



Learning God's methods of providence  
from the Torah's stories

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## Weekly Parsha

# Toldot

RABBI BERNIE FOX

*And Yaakov said to Rivkah his mother: But Esav is a hairy man and I am a smooth-skinned man. Perhaps, my father will feel me and I will be a deceiver in his eyes. And I will bring upon myself a curse and not a*

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## Weekly Parsha

# the Bracha of Eisav

RABBI DR. DARRELL GINSBERG

The story of the blessings given by Yitzchak to his sons is the primary focus in Parshas Toldos, as story we are all acutely familiar with. After learning of the deception, Eisav predictably reacts with an intense desire for vengeance. Yet immediately prior to expressing this, he beseeches Yitzchak for a bracha, and his father seemingly obliges him (Bereishis 27:38-41):

*"Eisav said to his father, 'Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me too, my father,' and Eisav raised his voice and wept. Yitzchak, his father replied and said to him, 'Behold the fatness [richness]*

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## Mysticism



# MAGIC

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

My friend Jessie's daughter Sarah wondered what the Torah's position is on magic. So Sarah, this article is written for you. I hope you find the answer I provide satisfactory.

## Defining our Terms

When we say "Torah," we refer to the verses found in either the Five Books, Prophets or Writings. I am paying no attention to people or even Rabbis and

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## Weekly Parsha

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Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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*blessing. And his mother said to him: Upon me will be the curse my son. Just listen to me and go take it for me. (Sefer Beresheit 27:10-13)*

## Formulation of the strategy to deceive Yitzchak

Parshat Toldot begins with the birth of Yitzchak and Rivkah's two sons – Esav and Yaakov. As the firstborn, Esav was the privileged son. Also, he was his father's favorite. However, Rivkah saw that Yaakov possessed the superior character. Early in the parasha, Esav abandons his rights as firstborn by selling these privileges to Yaakov.

Towards the end of the parasha, Yitzchak summons Esav and informs him that he plans to bestow upon him the blessings fitting for his firstborn son. Of course, Esav does not reveal to his father that he has bartered away his privileges to his younger brother. Rivkah is aware of Yitzchak's intentions. She wishes to divert the blessings to the more deserving Yaakov. Rivkah devises a plan that takes advantage of Yitzchak's failing vision. She directs Yaakov to substitute himself for Esav, present himself to his father, and secure the blessings Yitzchak intends for Esav. The above passages are a record of Yaakov's response to this plan and the ensuing conversation between Yaakov and his mother.

Yaakov tells Rivkah that the plan is flawed. His father's sight is failing but his sense of touch remains accurate. His father may feel his skin. He will immediately become suspicious. Esav is covered with hair but Yaakov's skin is smooth. When Yitzchak realizes that his younger son is attempting to deceive him, he will curse him rather than bless him. Rivkah responds that if this occurs the curse will be upon her. Then, she again directs Yaakov to execute her plan. Ultimately, Rivkah designs a disguise for Yaakov, the deception of Yitzchak is successful, and Yaakov secures the blessings.

There are two remarkable aspects to this conversation. First, Yaakov never seems to question the justice of diverting to himself the blessings his father intended for Esav. Instead, his concerns relate to the efficacy of his mother's strategy. He protests that the strategy may fail terribly and he will be cursed by his father. Why was Yaakov not concerned about the justice of his behavior?

Second, after Yaakov tells his mother his concerns, essentially, she tells him to not worry. She does not reveal her strategy for addressing the Yaakov's concern. Only later – before she sends off Yaakov to his father – does she reveal her plan for disguising

Yaakov. It is odd that she did not quiet Yaakov's concern immediately by sharing with him her strategy.

*And Yitzchak his father said to him, "Who are you?" And he said, "I am your first born son, Esav." And Yitzchak was seized by an extremely great fear. And he said, "Who is this that hunted for me game, brought it to me, and I ate before you came and I blessed him? And surely he will be blessed." (Sefer Beresheit 27:32-33)*

## Yitzchak's discovery that he had blessed Yaakov

Yaakov and Rivkah's deception is successful and Yaakov secures the blessings from his father. Yaakov leaves his father's presence and Esav enters. He is prepared to be blessed by his father. Yitzchak is initially confused but soon realizes that he has been deceived. He is overcome by fear. But he tells Esav that the blessings have been bestowed upon another and will not be retracted.



Why was Yitzchak afraid? The commentators provide a number of responses. Rashi reinterprets the passage to mean that Yitzchak was astounded. RaDaK suggests that Yitzchak only feigned fear or remorse to console Esav and communicate his empathy. However, Chizkuni understands Yitzchak's reaction as a very real and intense fear. Yitzchak realized that the bestowal of the blessings upon Yaakov certainly conformed to Hashem's will. To

Yitzchak, this implied that he had grossly misunderstood his children's characters. He had been prepared to bestow the blessings upon Esav. Suddenly, Yitzchak realized that he had been prepared to act upon a fundamentally flawed assessment of his sons and of Hashem's will and design!

