

JewishTimes

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We Must
Tell a Lie

The Prayer
We Can't
Request

What
Blinds Us?

How God
Intervenes
in our Lives

US
Support
of Israel



BIBLE'S MONSTERS

And how to see them!



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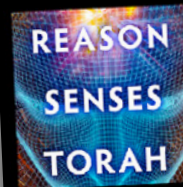
MISSION | **God's Revelation at Mt. Sinai: One Plan for Mankind**
The greatest event ever witnessed forces one conclusion

MESORA
Summer 2020

EVIDENCE EXISTS for only one event of God revealing His religion to man. All other religions claim divine origin, yet provide no validation. This explains their requirement of "blind faith," which is absent in Judaism: a major offering proof. 3332 years ago upon Mt. Sinai, God gave us His Bible: the only time God communicated a religion to man. Masses witnessed this, which is the only validation of any historical claim, and why the major religions accept the Bible. Mesora's mission is to share God's Biblical religion with all who seek it. As every human descends from that first couple; all humans are equals. Jews boasting "Jewish Superiority" and those who discriminate against any race violate the Bible and reason. Nearing a quarter century, Mesora helps others realize God's will for us all, sharing the beauty of Biblical wisdom. Search our 1000s of original essays, publications and audio, and write us with your questions. God determined the Jew's role is to share Torah's history, wisdom, laws and moral code with all mankind. As God created all mankind, He loves each person equally. As science has defined laws, God's will for man also has defined laws and principles, and they delight the soul. The greatest minds spent their lives studying God through Torah and science, as they found nothing that compared to its enjoyment. Let us humble ourselves before Moses, Kings David and Solomon, Maimonides, Aristotle, Newton and Einstein who taught that a life of wisdom is the most fulfilling life. We too can partake of this pleasurable existence.

THOUGHT
FUNDAMENTALS

"WHAT IS UNDETECTED BY THE SENSES, REASON OR TORAH, MUST NOT BE ACCEPTED AS TRUTH." MAIMONIDES



FEATURED
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PERFECTION

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Mankind descends from Adam. Black and white twins unveil the lie of racism. Bible denounces it: Moses' wife was black, our kings married Egyptians and Messiah descends from a Moabite. "Better is the day of A'sub' (Isr'el, 7:9). Birth doesn't define us, but how

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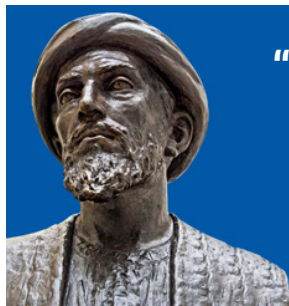
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MAIMONIDES

LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

What We Can't Pray For

RABBI: Based on the following quote, a friend questioned whether one should pray for a miracle:

And one who cries out over the past (in an attempt to change what has already occurred) it is a vain prayer. For example, one whose wife was pregnant and he says: "May it be God's will that my wife will give birth to a male child," it is a vain prayer. Or one who was walking on the path home and he heard the sound of a scream in the city, and he says, "May it be God's will that this scream will not be from my house," it is a vain prayer (Berachos 54a).

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Bartenura comments:

A person prays about something that already had occurred, this is a vain prayer, for what has occurred, has occurred.

Maimonides comments:

The future is possible; something can happen or not happen. Meaning, what has transpired, its time has passed. But one cannot pray on a matter that already was decreed (transpired). But one can pray for future matters.

In both cases, an event transpired: the embryo's gender was set and (the scream reveals) tragedy occurred in the city. But considering that Joshua and Gideon prayed for miracles and both requests were granted, what is unworthy about a different type of miracle: praying to alter the past?

I considered: this prohibition means that such a prayer is an absolute wrong. It got me thinking about what are absolutes in Torah. Free will immediately came to mind: God never interferes with man's choices. Man is to be the sole cause of his decisions and their outcomes, be they good or bad. Reward and punishment is another Torah fundamental and is directly tied to free will. The fundamental distinction of this prayer is that changing the past undermines free will. If results from our actions can be undone, this corrupts free will because if one can pray to reverse his decisions, he in fact has not committed to his decisions. His decisions are always in flux. If one can pray to alter the past, he can avoid reward and punishment. God's will the man takes responsibility no longer exists. Thus, we cannot pray to alter the past.

My friend asked: "Let's say the fire started naturally—not through an arsonist—how is that a problem with free will? In this case, I do not ask God to reverse a human's decision. Why can't I pray for a reversal of a natural fire?"

