and duplicity, even leading spiritual personalities must sometimes reluctantly wage war against evil in order for the good to triumph. Rebecca understands the world of reality; after all, she comes from the house of Laban and Bethuel, two masters of deceit and treachery.

It is fascinating that, in the next generation, Jacob's wife, Rachel, alongside her great spiritual gifts of kindness and humility (remember that she gave the secret signs to her sister under the nuptial canopy in order not to embarrass Leah), also had the practical ability to steal the household gods. In the ancient world of Mari and Nuzu – ancient peoples contemporaneous

with the patriarchs – these gods belonged to the inheritor of the birthright. When Rachel stole the gods she was securing her husband's rights, because after all it was Jacob who was responsible for Laban's material success. She also knew how to cover up her actions when her father began his search. It is no accident that her son Joseph rises to greatness not only because of his great moral qualities but also because of his practical wisdom and his ability to take advantage of every situation.

We should also remember that the King Messiah, the progenitor of whom is King David, is both the sweet singer of songs with a voice of Jacob as well as the great warrior of Israel with hands of Esau. Indeed, when Samuel the prophet anoints David, the young shepherd-singer is described as 'a red-faced man (admoni) with beautiful eyes and goodly appearance' [I Sam. 16:12]. Edom is also another name for Esau, who was also born an admoni (ruddy-complexioned) and who ate the red lentil pottage. King David's strength as well as his weakness apparently was derived from that aspect of Esau which was part of his personality. Every Jacob must learn to utilize, tame and ultimately sanctify the necessary hands of Esau, without which it is impossible to triumph.

But the profound complexity of our Torah continues its lessons. Yes, Jacob justifiably received both blessing and birthright (berakha and bekhora) from his father, but we cannot – and he cannot – forget that this occurred as a result of his act of deception. Jacob, therefore, has to pay a heavy price. He must flee from his parents' home in order to escape Esau's wrath, and is thrust into exile with the treacherous Laban.

And in addition to all of the problems faced by someone on the run, Jacob has the added dilemma of looking at himself in the mirror. His deception was orchestrated by his mother, perhaps even ordained by God, but, nonetheless, something inside him has been forever tainted. This feeling of guilt never leaves him. Twenty years later, when Jacob is about to return to his birthplace as a mature older man – as a husband and a father – he realizes that unfinished business between Esau and himself still remains.

Conscience-stricken, he acts totally subservient and obsequious, beseeching his brother, 'kah na et birkhati' (Genesis 33:11) which literally means 'take my blessing,' as he hands over a large portion of his material acquisitions. After all these years, Jacob wishes to make amends by returning the very blessings he undeservedly had received from his father. 'And one must restore the stolen object which one has taken' (Leviticus 5:23), demands biblical morality.

But Jacob even goes one step further. He is so remorseful about his youthful act of deception that when presenting his final will and testament to his children, Jacob himself acts according to his father's intention. He grants Judah the spiritual blessings of the nation's

leadership, and to the sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Menashe – the physical blessings, the double portion of the bechorah, the fat of the land, physical increase, material prosperity.

However, perhaps children are generally doomed to repeat the mistakes of their parents. What Jacob does is certainly understandable: in his search for forgiveness, he feels he must return to his father's original place and reject his mother's vision of unity. But in principle, Rebecca was right. This split of the blessing and birthright between Judah and Ephraim planted the seeds of division in the Jewish people, between Judah's concentration on religion and the Holy Temple, and Ephraim's celebration of luxury and lawlessness. However, Rebecca dreamt of a different world of unity, where Torah and technology, yeshiva and military service, could dwell together. © 2024 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**R**ashi, 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. © 2024 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

#### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

### **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**S**omething naive, almost simplistic, about our patriarch Isaac jumps out of the Genesis narrative. In virtually every chapter that describes his life, he is portrayed as reserved, nonaggressive, and passive.

Soon after Isaac is weaned, the Torah describes Sarah as seeing Ishmael metzachek. It seems that, in response to what she saw, Sarah demands that Ishmael be driven out (Genesis 21:8–10). Is it possible that metzachek means mock? That is, Ishmael may have seen something different about Isaac and therefore ridiculed or laughed at him.

In the next chapter, in the story of the Akeidah (the Binding of Isaac), Isaac is portrayed as dependent. He goes to Moriah to be slaughtered without persistent argument. He seems to agree with everything he's asked to do, no matter the consequences.

Later, we learn about the burial of Sarah (Genesis 23), a scene from which Isaac is glaringly absent. It's almost as if Abraham wants to spare Isaac, Sarah's only son, the grief of burying his mother.