## Yaakov and Rivkah's basic ethical rationale

Based upon Chizkuni's comments it is possible to understand the first aspect of the conversation between Yaakov and Rivkah. According to Chizkuni, Yitzchak came to understand that his role in the bestowal of the blessings was limited. His sole responsibility was to ascertain upon which son the blessings should be bestowed and to execute Hashem's will. He was to act as Hashem's instrument. It is apparent that Yaakov and Rivkah understood Yitzchak's role. They also realized that the blessings properly belonged to Yaakov. They shared the belief that their understanding of

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(Toldot continued from page 2)

## Weekly Parsha

Hashem's will – in this instance – was superior to Yitzchak's. Therefore, their responsibility was to prevent Yitzchak from attempting to undermine Hashem's will. They were sure of the justice of their cause.

### Alternative interpretations of Rivkah's response to Yaakov

The second aspect of the conversation between Yaakov and his mother still requires an explanation. Why did Rivkah not reassure Yaakov by immediately revealing her plan to disguise Yaakov as Esav? Apparently, Rivkah believed that Yaakov was not only questioning the practicality of her scheme. She sensed some deeper issue underlying Yaakov's concern. What was this issue?

The passages above that relate the conversation between Yaakov and Rivkah are translated in accordance with RaDaK's interpretation. However, there are other important alternative translations.

According to Unkelus, Rivkah responded to Yaakov that she knew through prophecy that Yaakov would not be cursed. Chizkuni attributes Rivkah's confidence in the outcome of her plan to a prophecy described in the opening passages of the parasha. The Torah explains that Rivkah experienced terrible pain during her pregnancy. She sought the insight of an unnamed prophet. He explained to her that she was carrying twins. Both would be progenitors of great nations and kingdoms. The older son would serve the

younger. Because of this prophecy of Yaakov's ascent over Esav, Rivkah was confident that her strategy would succeed and Yaakov would be blessed by Yitzchak and not cursed.

Rabbaynu Yonatan ben Uziel suggests another translation. According to this translation, Rivkah responded to Yaakov that if Yitzchak bestowed a blessing, it would be take effect. However, should Yitzchak utter a curse, it would be transferred to her and not fall upon Yaakov. RaDaK explains that Rivkah told Yaakov that she accepted full responsibility for the deception that she was proposing. If the strategy resulted in a curse, then she would be the guilty person, responsible for the deception and she would accept upon herself the curse directed toward the innocent Yaakov.

### Yaakov's criticism of Rivkah's plan

In her response, Rivkah was reacting to Yaakov's objection to her plan. Therefore, the response provides important insight into her understanding of Yaakov's objection. Although each offers his own specific interpretation of Rivkah's response to Yaakov, both interpretations share a common message. Rivkah's response was an assurance to Yaakov that he would be acting properly in following her direction. According to Unkelus, Rivkah told Yaakov that she knew through prophecy that he was destined to receive the blessings. According to Rabbaynu Yonatan ben Uziel, Rivkah did not claim

prophetic knowledge. However, she told Yaakov that she accepted upon herself full moral responsibility for their plan. Rivkah's response implies that she detected in Yaakov's concerns some question regarding the ethics of her plan. What was the concern that she detected?

### Yaakov's underlying concern

According to RaDaK's interpretation, Yaakov was not concerned with the ethics of diverting the blessings away from his brother and towards himself. However, he was very concerned with the prospect of facing his father's anger upon his discovery of the deception. In other words, Yaakov believed in the justice of the cause. However, he did have scruples regarding the means his mother suggested. He expresses his concern as a practical issue but Rivkah sensed a more fundamental ethical scruple. Yaakov questioned the ethics of deceiving his father. If he engaged in an unethical strategy, he could he be assured of success and not failure!

Rivkah knew she could not respond to this objection simply by explaining the precautions they would take against premature discovery. Yaakov also required reassurance regarding the ethics of the plan. Therefore, her initial response was to provide reassurance that Yaakov would be acting properly in following her direction. Only after Yaakov agreed to accept his mother's assessment, did she explain the details of her plan to avoid detection. ■

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(Magic continued from page 1)

## Mysticism

Jewish teachers, even from long ago and until today, who "believe" in magic, since belief is not proof. Furthermore, the Torah is our authority, as these are God's words. And we follow God over man when there is a conflict. Apparently today, many Jews wish to believe in magic. So let us use our reason and the Torah to guide us to the truth.

When we say "magic," we refer to events where the natural cause is not apparent. For example, a magician makes a tiger suddenly appear on a stage, when there was no tiger beforehand. Since there was no apparent cause for the appearance of the tiger, we call this magic. But if a trainer walked a tiger onto the stage, we don't call this magic, as we see the natural cause for the appearance of the tiger. But of course we know this was not "magic." The proof is that magicians always cover the cage with a sheet before making the tiger appear. Why? Because he must hide the trap door under the cage, or the hidden hole in the curtain behind the cage, from where the tiger comes out. But never does a magician perform this act without a sheet. Additionally, why must magicians charge for performances? If they could truly perform magic, wouldn't it be easier to simply make money appear, instead of all the time and labor required to perform to get paid?