The answer is that if a person is on the proper level, God protects him from all calamities. If he is a sinner, God may not shield him from a fire. Thus, events are fit for us and prayer to alter the past is improper; whether one does not suffer from a fire because he's on a level of providence, or if he does experience a fire because he is not subject to God's protection. And since these are both good (i.e., protection and punishment) and come under the framework of reward and punishment, one cannot pray to alter history. Free will and reward and punishment are inextricably bound up with each other. My friend's question was essential to this conversation. Finally, it is notable that there are only 2 examples given: natural (altering gender), and freewill (robbers causing victims' screams). As all events are generated either by natural causes, or by man, only 2 cases are discussed. ■



“Made in Israel” and BDS US Support of Israel

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced Thursday during his visit at the Psagot winery that the US will allow products from Judea and Samaria to be labeled “Made in Israel. All producers within areas where Israel exercises the relevant authorities will be required to mark goods as 'Israel', 'Product of Israel', or 'Made in Israel' when exporting to the United States,” Pompeo said in a statement. Pompeo landed at noon in the Psagot community in Mateh Binyamin, where the world-famous local Psagot Winery is located. This is the first official visit of such a senior American representative to a Jewish community across the Green Line.

“Who would have thought the US Sec. of State (remember the State Dept. was always pro Arab and not too friendly to Israel) would recognize the legitimacy of Israeli settlements. This is amazing and could never have happened under a non-Trump administration. The election is not over—there is still a path to victory, however slim. Let's pray for a Trump win.”
—Rabbi Reuven Mann

In further news, secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Thursday announced that the state department will ban funding for any organization it determines participates in the global boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel, labeling such activity as anti-Semitic. The announcement was expected for several weeks and had earlier drawn pushback from civil and human rights groups that warned the effort politicized the fight against anti-Semitism and could delegitimize the work human rights organizations conduct around the world. The secretary made the announcement along side Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu while on travel in Jerusalem and said the state department would work quickly to identify and label organizations it views are anti-Semitic. ■

Love & Marriage II Reader's Response & Rabbi Mann's Answer

READER: Dear Rabbi Mann, Regarding your article "Love and Marriage: Which Comes First", with all due respect...

As I read your article, I found myself feeling a certain disingenuous with the direction of your article. Please forgive me if I am wrong. First of all, I believe the Talmud states that a man should not marry a woman if he has not physically seen her. Second, this was not the case with another patriarch—Jacob. Third, I do not agree that today's “elevated divorce rate” is an outcome of “falling in love” but rather the availability of instant communication and expecting unrealistic goals, among the many other social and economic issues. Falling in love is as old as history and the proportional divorce rate was not elevated in previous generations because of it. Fourth, “virtue and character” is a wonderful trait by a woman, but to say that chemistry and a “certain someone” is less important, is missing the point. Would you have married that certain someone if she had virtue and character but there was no chemistry (love and heart flutter) between both of you? I think not. Finally, what makes a marriage successful is commonality. After the early love begins to dissipate with the years, what you are left with is common goals that keeps the marriage successful. The true love is the commonality that keeps the bonds together. Thank you, Zvi.

RABBI REUVEN MANN: Thank you for your incisive comments. I do not diminish the importance of the factors you mentioned. I did say that love is important and did not mean that objective qualities unrelated to an emotional connection satisfies a person's needs.

Clearly the marriage of Yitzchak to Rivka was in line with the Talmud for they both saw each other prior to the marriage. I meant to focus on the problem of not getting to truly know and value the true qualities of the other person and falling in love with the superficial attractiveness of the other, which is not a recipe for a lasting relationship. The other problems you mention are pertinent and all the more reason to base one's choice on factors which will cause the relationship to grow and prosper. Read the last few sentences of my article—I believe it corresponds to what you refer to as commonality. Thanks for your letter. I found your comments to be valuable.

—Rabbi Reuven Mann ■



PART I

Reading the Parsha 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!’” (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 and 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.

The prophet informed her 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 was seizing Esav’s heel. The Torah then says that Esav became a hunter while Jacob was a dweller in tents. Isaac loved Esav, for he captured food for Isaac, while Rivkah loved Jacob. The Torah hints at 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 scented from the field to deceive the senses of the now blind Isaac into thinking Jacob is the hairy hunter Esav. The ruse works. And not a split second after Jacob leaves Isaac’s presence, Esav enters requesting the blessings. This greatly frightens Isaac, as he realized through a successful blessing of Jacob that he must have been wrong about Esav. The blessings’ success indicated divine providence favoring Jacob, while all along Isaac favored Esav. Now our questions:

What was God’s intent that Rivkah experience an unnatural, tormenting pregnancy?

Why was Rivkah’s response to inquire about God’s providence from a prophet?

And why did she inquire from the prophets

Abraham or Shem, but not of her own husband Isaac?

Of what significance is Esav’s hairy nature?

Why are we told that Jacob seized Esav’s heel at birth?