The pattern of Isaac's passivity continues in Genesis 24, where a wife is chosen for Isaac without his input. The text notes that Rebecca is startled when she first sees Isaac, to the point that she falls off her camel (24:64). Perhaps something surprised her about his appearance. In the end, they marry, and Rebecca comforts Isaac because she reminds him of his mother Sarah (24:67). Once again, Isaac is depicted as one for whom key decisions are made and one who felt especially attached to his mother.

In Genesis 26, Isaac digs wells. The Torah notes that they were the ones originally dug by his father

(26:18). On the face of it, Isaac lacks initiative, succeeding in a business his father developed.

Finally, in Genesis 27, Isaac is deceived. Jacob fools him as he takes Esau's blessings.

The upshot is that Isaac is easy to deceive, is spared grief, is compliant and is even mocked. A common thread weaves itself through each of these characteristics: they are often found in those who have Down syndrome.

It should also be pointed out that aged parents are more vulnerable to having a child with Down syndrome, and Abraham and Sarah were elderly when Isaac was born.

There is no evidence whatsoever from the biblical text or from our classical commentators to suggest that Isaac had Down syndrome. Indeed, each of the events in Isaac's life described above can be understood differently.

Still, one wonders why the Torah presents Isaac such that some of his characteristics can be associated with Down syndrome. Perhaps it aims to teach that those with Down syndrome and others who are differently abled possess the image of God and have the ability to spiritually soar, to spiritually inspire, and yes, even to lead. Far from being limited, those who face physical and mental challenges are our teachers. They remind us that everyone has the potential to reach the highest of heights. ©2024 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

## ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

### Voice Identification

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

**T**he 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*

## RABBI DAVID LEVIN

### Two Different Instructions

**P**arashat Toldot tells the story of the twins, Ya'akov and Eisav, from their birth until the time that Ya'akov left his family and went to Lavan. They could not have remained together as Eisav planned to kill Ya'akov for stealing his blessing from their father, Yitzchak. In past years we have examined the blessings, and this year we will examine the instructions given to both sons before the blessings were to be given. The instructions to Eisav came from Yitzchak, and the instructions to Ya'akov came from Rivka. The instructions were different, designed especially for each son.

Concerning the instructions to Eisav, the Torah tells us, "And it was when Yitzchak became old, and his eyes dimmed from seeing, that he summoned Eisav, his older son, and said to him, 'My son.' And he said to him, 'Here I am.' And he said, 'See now, I have aged: I know not the day of my death. Now sharpen, if you please, your gear – your sword and your bow – and go out to the field and catch game for me. Then make delicacies for me such as I love and bring it to me and I will eat, so that my soul may bless you before I die.'"

Concerning the instructions given to Ya'akov, the Torah tells us, "But Rivka had said to Ya'akov, her son, saying, 'Behold I heard your father speaking to your

brother, Eisav, saying, 'Bring me some game and make me delicacies and I will eat, and I will bless you before Hashem, prior to my death.' So now, my son, heed my voice to that which I command you. Go now to the flock and fetch for me from there two choice young goats, and I will make delicacies for your father, as he loves. Then you will bring it to your father, and he shall eat, so that he may bless you before his death."

The Ramban explains that, "It was Yitzchak's intent to bless Eisav, that he merit the blessing of Avraham to inherit the land and to become the one with whom Hashem would make the covenant since he was the firstborn." HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin mentions that it was unusual for Yitzchak to call Eisav "his older son," as Yitzchak did not use the word, "bachor, firstborn." He explains that for this righteous man, no false word could come out from his lips. The Ramban explains that Rivka had not told Yitzchak that Hashem had given her the prophecy that "the elder shall serve the younger," when Rivka went to Hashem to understand why she was having so much difficulty with her pregnancy. She did not ask Yitzchak's permission for this meeting with Hashem, so she was afraid to tell Yitzchak what Hashem had told her. The Ramban suggests that Rivka believed that Yitzchak's love for Eisav would cause him to withhold the blessing that he should have given to Ya'akov, and instead he would not bless either son and leave everything to the Will of Hashem. Rivka knew that it was important for Ya'akov to receive the blessing directly from the mouth of Yitzchak. That is why she interfered with the blessing that Yitzchak would give.

The Midrash explains that the command to Eisav to sharpen his weapons was not intended for the bow and arrow but instead for the slaughtering knife, as the animal to be slaughtered was the Pesach sacrifice on the eve of Pesach. The Sifsei Chachomim explains that the reason that Eisav was so delayed was that he had to be careful when he hunted not to damage the animal and render it improper for slaughtering.