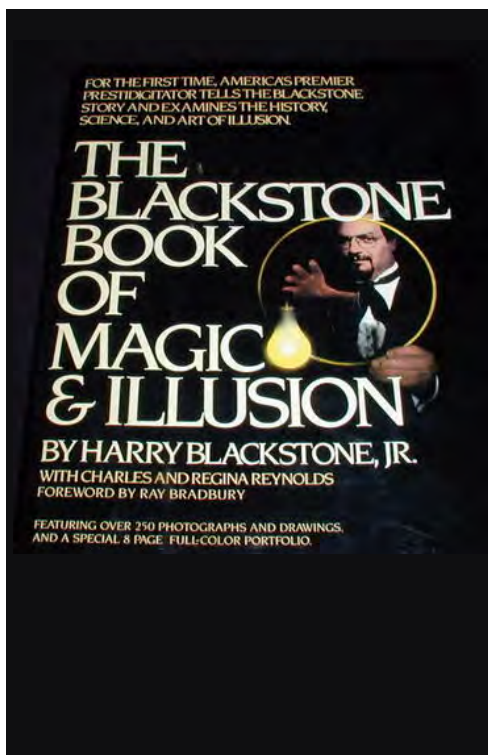
### God's Will

God desires that man view the world truthfully. This is why He gave us 1) senses and 2) reason. God gave us only these two faculties to determine what is true or false. It follows that with these faculties alone, we possess all that is required to determine truth from falsehood. This means that we are not to accept as real, anything that is not 1) perceived, or 2) based on reason. If we do believe in magic, we violate God's will, expressed in His design of the human being. This must be clear.

He also created a world where laws are constant. He wishes that we are convinced that fire is always extremely hot, and is never cold. He allows us to trust our senses, and to plan our daily activities around this conviction that natural laws do not change. This is important. For if laws changed, how could God command man to bring fire for sacrifices, if fire would burn only sometimes, and sometimes freeze? Thus, we are to trust our senses and reason, and we are to be convinced that laws are constant.

### Rejection of Sinai & Torah

If we accept magic, we thereby suggest God is not truly the Creator, since man too can make things appear. So maybe it was man who created the event at Sinai, and the Torah. But as God said we must never forget Sinai which He performed, it means that this event was His doing, and not man's doing.



Why are lesson books required if magic is real?

Furthermore, God prohibits us from following a false prophet instructing us to violate the Torah, even if he performs signs or wonders (Deut. 13:4). The Torah also prohibits magic (Exod. 22:17) and Ibn Ezra says what is prohibited, is false (Lev. 19:31):

*"Those with empty brains say 'Were it not that fortune tellers and magicians were true, the Torah would not prohibit them.' But I (Ibn Ezra) say just the opposite of their words, because the Torah doesn't prohibit that which is true, but it prohibits that which is false. And the proof is the prohibition on idols and statues."*

Now, if God commanded us not to follow false prophets and magicians, and He also wants us to believe what is true...it must be that these two personalities are liars. What about the stories of Pharaoh's magicians and all the Talmudic accounts that refer to humanly performed miracles or magic? Saadia Gaon made some important statements (Emunos v'Daos):

*"I say also that it was for this very reason that God made the prophets equal to all other human beings in so far as death was concerned, lest man get the idea (and say wrongly to himself) 'Just as these prophets were capable of living forever, in contradistinction to them, so were they also able to perform marvels in contradistinction to them!'"*

He adds:

*"Man has no power over the elements".*

Saadia Gaon also remarks that Egypt's magic was sleight of hand, and nothing more. They imitated the Plague of Blood using red dye, and they imitated the Plague of Frogs by placing chemicals in the Nile River that caused the frogs to leap from those poisons. ("The Book of Beliefs and Opinions", p 153) Saadia Gaon clearly says that magicians and prophets have no powers. Why was he so convinced of this? It is as we have said: what is not provable, does not exist.

And the Talmudic stories about Rabbis performing miracles must be understood as King Solomon, Maimonides and all intelligent leaders said, "The Rabbis speak in riddles and metaphors". A wise Rabbi offered a beautiful quote:

*"To paraphrase Shmuel Hanagid(1), the value of Aggadah (allegory) is found only in the gems of wisdom one derives from it. If one derives nonsense, it has no value. Very few people are capable of 'diving into the deep water and coming up with pearls'. [Ramban metaphor] Other individuals have no business delving into Aggadah. They would do better refraining from trying to interpret that which is beyond them. "Bmufrosh mimcha al tidrosh". Such people cannot discern between something literal or metaphorical." (1) See "Mavo HaTalmud" (Intro to the Talmud) found at the end of Tractate Brachos*

### Motivation to Believe

What motivates people to believe in magic, when they have no proof? You must understand that people are attracted to "mystical" things. What they cannot explain, is intriguing. Believing in powers or magic, people can also believe their wishes will come true. So it is not the intelligent person who accepts magic; it is the person who lives in dreamland, who lives like a child. Yet, these same believers in magic will not believe magic will heal them if they are sick, or that magic will get them their rent or money to buy food. In these matters that are important to them, suddenly they don't believe in magic. This must show you that they are in a contradiction. They really don't believe in magic, since they have not witnessed any proof that "magic will provide their real and important needs. They truly do not live in a way where they believe in magic.