Of what significance is it that “Rivkah loved Jacob, while Isaac loved Esav?”

How was Jacob “instantly” prepared to purchase the birthright from Esav when he asked for the lentils?

Why are we told that Rivkah heard that Isaac was about to bless Esav?

Why did Rivkah and Jacob agree they must deceive Isaac to obtain the blessings; why not ask Isaac openly?

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 to be instrumental in securing the younger son’s success, as a means of establishing the nation of Israel. She also deduced that for good reason, God bypassed Isaac, withholding from him this prophetic information.

The patriarchs and matriarchs did not function in accord with simplistic favoritism. We must not erroneously project such motivation onto them. Thus, when the Torah teaches that, “Isaac loved Esav while Rivkah loved Jacob” it teaches an important lesson. It appears this lesson is that Isaac was not as well informed as was Rivkah about the natures of their two sons. Thus, the Torah saw fit to teach us the imbalance of their divergent loves, 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 desired to bless Esav and not bestow these blessings upon Jacob. Isaac was deluded by Esav’s ostensible good nature, as Esav disguised himself as upright with inquiries of proper conduct (capturing him) only 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 facade offered by Esav’s veneer. Esav presented

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PARSHA

TOLDOS

A Study of God’s Providence

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

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; she had clarity. 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 contend and usurp his twin. Rivkah relied on this knowledge later 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 Jacob clutching Esav’s heel as a divine message. God was showing Rivkah the means that He implanted into human 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 he had murdered, committed adultery and idolatry, for on that day, Abraham had died. 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 any role model displayed by Abraham: “For what good is life, if it ends?” Esav felt. He therefore went astray from Abraham’s values and committed these grave acts. Esav, exhausted and famished, requested the lentils which Jacob had cooked. Jacob “instantly” countered with his offer to purchase the birthright from Esav, in exchange for the lentils. Thus, Jacob’s purchase was premeditated. He had already planned to obtain the birthright prior to this event; now the moment was ripe. We might explain 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 years earlier 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, when Rivkah “happens to overhear” (divine providence) that Isaac was about to give the birthright blessings to Esav, she urges Jacob to deceive his father and to disguise himself as Esav. 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 the birthright later? And 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 must obtain the blessings and told Jacob. 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 truly 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 would not curse him, but he had no concern about the deceit itself as a sin to God. Jacob knew a lie is necessary at times. 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 her husband. She would have to act to bring about the nation of Israel. God orchestrated an abnormal pregnancy precisely to educate Rivkah on matters of this pregnancy: the issuing nations of Jacob and Esav and how they must be guided through her, as “she loved Jacob,” i.e., in this matter she grasped reality whereas Isaac did not. Compelled to inquire from a prophet, she avoided asking Isaac about the pregnancy as she understood Isaac was lacking clarity. Rivkah became equipped with the divine knowledge, vital to ensure 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 one more essential lesson through seeing his hand clutching Esav’s heel: 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 the prophecy comes to be. Had she merely received knowledge that Jacob was to be superior, this knowledge alone does not compel her to act through Jacob. Rather, it was the act of Jacob grabbing his brother’s heel whereby Rivkah understood she was seeing this for a reason. She deduced that this competitive display was necessary to indicate that her two sons have various natures, through which she must play a role to ensure these natures are acted out. She must make Jacob topple Esav in “status” when the time is right.

Rivkah teaches Jacob this prophecy when he is young, and from that point forward, Jacob is ever-prepared to purchase the birthright. And at the right moment, 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, then it must have been God’s will that Jacob had received them.

Isaac’s sudden fright (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. Therefore, Rivkah avoided approaching Isaac with her concerns regarding her pregnancy, and also when securing the blessings for Jacob. And 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 the clues to their answers 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, the development of our minds and souls, and 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 deceit to Rivkah in their childhood home. Thereby, Rivkah learned to be cunning herself and achieved a good outcome of the blessings. Through Rivkah’s cunning, Jacob learned how to deal with Lavan. Lavan’s cunning came full circle and ended up ruining him.

It is also clear from here and other Torah stories that God works with His prophets and righteous individuals through wisdom. God merely handed Rivka certain clues, without spelling out a plan. For God desires His servants to engage wisdom and devise their own plans, and not disengage their minds. God told Abraham that Sodom was exceedingly evil, yet, there existed the option that He would not destroy them. Again, God hinted to a matter that generated curiosity in Abraham’s mind, and so he inquired of God’s system of justice.

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PART II

Having read this, my friend Shaye Mann asked a fine question: “I understand that ‘after’ Rivkah witnessed Isaac favoring Esav, that 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 Shaye had raised, and immediately went back to the verses. Reading from the very beginning of the parsha, 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”, (ostensibly a nationality), why are we told again that Lavan was also an “Arami”? If Lavan’s father was an Aramite, then we know Lavan his son is also an Aramite!