Yitzchak requested delicacies before he blessed Eisav. HaRav Sorotzkin commented that this was not true of Ya'akov or Moshe when they blessed the tribes. The Midrash explains that Yitzchak was blind and could not find pleasure in seeing the food, but he would find pleasure in its taste. The Torah Temimah explains that one must feel joy when blessing others, and Yitzchak required the delicacies to feel joy.

Rivka first explained to Ya'akov what had happened and then spoke to him: "So now, my son, heed my voice to that which I command you." Rivka understood that she was about to ask Ya'akov to act deceptively, and Ya'akov would find this extremely difficult. Her words, therefore, demanded "compliance to filial obedience, thereby silencing any resistance." This is the opinion of Abarbanel and Malbim. Ha'Amek Davar explains that Rivka's use of the words, "my voice," was an indication that she was speaking from a prophetic

spirit, a prophecy that she had not shared with Yitzchak. Rivka instructed Ya'akov that she was commanding him and would take responsibility for any consequences. HaRav Sorotzkin explains that the command was also a request, that Ya'akov accept the blessing even though he was reluctant.

Rivka's instruction to take two goats seems very strange as Yitzchak certainly did not eat two goats. Rashi explains that, since it was the eve of Pesach, one goat would serve as the Pesach sacrifice and one would qualify as the delicacies that Yitzchak requested. The Ba'al HaTurim refers to the second goat as the Holiday Sacrifice (Korban Chagigah) which had to be brought on Pesach as well. The ibn Ezra uses a play on words as the word for goat is sei'ir and the word for hair is sei'ar. He suggests that since Eisav was hairy and Ya'akov was smooth, bringing the two goats would make them equal.

Rivka's instructions to Ya'akov are different than Yitzchak's instructions to Eisav. Yitzchak focused on the preparation of delicacies while Rivka focused on obedience. Each knew the son which each preferred, but only Yitzchak was blinded to the real Eisav until the end. Yitzchak commanded Eisav concerning the hunt, believing that Eisav saw hunting as a means of bringing delicacies to his father and honoring him. Yitzchak did not understand that Eisav enjoyed the hunt and the killing more than the subsequent preparation of the delicacies. He liked spilling blood and the power that gave him. Eisav hunted for power, not food.

Rivka understood Ya'akov so she commanded him on obedience. Ya'akov studied Torah which meant that he was dedicated to Hashem and was prepared to serve Hashem completely. Ya'akov was accustomed to obeying the commands of Hashem. When the Torah commands one to honor his parents, the father is placed before the mother. But when the Torah commands to fear one's parents, the mother is placed first. Obeying Hashem's commands is also part of fearing Hashem. Rivkah knew that Ya'akov would obey his mother with that same fear in which he obeyed Hashem. May we also fear and respect Hashem and be obedient of Hashem's commands even when we are reluctant to do so. © 2024 Rabbi D. Levin

### **RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ**

## **Migdal Ohr**

"**A**nd Rivka said to Yitzchak, "I am revolted for my life because of the daughters of Cheis..." (Beraishis 27:46) Throughout the stories of our Avos and Imahos, we find snippets of their conversations which give us insight into their personalities and relationships. One thing which is noticeably different is that though we find Sarah, Rachel, and Leah speaking up to their husbands, we don't find it happening with Rivka.

When she had a challenging pregnancy, she went to the Yeshiva of Shem and Ever, not to Yitzchak.

When Eisav was acting as if he were pious, Rivka didn't speak up to dispel Yitzchak of this notion. In fact, the entire ruse of the food she prepared, along with the goat skins on Yaakov's arms and neck to make it seem like he was Eisav to his father without eyesight, was necessary because Rivka could not speak freely to Yitzchak.

The Netziv, in Haamek Davar, at the end of last week's Parsha, discusses that when Rivka saw Yitzchak for the first time, she was struck with fright and awe. She realized how holy he was, and felt unworthy of being his wife. This fear stayed with her always, which is why she never spoke against Eisav's behavior.

He explains that this was the case so the giving of the blessings would be done in this deceptive fashion, and it was Hashem's Divine Providence which guided all of this. This being the case, it is why we never find Rivka speaking to Yitzchak in the pesukim. But something has changed now.

Now, she speaks up and tells Yitzchak that she cannot live if Yaakov were to take a wife from the local girls. "If he were to marry one like their others daughters-in-law, who worshiped idols in their home, what was the point of living?" From where did she get the strength and temerity to speak to her husband like she hadn't in over eight decades?