In the end, our reason, senses and our Torah refute magic as real. ■





# TOLDOS

## *a Study of Providence*

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

### Part I

Reading the Parasha each week, at times we gloss over “simple” information, assuming nothing more is intended below the surface. But this cannot be the case. Maimonides teaches, “There is a good reason for every passage; the object of which we cannot see. We must always apply the words of our Sages: ‘It is not a vain thing for you’ (Deut. xxxii. 47), and if it seems vain, it seems your fault.” (The Guide, Book III, Chap. L)

With this in mind, let’s recap the story of Toldos and then isolate the questions.

Rivkah experienced a troubling pregnancy: the children were moving violently within her. Ibn Ezra says that Rivkah first asked other women if her pregnancy was the norm. When the women told her that her pregnancy was abnormal, she sought counsel from God via a Prophet (either Abraham or Shem, Noah’s son). Rivkah was aware of God’s Providence; initiated with Abraham, sustained unto Isaac and herself. The nation of the Jews was to be established through her. This pregnancy was unnatural and must be due to God’s will.

Rivkah then sought out a Prophet and learned from him that she will give birth to twins (two nations) and that the “greater son will be subservient to the younger.” This was the primary message. When she finally gave birth, Esav exited first and the Torah describes him as red and covered with hair. Jacob then exited – his hand seizing Esav’s heel. The Torah then says

that Esav became a hunter while Jacob dwelled in tents. Isaac loved Esav, for he captured food for Isaac, while Rivkah loved Jacob. The Torah reveals an imbalance.

We then learn of the sale of the birthright. Jacob’s alacrity in requesting the birthright in exchange for the lentils appears premeditated. Later, Rivkah “somehow” hears Isaac preparing to give the blessings to Esav. Rivkah dresses Jacob in goat skins and in Esav’s garments to deceive the senses of the now blind Isaac, into thinking Jacob is Esav. The ruse works, and not a split second after Jacob leaves Isaac’s presence, Esav enters requesting the blessings. This alarms Isaac greatly, as he realized through a successful blessing of Jacob that he must have been wrong about Esav. The blessings success indicated Divine Providence. Now our questions:

- 1) What was God’s intent that Rivkah experience an unnatural, tormenting pregnancy?
- 2) Why was Rivkah’s response to inquire about God’s Providence from a Prophet, and why did she inquire of the Prophets Abraham or Shem, but not of her own husband?
- 3) Of what significance is Esav’s hairy nature?
- 4) Why are we told that Jacob seized Esav’s heel at birth?
- 5) Of what significance is it that “Rivkah loved Jacob, while Isaac loved Esav?”
- 6) How was Jacob “instantly” prepared to purchase the birthright from Esav when Esav asked for the lentils?
- 7) Why did Rivkah and Jacob agree they must deceive Isaac to obtain the blessings: why not ask Isaac openly?
- 8) Why was Isaac shocked when Esav came before him to receive the blessings?

It is clear, God intended Rivkah to obtain information vital to the establishment of the Jewish people. Her difficult pregnancy was intended to direct her to one who would inform her of God’s intentions. With that new information obtained via the Prophet – “the older would serve the younger” – Rivkah now cherished Jacob over Esav, as she learned through that prophecy that a matter of “nations” depends on the younger Jacob. (She was told that two nations would issue from her.) The prophecy taught her that she was to be instrumental in securing the younger son’s success as a means of establishing the nation of Israel. She also deduced that Isaac was not given this Prophetic information, for good reason.

The Patriarchs and Matriarchs did not function in accord with simplistic favoritism as we do today. We must not err and project our emotions onto them. Thus, when the Torah teaches that “Isaac loved Esav while Rivkah loved Jacob,” it

must teach an important lesson. It appears this lesson is that Isaac was not as well informed as was Rivkah about the nature of their two sons. Thus, the Torah saw fit to teach us the imbalance of their divergent love, so we might appreciate how God orchestrated His Providence. As Isaac was misled by Esav’s “capturing his father with his mouth” (Gen. 25:28), Isaac loved him more. Isaac was deluded by Esav’s ostensible good nature. Esav disguised himself as upright with inquiries of proper conduct from Isaac (capturing him) to earn Isaac’s favor. In truth, Esav was evil. In contrast, the Torah teaches that Jacob was a “dweller of tents” (ibid 25:27): he was complete in his perfection and delved into the study of God.