There are no redundancies in God’s Torah. I thought about the first question. I realized “Abraham bore Isaac” must indicate something new. 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 effect 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 seeks to emphasize Isaac’s nature as greatly dependent upon Abraham.

The second verse teaches an apparent 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 was a liar, 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 Shaye’s question.

We are taught that Rivkah—one who observed 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 pregnancy. The Torah cleverly hints to the 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—and not Isaac—when she was in need of understanding the nature of her pregnancy, and how it might affect the establishment of B’nei Yisrael.

These two verses appear at the very start of our Parsha, 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. Thank you Shaye.

It is amazing how subtle redundancies can shed light: one of the true codes of Torah.

God’s Providence

Esav born unnaturally covered with hair conveys Divine intent. The only other mention of Esav’s exterior is the means through which Jacob deceived his father. This teaches that God’s providence was in play at the very birth of these twins. God ensured a means existed through which the blessings would be successfully transmitted to Jacob.

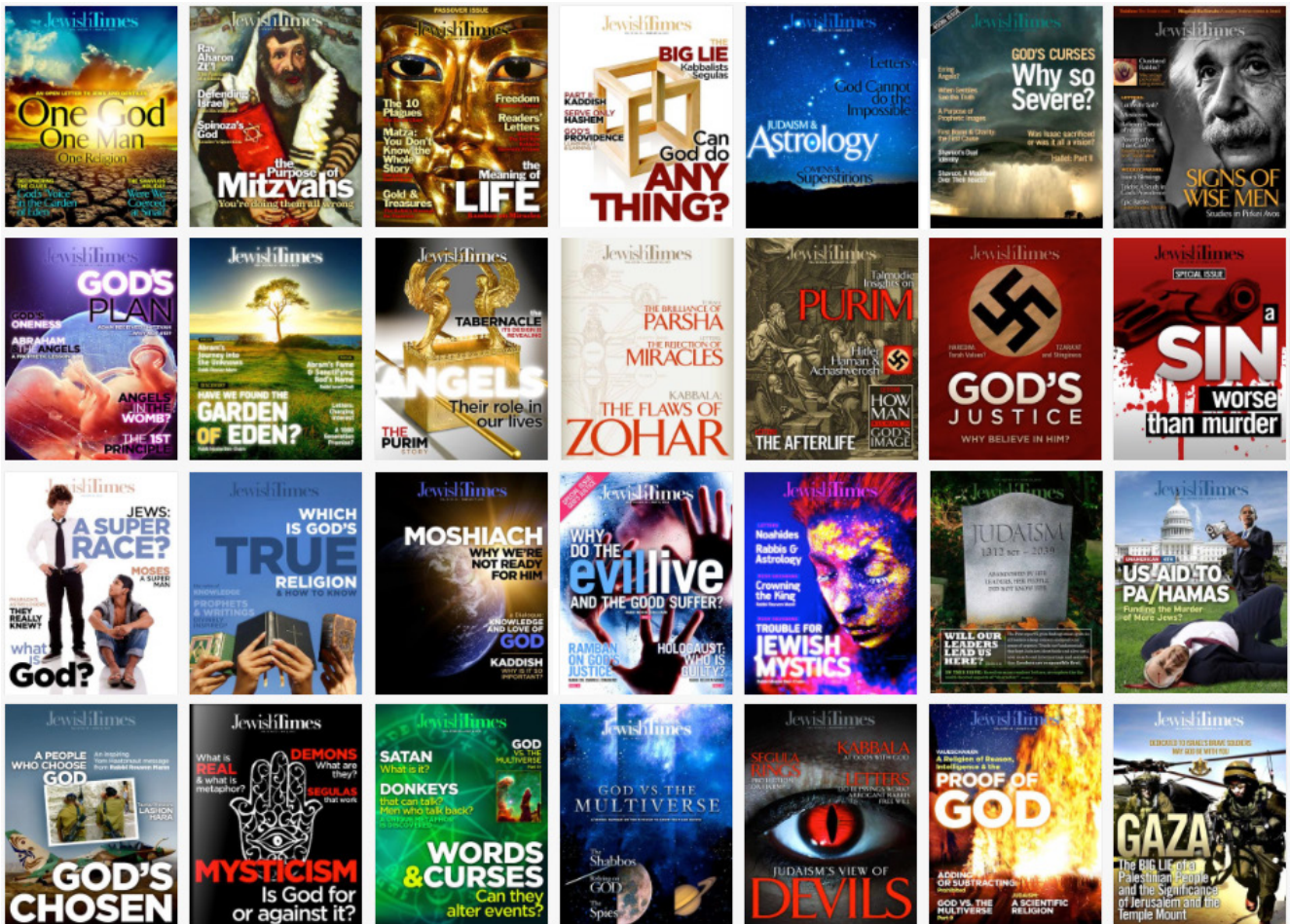
First, God provides the impetus (a troubling pregnancy) to direct the righteous Rivkah towards obtaining greater knowledge. He gave Rivkah prophetic insight into the future of the Jewish nation, emanating from Jacob. It is clear that God wishes men and women to engage their intellects; we are not to sit back while God runs the world. The opposite is the case: God desires the path and progress of mankind to be steered by mankind. We are to use all in our power to achieve the best for all others and ourselves. God says this in Genesis 1:28, “Fill the Earth and conquer it.” But since man cannot know most variables or control even a few of them, God assists man when necessary. Therefore, God 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 physical hairy nature, Jacob’s personality as capable of usurping Esav, and the knowledge of events such as Rivkah hearing Isaac’s wish to bless Esav and Esav’s wish to kill Jacob. And besides reacting to God’s clues, Rivkah devised her own methods, such as dressing Jacob in Esav’s clothing in her anticipation of Isaac’s smelling the fragrance of the field, 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 words of blessing were required as a means of silencing those descendants of Esav claiming shared rights to his legacy, along with Jacob. Talmud Sanhedrin 91a teaches how Ben Pasisa responded to Alexander when the Ishmaelites sought claim on 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 an inheritance from Isaac, now that Isaac declared Jacob his sole inheritor. ■