The answer is strikingly simple. Hashem had instilled in her a reverence for her husband so Yaakov would have to use cunning to obtain the brachos. Now that this occurred, there was no longer a need for that fear! Now that the hesitation to speak to her husband had dissipated, she was able to articulate her desire for Yaakov to go to her homeland to find a bride.

You may ask, why, if she was no longer afraid, did she not tell Yitzchak that Eisav was a charlatan, pretending to be pious when he wasn't? The answer is because there was no practical need to do so. The blessings had been given, and she could have Yitzchak agree to send Yaakov away (and out of reach of his brother's malicious intent) without resorting to saying anything negative about Eisav.

Though Lashon Hara doesn't apply to a wicked person, speaking negatively is still a lowly behavior, and though she'd had it bottled up inside for many decades, she was still our righteous Mother, who was careful with her words and didn't let her emotions control her.

*A well-respected teacher and acknowledged Chasid-Hashem was walking with his disciples when they passed the carcass of a dead dog. Overcome by the stench of the animal, and perhaps noticing the similar reactions of his friends, one student blurted out, "How smelly this rotten carcass is!"*

*The Master maintained his composure and did what he always did: seek out the best and never say anything demeaning. "That may be true," he responded. "But look how white the dog's teeth are." Source: Chovos HaLevavos of Rabbeinu Bachya © 2024 Rabbi J. Gewirtz*

& Migdal Ohr

**RABBI AVI SHAFRAN**

## Cross-Currents

**W**hen a pasuk seems superfluous, it's probably significant. As Rivka is about to advise her son Yaakov to impersonate his twin Esav and receive their father Yitzchak's bracha, she adds, "So now, my son, heed my voice about that which I am commanding you" (Beraishis 27:8). What are those seemingly unnecessary words meant to convey?

Rav Yaakov Moshe Charlop, the Mei Marom, suggests something fascinating. He points out that Yitzchak, spiritually purified as he was after the Akeida, was exquisitely spiritually sensitive and able to discern that the food he was consuming carried the flavor of a mitzvah -- here, an aroma of kibbud av va'eim, the honoring of parents.

Yitzchak had commanded Esav (but not Yaakov) to bring him victuals and so Rivka sought to ensure that what Yaakov brought his father would be spiritually redolent of that mitzvah. Otherwise Yitzchak would sense the lack of "mitzvah-ness" in the food, and know that the son before him was not Esav.

And so, Rivka's statement to Yaakov that he heed her voice about "that which I am commanding you" imbued the food Yaakov prepared with that mitzvah-aroma. Yaakov's physical disguise was thus complemented with a spiritual one -- the fulfillment of a parent's order.

I have a personal custom, when attending a bar or bas mitzvah celebration, of directing the father or mother of the newly "commanded" member of Klal Yisrael to ask him or her to pass the parent one of the condiments on the table. When the young person complies, I say, "A mitzvah d'Oraysa is fairly rare. You just fulfilled one." And, mindful of the Mei Marom's thought, I know that, even though the parent most likely can't taste it, the aroma of a mitzvah resides in the food.

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**RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER**

## Weekly Dvar

**P**arshat Toldot tells the story of Yaakov (Jacob) and Esav, two brothers that couldn't be any more different. When their father Yitzchok (Isaac) decides that it's time to bless his two sons, Yaakov ends up getting the better of the two blessings. In comparing the two blessings, though, the Chafetz Chaim points out a very interesting observation: When Yaakov gets the blessing, the Torah says "And may G-d give you of the dew of the heavens and of the fatness of the earth" (27:28). However, when Esav gets his blessing, Yitzchok says "Behold, of the fatness of the earth shall be your dwelling and of the dew of the heavens from above" (27:39). Why was the order of the fatness and the dew reversed?

The Chafetz Chaim explains that since Yaakov preferred the spiritual to the physical, his blessing came from heaven (dew) to earth (fatness of the earth). On the other hand, since Esav valued the physical more, his blessing was customized to his desires by focusing on the physical first. Although that's a nice explanation, there's a much deeper lesson to be learned: Because Yaakov focused on heaven and the chain of where things come from, he realized that he's being GIVEN of the dew of the heavens, which produces the fatness of the earth, and consequently thanked the source, G-d. Contrarily, as the verse adds, Esav's fatness was simply his "dwelling", as if it were there all along, with no connection to where it came from. Yaakov was blessed with the ability to see beyond what was in front of him, and therefore appreciated it (and G-d) more. We too are given that same opportunity every day. And all we have to do is stop and think about what we have (as opposed to what we don't have), and where it really came from. Only then will we ever truly be content, fulfilled, and most importantly, blessed. © 2013 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

#### **RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND**

## **RavFrand**

*Transcribed by David Twersky*

*Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman*

I saw the following interesting observation in Rabbi Buchspan's sefer. The pasuk says, "The lads grew up, and Eisav became a man who knows trapping, a man of the field; but Yaakov was a wholesome man, abiding in tents." (Bereshis 25:27).