Jacob’s proper lifestyle did not present the charade offered by Esav’s veneer. Esav presented himself in the manner he knew his father would cherish. He “captured his father with his mouth.” Thus, the Torah thereby informs us of the need for God’s Providence to work through Rivkah who was more aware of her son’s diverse natures. From the very outset of the lives of Esav and Jacob, Rivkah was taught that the younger Jacob was to rule his older brother and that Jacob was to receive the blessings. This was also substantiated through Jacob’s clutching of Esav’s heel. This strange phenomenon taught Rivkah that Jacob – right out of the womb – was one who could confront and usurp his twin. Later on, Rivkah relied on this crucial knowledge in her plan to deceive Isaac.

It was also vital that Rivkah receive the Prophet’s communication ‘before’ giving birth. Now that she understood the younger was to be favored, she could interpret that act of Jacob clutching Esav’s heel as a Divine message. God was showing Rivkah the means He implanted into Jacob’s nature to ensure her success. God also created Esav with a hairy exterior which would also play a vital role in Rivkah’s plan.

The Torah tells us how Esav arrives home exhausted. The Rabbis teach that he had murdered, committed adultery and idolatry. He did so, for on that day, Abraham had died. A wise Rabbi taught that Esav – a man seeking an Earthly, hedonistic existence alone – was frustrated that his grandfather Abraham would actually perish from this Earth. Esav’s immortality fantasy was abruptly shattered. He no longer clung to the role model displayed by Abraham: “For what is it worth, if it ends?” Esav felt. He therefore went astray from Abraham’s values and committed these grave acts. Esav, exhausted, requested the lentils Jacob had cooked. Jacob ‘instantly’ countered with an offer to purchase the birthright from

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## Weekly Parsha

Esav, in exchange for the lentils. Thus, Jacob's purchase was premeditated. He had already planned to obtain the birthright prior to this event!

We might explain that Jacob's readiness to obtain the birthright was due to Rivkah's informing him of her knowledge obtained via that earlier prophecy. Rivkah most probably explained to Jacob what she learned, that the younger – Jacob – was to rule over the older. This is supported by Jacob's readiness to purchase the birthright.

Later, Rivkah 'somehow' overhears that Isaac was about to give the birthright blessings to Esav. This too is mentioned to teach of God's intervention, that she hear these words. She then urges Jacob to deceive his father and to disguise himself as Esav in front of his blind father. The point here is that Rivkah is not first informing Jacob "that" he must obtain the birthright, but rather, "how" he can accomplish this. Thus, we find proof that Jacob already knew he was to obtain the birthright blessings. This is why he purchased them from Esav at the outset, for Rivkah must have instructed him to do so. Otherwise, without a proper purchase, what right would he have to take them later? Without Rivkah informing Jacob that he should have the blessings, why would Jacob even think to purchase them? It must be as we suggest, that Rivkah learned through prophecy that Jacob – the younger – must obtain the blessings. Therefore, Jacob was prepared at all times for the right moment to purchase them. Then he must act to obtain them even through deceit. For a lie is not absolutely prohibited by God. As we see God told Samuel (Sam. I; 16:2) to make believe he was offering a sacrifice, although he was really en route to anoint David in Saul's place. Samuel feared that Saul would learn of this and would kill Samuel for attempting to replace him with a new king. Thus, God instructed Samuel in a deception. Jacob too did not argue with Rivkah about the deceit here. He was only concerned that his father should not curse him, but he had no concern about the deceit itself as a sin to God. Jacob knew a lie was necessary at this time. And Rivkah as well as many others lied for just reasons. Ibn Ezra teaches there is no harm in lying if it is for a proper motive. (Gen. 27:13)

In summary, Rivkah required Divine instruction due to the imbalance between Esav and Jacob, and between her and Isaac. She would have to act with cunning and deceit to bring about the nation of Israel. God orchestrated her abnormal pregnancy precisely to educate her: the issuing nations of Jacob and Esav and how they must be guided through her. Compelled to inquire from a Prophet, Rivkah became equipped with the Divine knowledge, vital to

ensure that the blessings are bestowed upon the proper recipient.

There was a need for Rivkah to learn of the different natures of her two sons. She learned through prophecy that Jacob would be the superior. But she also learned through seeing his hand clutching Esav's heel, one more essential lesson. Through this act, Rivkah learned that Jacob possessed the natural tendency to usurp Esav. It was only through this knowledge gained by seeing his hand grabbing his brother's heel that Rivkah thereby learned that she must harness his nature to ensure that the prophecy comes to be. Had she merely received knowledge that Jacob was to be superior, this knowledge alone would not compel her to act through Jacob. Rather, she witnessed Jacob grabbing his brother's heel. She understood she saw this for a reason: their competitive display was a necessary indication to her that her two sons each have different natures by divine intent. Rivkah understood both she, and her son's natures would play vital roles. Working with their natures, Rivkah must ensure Jacob overturns Esav in "status" at the right time.

Rivkah teaches the young Jacob this prophecy so he is ever-prepared from that point to purchase the birthright when the moment presents itself. Rivkah and Jacob strategize a plan that succeeds,

but again, only through God's Providence. For we see that "no sooner that Jacob left, did Esav return." This is to teach that God controlled the timing to the second, ensuring Rivkah and Jacob's success (Gen. 27:30). And finally, Isaac too attests to Jacob's rightful receipt of the blessings, as he tells Esav, "and he is surely blessed (ibid 27:33)." For Isaac realized that since he was able to utter the blessings, it must have been God's will that Jacob receive them.