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Identity Theft

RABBI REUVEN MANN

This week's parsha, Toldot, challenges the limits of our religious tolerance. We tend to create unrealistic images of what our spiritual role models should be like. We assume that the Patriarchs and Matriarchs always tell the truth and never lie. But that is not the case. Avraham lied to the Egyptians and to the Philistines saying that Sarah was not his wife, but his sister. True, he did this for very compelling reasons, but our parsha indicates that this matter went even further.

We read that Yitzchak had gotten older and wanted to confer his blessings upon his oldest son, Eisav, whom he viewed in a favorable light. The verse tells us that, "Yitzchak loved Eisav because the hunt was in his mouth; but Rivka loved Yaakov."

This statement is open to interpretation. Did Yitzchak refrain from loving Yaakov and did Rivka reject Eisav? Why would Yitzchak refrain from embracing Yaakov, whom, we are told, spent all his time studying in the "tents of Shem"? And what would motivate Rivka to spurn her firstborn?

My understanding of this cryptic quote is that both parents loved Yaakov, as his pure character was clear to all. The disagreement focused on their attitude to Eisav, who was a master hunter and "man of the field." Yitzchak believed his bechor was a righteous individual who performed mitzvot and sought to use his material accomplishments for idealistic purposes.

It would appear that Rivka did not share this rosy perspective, but remained skeptical, waiting until Eisav revealed his true character. Thus it was that she kept close watch over Yitzchak's interactions with Eisav. It would appear that she was concerned that Eisav might seek to usurp the rightful spiritual inheritance of Yaakov. When it became apparent to her that Yitzchak was planning to confer his blessings upon the older son, she took measures to thwart his intentions.

To prepare for the blessing, Yitzchak instructed Eisav to hunt an animal and prepare a delicious meal according to his father's taste. Rivka saw this as her opportunity. She implored Yaakov to seize the blessings from Eisav by stealing the identity of his brother. Accordingly, she prepared the meal as Yitzchak preferred and dressed Yaakov in hairy skins to give him the physical texture of his brother.

Yaakov, pretending to be Eisav, appeared before his nearly blind father, who asked him who he was. Said Yaakov, "It is I, Eisav, your firstborn." This seems clearly to be a lie. Yet Rashi appears to



indicate otherwise. He interprets Yaakov's words as meaning, "I -am the one who is bringing this to you- and Eisav, he is your firstborn."

This is a very complex and challenging Rashi. Of course, the words in any statement that is a blatant lie can be reconfigured so they emerge as truthful, but don't we have to judge the utterance at face value? Yaakov clearly conveyed to his father that he was Eisav, and that is how Yitzchak understood his declaration. Does it make a lie any less egregious if we can insert pauses between the words and twist their meaning?

I do not believe that was the intent of our great Bible commentator. He does not mean to say that Yaakov didn't tell a lie. He, in fact, did. However, Rashi is telling us a deep truth about the phenomenon of fraudulence. It is generally prohibited for two reasons. The first is that we owe people the truth and cannot purposely mislead them by offering false information.