Chazal say that the expression "abiding in tents" indicates that Yaakov learned in yeshiva. He learned in Yeshivas Shem v'Ever. This pasuk ostensibly describes Yaakov and Eisav. However, shouldn't the pasuk say that Yaakov yashav b'ohalim (i.e. -- he sat in the yeshiva), in past tense? Yoshev ohalim means he is sitting there, in the present.

There are two other places in Sefer Bereshis where the Torah uses the word yoshev instead of yashav, both times indicating something significant. For instance, the pasuk in Parshas Vayera says, "And the two Angels came to Sodom and Lot was sitting (yoshev) in the Gates of Sodom." (Bereshis 19:1). The fact that the present tense was used rather than the historical past teaches us (as Rashi comments) that it was specifically that day that Lot was appointed to a judicial position in Sodom. Yoshev means that today was his first day.

A second example is in last week's parsha: Efron was sitting (yoshev) in the midst of the children of Ches." (Bereshis 23:10). Rashi there as well comments that it was just that day that Efron was appointed as a judge over the children of Ches. Thus, when the pasuk writes yoshev rather than yoshav, it means that he just started today.

So, what are we going to do about the pasuk "Yaakov ish tam, yoshev ohalim"? It can't mean that this was his first day! The Medrash (on the pasuk "and the lads grew up" (Bereshis 25:27)) writes that this is reminiscent of two flowers that sprouted up next to one another -- a myrtle and a thorn-bush. At the beginning of their sprouting, they look similar. However, when they grow up, one emits its beautiful aroma and the other one gives off thorns. So too, the first thirteen years of their lives, both Yaakov and Eisav attended school each day. After thirteen years, this one went off to the house of study and this one went off to the house of idolatry. They both went to the same cheder, but after their Bar Mitzvahs, Yaakov took one path and Eisav took another path.

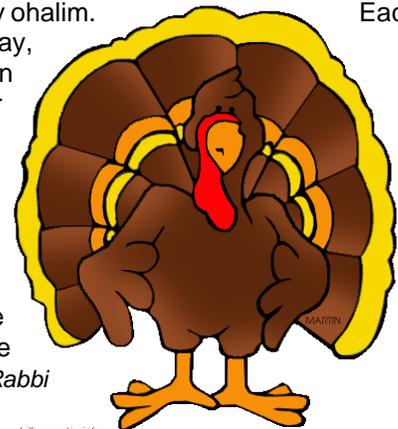
So what does it mean "yoshev ohalim"? After all Yaakov was in cheder since age three or perhaps age five. The answer is that the special attribute of Yaakov was that it was as if it were his first day in yeshiva. Yaakov's quest for learning was such that each day felt like it was "day one." Each day feeling like "day one" indicates a special level of enthusiasm and excitement.

Rashi says on the pasuk "And these words that I command to you today shall be upon your heart." (Devorim 6:6) -- that they should not be upon you like an old edict but rather like a new one. This is one of the great challenges of life. It is one of the great challenges of every yeshiva bachur and of everything we do in life. It is very common that everything we do becomes "Same old; same old." It is just another day.

If a person had this ability to treat every day as if it were new, like the first day, then our attitude would be quite different. This is a very appropriate message to any Bar Mitzvah boy. On the first day that a boy wears tefillin, it is amazing how carefully and meticulously he wraps the retzuos around his arm and puts the shel rosh on his head. The same is true on the first day of a new school year or of attending a new yeshiva. I remember the first day that I attended Ner Yisrael. It is seared into my memory for the rest of my life.

Unfortunately, that original enthusiasm wears off. It does not take too long to become "Same old; same old. Day in, day out." The greatness of Yaakov Avinu was that he was a yoshev ohalim.

Each day was a new day, like day one in yeshiva! It is hard for us to duplicate that, but the more we can appreciate every day in yeshiva (which does not last forever), the more successful we will be in yeshiva. ©2024 Rabbi Y. Frand & torah.org



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