Isaac's sudden shock (ibid 27:33) also explains why Rivkah did not inquire from her husband about her abnormal pregnancy, but only from Abraham or Shem. For she understood that Isaac would reject the idea of Esav's unfit character. That is why Jacob too could not openly ask for the blessings, even though he rightfully purchased them. Until Isaac successfully uttered the blessings, he would not accept Esav as unfit. Rivkah therefore avoided approaching Isaac with her concerns regarding her pregnancy, and when securing the blessings for Jacob. Isaac again confirms to Esav that Jacob was correct in taking the blessings, as Isaac says to Esav, "your brother came with wisdom and took your blessings." Why does Isaac say "with wisdom?" Perhaps to teach Esav that Jacob was correct. The obvious questions and clues to their answers

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are the true “codes of the Torah.” This is God’s method of directing us to unlock the Torah’s mysteries, imbuing us with an ever-growing appreciation for His wisdom; thus, developing our minds and souls by understanding the perfection of our Matriarchs and Patriarchs.

Could it be that God prepared Rivkah to be Lavan’s sister, so she might learn of his cunning, as a preparation of this necessary deceit of Isaac? And could it be that Rivkah’s training of Jacob to use deceit helped to prepare Jacob to deal with Lavan for those 20 years when Lavan tried again and again to deceive Jacob? If so, it ends up that Lavan’s cunning came back to haunt him. For he displayed to Rivkah in their childhood home a deceitful nature. Thereby, Rivkah learned to be cunning herself and achieved a good outcome regarding the blessings. Through Rivkah’s deceit, Jacob learned how to deal with Lavan. Lavan’s cunning came full circle and ended up ruining him.

## Part II

Having shared these ideas with a friend, he asked a fine question:

*I understand that ‘after’ Rivkah witnessed Isaac favoring Esav, Rivkah had grounds to omit Isaac from her prophecy and her plans. But before she even had the prophecy, prior to giving birth...she avoided asking Isaac for an explanation of her abnormal pregnancy! She asked either Shem or Abraham. How can you explain this avoidance of Isaac ‘before’ Isaac ever expressed any favoritism towards Esav?*

I recognized the problem and immediately went back to the verses. Reading from the very beginning of the Parasha, I was bothered by the first two verses:

*And these are the generations of Isaac son of Abraham; Abraham bore Isaac. And it was when Isaac was forty that he took Rivkah the daughter of Betuel the Arami from Padan Aram, the sister of Lavan the Arami, for a wife.*

Think about this: the first verse already says “Isaac son of Abraham.” Why then does it repeat “Abraham bore Isaac?” And in verse 2, if we are already told that Betuel – Lavan’s father – was an “Arami,” why are we told again that Lavan was also an “Arami?” If Lavan’s father was an Arami, then we know Lavan his son is also an Arami!

There are no redundancies in God’s Torah. I thought about the first question. I realized “Abraham bore Isaac” must indicate something new. The word “bore” is also a difficulty, since men cannot “bear” children, implying pregnancy. This must mean something akin to “bearing.”

Abraham sought a wife for Isaac. We thereby learn that Isaac was incapable of selecting one for himself. We may suggest, “Abraham bore Isaac” means that Abraham “raised” Isaac. In other words, Isaac – more than any other, was in need of paternal dedication and guidance. He was not as others, who approached marriage independently. His self-sacrifice on the altar had a profound affect on his nature. He was not even allowed to leave the land, as God told him to remain in Gerar and not descend to Egypt. Therefore, this first verse emphasizes Isaac’s dependence upon Abraham.

The second verse contains a redundancy as well. We know Betuel is an Arami, so it is unnecessary to teach that his son Lavan was also an Arami...if that means a nationality. Or Hachaim teaches that Arami in fact is not indicating a nationality, but a character trait. Switching two letters (in Hebrew) “Arami” becomes “Ramai,” meaning a swindler; a liar. In this verse, we are being taught that Isaac married a woman whose father and brother were liars. So even though we are taught that Betuel is a liar (arami), we must also be taught that Lavan too chose this lifestyle, as it is not inherited, as seen from Rivkah’s upright stature. Now the questions.

Why must we learn of Isaac’s dependency on Abraham? Why must we learn that Rivkah’s father and brother were liars? I feel these two verses answer my friend’s question.

We are taught that Rivkah – one who observed the cunning personalities in her father and brother – was able to detect Isaac’s shortcomings in terms of interpersonal issues. This prompted Rivkah to avoid approaching her husband Isaac with matters of her strange pregnancy. The Torah cleverly hints the two reason why Rivkah avoided Isaac: he was not fit, and she was cunning enough to know this from experiencing shrewd human nature in her home. We now understand why she went to Abraham or Shem, not Isaac, when she needed to understand the nature of her pregnancy and how it could affect the establishment of B’nei Yisrael.