However, there is more to the matter than that, as the Torah says, "Stay far away from falsity." The most fundamental task in life is to elevate the soul by pursuing true knowledge. Every departure from the truth has a harmful effect upon the soul. The temptation to depart from reality and obtain desired outcomes by cleverly manipulating information is quite alluring.

In fact, the tendency to dissimulate makes its appearance very early on. Children quickly learn how they can maneuver their parents to avoid punishment or to gain advantages by clever distortions. This propensity remains with us as we get older. In fact, the skill of talking your way out of difficult circumstances is one that is generally admired and prized. If someone is stopped by a police officer for some infraction, and he cleverly avoids a ticket through some narrative he has invented, he will not tire of retelling the tale of his coup to anyone who will listen.

Therefore, it is not just a matter of having permission to tell an untruth. There is a spiritual danger in merely recounting the fiction, even if we are obligated to do it. In consequence, we must take internal measures to lessen the impact of the exposure to mendacity. Rashi therefore means that when Yaakov was telling the lie, he was psychologically disassociating himself from it. He kept focusing on the fact that Eisav was truly Yitzchak's son, to insure that he derived no enjoyment from the pretense.

There is no higher value on the Jewish spectrum of virtue than truth. We must do everything in our power to be excruciatingly honest to others and to ourselves. We must scrupulously avoid any shading of the emet (truth). But we must also know when we are obliged to dissemble to preserve a great ideal.

When this is necessary, we must proceed with great care. The body might be lying, but the soul must distance itself from its harmful effects. Man's goal in life is to pursue truth and to live by it in relations with our fellow man and before Hashem. May we merit to attain it. Shabbat shalom ■

Dear Friends, In this time of social isolation, we should seek ways to avoid boredom by staying occupied with meaningful activity. The world of virtual reality allows us to stay in touch with friends and attend all kinds of classes available online. But that can only take you so far. Comes Shabbat and Yom Tov, and you need books, especially on the parsha. I personally recommend Eternally Yours on Genesis <http://bit.ly/EY-Genesis> and Exodus <http://bit.ly/EY-Exodus>, and my newest one on Numbers <http://bit.ly/EY-Numbers2>. They are easy to read, interesting, and thought-provoking conversation starters. I am especially interested in your feedback and hope you can write a brief review and post it on Amazon.

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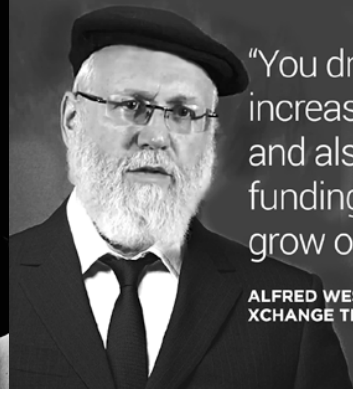
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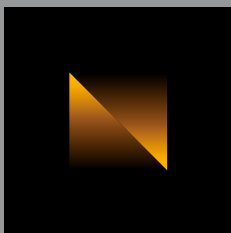
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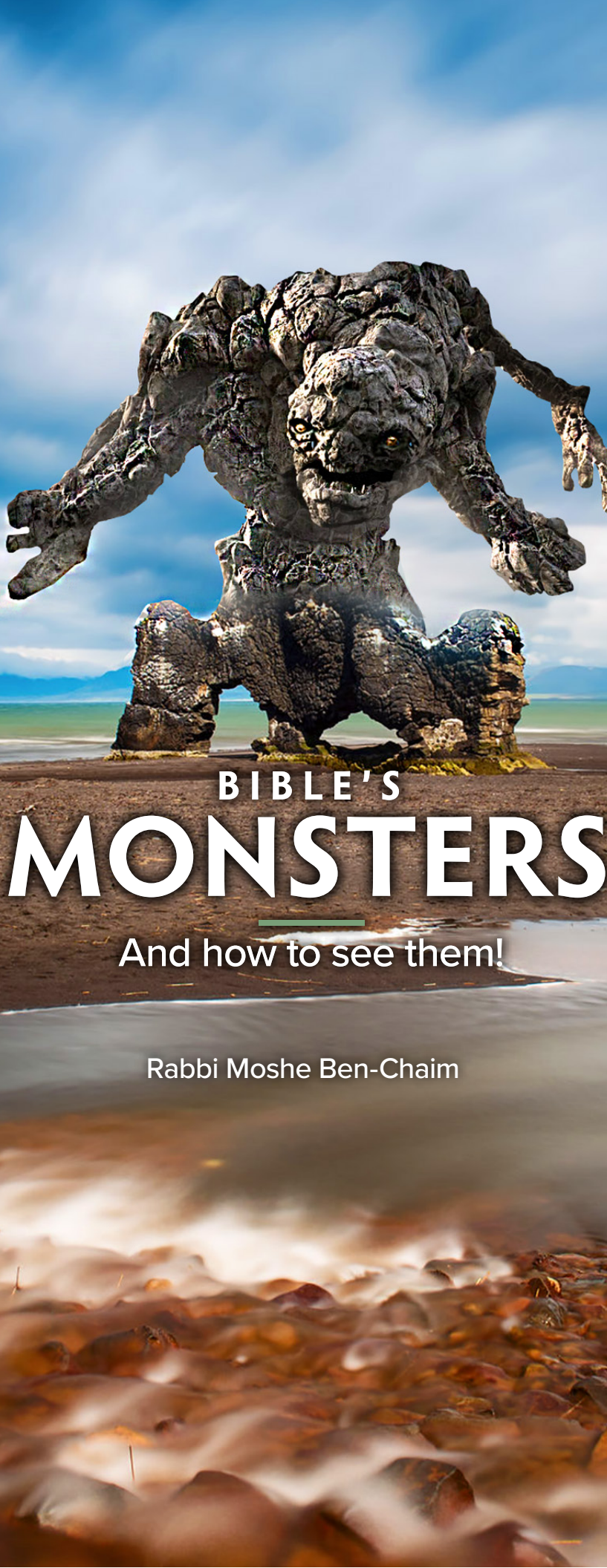
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BIBLE'S MONSTERS