These two verses appear at the very start of our Parasha, as they explain the succeeding verses, and Rivkah’s actions. No question in Torah is without an answer. This time, we were fortunate enough to discover it. It is amazing how subtle redundancies can shed light. Again, one of the true codes of Torah.

## God’s Providence

Esav was born red and unnaturally covered with hair, conveying Divine intent. The only other mention of Esav’s exterior is the means which Jacob used to deceive his father, thus tricking Isaac into believing he was Esav. This teaches that God’s Providence was at play in the birth of these twins. God ensured that a means existed through which the blessings would be successfully transmitted to Jacob.

First, God provides the impetus (a troubling pregnancy) to direct the righteous towards obtaining greater knowledge. He gave Rivkah Prophetic insight into the future of the Jewish nation that would emanate from Jacob. It is clear from this example that God wishes men and women to engage their intellect. We are not to sit back while God runs the world. The opposite is true: God desires that the path and progress of mankind, be directed by mankind. We are to use all in our power to achieve the best outcome for ourselves and all others. God says this in Genesis 1:28, “Fill the Earth and conquer it.” But since man cannot know all variables or control even a few of them, God assists man when necessary. God therefore imparted to Rivkah His plan, and the necessary tools with which to attain success. These “tools” include Rivkah’s own cunning personality adopted from her brother and father, Esav’s hairy nature, Jacob’s personality, which was capable of usurping Esav, and Rivkah’s hearing both Isaac’s wish to bless Esav, and Esav’s wish to kill Jacob. Besides acting on God’s clues, Rivkah devised her own methods, such as dressing Jacob in Esav’s clothing in anticipation of Isaac smelling the fragrance of the field, and thereby assuming this was Esav before him.

Why were the blessings necessary at all? God can certainly achieve His plan without man! I believe Isaac’s blessings were required as a means of silencing those descendants of Esav who would claim rights to his legacy, rejecting Jacob. Talmud Sanhedrin 91a teaches how Ben Pasisa responded to Alexander when the Ishmaelites sought claim of Abraham’s legacy. Ben Pasisa responded, “If a father sends away all his sons and gives them gifts while yet alive, do these sons have any future claim on the father’s legacy?” (Referring to Abraham’s casting of all sons except Isaac, Gen. 25) This silenced the Ishmaelites. And I believe Isaac’s words too were necessary – not as causative of blessings, but as his exclusive selection of Jacob. Future generations of Esav can no longer justly claim Abraham’s legacy through Isaac, now that Isaac declared Jacob his sole inheritor through these blessings. ■



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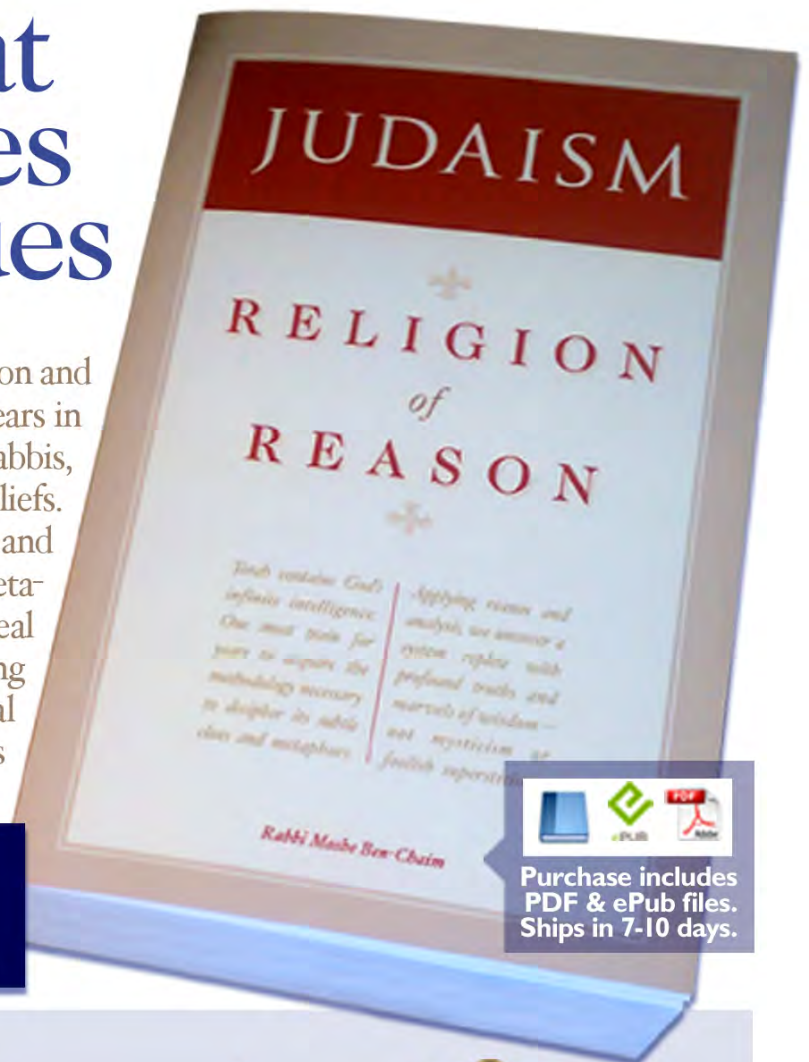
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*of the earth shall be your dwell-ing, and of the dew of heaven from above. You shall live by your sword, and you shall serve your brother. When you have cause to be grieved [tzaar], you will throw off his yoke from your neck. Eisav hated Yaakov because of the blessing with which his father blessed him, and Eisav said in his heart, "The mourning days for my father are approaching. I will then kill my brother, Yaakov.""*

Yitzchak's response is very intriguing. At first glance, one could deduce that this was some type of pacification, trying to calm his son down. And if indeed this was an attempt at pacification, it failed, as Esav's thoughts, as depicted by the Torah, are focused on retribution. Yet when taking a closer look at the words of Yitzchak, it would be a mistake to see these words as mere consolation. This was a bracha, and as such, must something more than words of comfort.

Rashi offers us the following (ibid 40:

*"tzaar' denotes grief or pain as in ---"I lament in my prayer." He meant to say: "When the Israelites will transgress the Torah and you will have reason to grieve over the blessings which he took [then] 'You will throw off his yoke, etc.'"*

This insight is based on the Midrash Rabba (Bereishis 67:7), which explains that when Bnai Yisrael stop following the Torah, Eisav will rule over them.

What do we make of all this? This seems to go beyond mere consolation to Eisav. Is this some sort of reward for Eisav, where if Bnai Yisrael fall, Eisav finally gets his shot to take over?

Before understanding the bracha itself, let's first try and establish, to a limited extent, Yitzchak's . Yitzchak's intent was to give the bracha of Avraham to Eisav, based on the hope that If Eisav was supplied with the bounties of the physical world, he might naturally shift his mindset away from their pursuits and follow the path of Hashem. Furthermore, with both Yaakov and Eisav on the same page, a powerful union would be created, with the strengths of each complementing the other. Yet, with the revelation of Yaakov as the recipient instead of Eisav, it seems an entirely different outlook emerged, as we will see in the bracha Yitzchak begins with a similar opening as with the first bracha. He refers to the benefits Eisav could receive from the physical world (albeit, according to the Ramban, with small differences), offering him the same chance to use this reward in the service of God. He continues, isolating

specifics of Eisav's personality and its impact on the future. Yitzchak saw Eisav as someone who wanted to be a leader, driven by a desire for power. As such, his life would be one of the "sword". This does not mean Eisav would be scampering around, complete with bloodcurdling screams and charges against whole armies. Instead, it would seem to be referring to the mindset of the general. Sforno explains that it is through this approach to life, versus a farmer or laborer, that someone pre-pares himself for the position of king. Eisav was to be a conqueror, being the path to power, and this feature would be evident in his progeny. He would always be guided by this thirst for supremacy; the question was, would it have a means of expressing itself vis a vis Yaakov?

Yitzchak realized that Yaakov and Eisav, and the ideologies each represented and would perpetuate, were incompatible – but this did not mean mutual annihilation. Instead, one system of thought and way of life would be subordinate to another. This seems to be the idea of Eisav's "subservience" to Yaakov. Rather than viewing this relationship as one where Eisav would be carrying Yaakov's luggage, it would seem more likely that there would be a general recognition by Eisav of the ascendancy of the approach of Yaakov. In other words, Eisav and his progeny would tolerate this relationship, understanding that as long as Bnai Yisrael were on the side of God, there would be no way to defeat them, and therefore no reason to try and become the dominant force. However, if and when Bnai Yisrael would turn from the Torah, Eisav would be the

one to step in and fill the void. This relationship, as seen in Rashi and the Midrash, reveals two important points. We see that Yitzchak was explaining to Eisav that his ascension would never be based on his own merits. Instead, his rise to power would only be the result of the failure of Bnai Yisrael. Once Bnai Yisrael would reject Torah, Eisav would be able to become the "leader". We also see from this idea Eisav's view of the bracha given to Yaakov. It is not the fact that Yaakov stole the bracha that causes Eisav pain. It is the fact that the bracha he "stole" is now being abused, a clear indication he was not the right choice for the bracha. That realization emerges with Bnai Yisrael's outright rejection of the path of Hashem.

We now have a greater insight into both the bracha of Yitzchak to Eisav, as well as important features of Eisav's personality. Yitzchak was not trying to console Eisav. Instead, he was providing Eisav (whether it was through prophecy or intuition is a matter taken up by various commentaries) with crucial insights into his personality, as well as his relationship with Yaakov and the ideology of God. We also see in Eisav a more dynamic personality that simply the angry brother seeking revenge. Eisav, and his descendants, would not be blinded by rage and vitriolic anti-Semitism. They would understand how Bnai Yisrael would occupy a position in the world that could not be challenged. However, its status would be dependent on its adherence to Torah. The stumbling of Bnai Yisrael creates the opportunity for Eisav. ■

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