And how to see them!

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

READER: If mazzikim (destroyers/monsters) are supposed to be taken figuratively as some sort of a psychological mirage, why then does the Gemara go out of its way to illustrate ways that we can see them? For example, burning a cat's placenta and rubbing into our eyes, or pouring dust around our beds at night. How can these be interpreted figuratively?

RABBI: Let's read that talmudic portion (Brachos 6a):

Abba Binyamin says: "If the eye was given permission to see, no person would be able to withstand the mazzikim." Abaye said: "They are more numerous than we are and they tower over us like walls of earth surrounding a pit." Rav Huna said: "Each and every one of us has a thousand mazzikim to his left and ten thousand to his right." Rava said: "The crowding at the kalla (gatherings for Torah study during Elul and Adar) is from them; those knees that are fatigued even though one did not exert himself is from them, those clothes of the Sages that wear out, despite the fact that they do not engage in physical labor, is from friction with them; those feet that are in pain is from them. One who seeks to know that the mazzikim exist should place fine ashes around his bed, and in the morning their footprints appear like chickens' footprints, in the ash. One who seeks to see them should take the afterbirth of a firstborn female black cat, born to a firstborn female black cat, burn it in the fire, grind it and place it in his eyes, and he will see them. He must then place the ashes in an iron tube sealed with an iron seal lest the mazzikim steal it from him, and then seal the opening so he will not be harmed. Rav Beivai bar Abaye performed this procedure, saw the mazzikim, and was harmed. The Sages prayed for mercy on his behalf and he was healed.

This last statement, "Rav Beivai bar Abaye saw the mazzikim" conflicts with Abba Binyamin's opening statement, "The eye was not given permission to see the mazzikim." Now, either mazzikim can be seen, or they can't be seen. Which is it?

We must appreciate that Talmud's words are not only content, that midrash is allegory, and also, that there is a structure to Talmud. The opening statement of this portion addressing mazzikim states that man cannot see mazzikim. This is the rule; what then follows must adhere to that rule. It is preferable to reduce arguments and interpret a Talmudic portion where all rabbis compliment each other. Unifying the rabbis' views displays a unified Torah: Torah doesn't contradict itself. Therefore, I explain Rav Beivai bar Abaye "seeing" mazzikim as metaphoric. We certainly do not see thousands of mazzikim surrounding us! We glean from this that whatever mazzikim are, they are many and are "formidable, like walls towering over us in containment."

Rava gives a clue: "The crowding at Torah study during Elul and Adar is from them." Elul is significant: it is the month immediately preceding Rosh Hashana when God decrees for each person his fate for the new year. This decree weighs heavy on us, causing people to be on their best behavior to earn God's good decree. Rav says these crowded study halls are due to the mazzikim. He means that our attempts to ensure a good decree from God—which is based on fear—is due to the mazzikim. He means that mazzikim are human emotions or instincts; here, it is the emotion of fear. (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

“Anyone who is greater than his friend, his evil inclination is greater than his” (Sukkah 52a). The sages are people who constantly battle their instinctual urges more than others. They redirect their strong instinctual energies towards Torah study, generating a rocking and stirring of their bodies, wearing out their clothes.

“One who seeks to know that the mazzikim exist should place fine ashes around his bed, and in the morning their footprints appear like chickens’ footprints, in the ash.”

Another metaphor is “In the morning their footprints appear like chickens’ footprints.” As the rabbis teach, instincts are very active at night. But there will not be any footprints, as mazzikim refer to human instincts which aren’t physical and certainly have no feet! Mazzikim are our own instinctual and unconscious drives. They are more active in sleep when our minds are not in control. That’s why dreams can be very intense and without structure. This Talmudic portion says that only the “residue” of the mazzikim is detected—footprints—but the mazzikim themselves are not seen, as mazzikim are only psychological and not literal. Thus, upon waking each morning, our instinctual residue remains which overtook us in sleep. This residue is termed as “chicken footprints,” as chickens are known to be sexually active...referring here to active instincts. “Though one’s wife is always lawful [permitted] to him, it is proper that a disciple of the wise should demean himself with sanctity, and not be like a rooster [regularly with his wife sexually], rather [engage in intercourse] from Sabbath to Sabbath [Ketubot 62b]” (Maimonides, Laws of Human Disposition 5:4).

Jacob too wrestled a “man” at night. At night he was instinctually aroused, but there was no man, as the verse says, “Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn” (Gen. 32:25). Rabbi Israel Chait explained that at dawn, one awakes, and his unconscious drives [the man] become hidden once again. Additionally, Halacha teaches that man should relieve himself at night as by day, with equal modesty, as there is tendency to be less on guard against our instincts at night (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 3:12).

“One who seeks to see them should take the afterbirth of a firstborn female black cat, born to a firstborn female black cat, burn it in the fire, grind it and place it in his eyes, and he will see them.”

A black cat that’s a first born is hard enough to determine...certainly a firstborn female black cat, born to a firstborn female black cat. One cannot determine birth ranks of multiple animal generations. Meaning, just as one cannot find these black cats, one can’t see mazzikim. As the gemara started out saying, man cannot see mazzikim, for instincts are internal and not visible. They are called monsters or destroyers as they lead man to harm himself through chasing lusts and fantasies.

Such a loathsome act of burning and grinding a placenta—and females demand even greater sensitivity—agitates one’s instincts to the point where one can succumb to

dangerous mental states, termed here as “seeing mazzikim.” We know of people who are emotionally unstable, or who engage too much in instinctual lifestyles where they cannot abandon their paths. Others are psychologically disturbed, depressed, obsessive, paranoid, neurotic with any of a wide range of psychological illnesses. These conditions are all called mazzikim, and are abundant. Then gemara also teaches that one who could entertain performing such a gruesome act will “see mazzikim”—meaning he will encounter unruly emotions or psychological conditions and will harm himself.

“Rav Beivai bar Abaye performed this procedure, saw the mazzikim, and was harmed.”

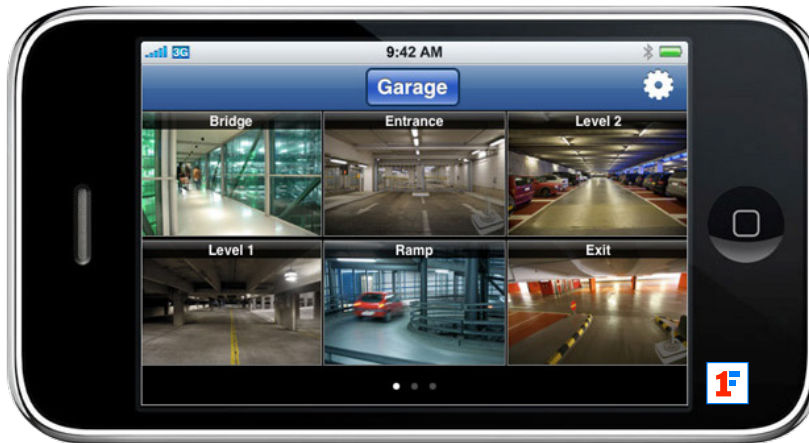
A similar case is when King Saul was desperate and asked the witch to communicate with Samuel. Saul heard the voice of the dead prophet Samuel (I Samuel 28:15). But this is all hallucination as Radak discusses. In his state of mind, King Saul imagined he heard Samuel talk to him. This too was a case of mazzikim.

“He must then place the ashes in an iron tube sealed with an iron seal lest the mazzikim steal it from him”

This means that mazzikim “wish to remain to be unseen.” This euphemism expresses the nature of mazzikim: they are unseen. This is expressed by personifying mazzikim as desiring to steal the ashes so others can’t see them. Mazzikim aren’t alive, as we said. Buy the rabbis scripted these allegories to keep deep ideas from those unable to grasp them, but yet, to safely pass on Torah ideas in a disguised fashion. ■



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What Blinds Us

RABBI ELIEZER BARANY

When Yitzchak was old and his eyes were too dim to see, he called his older son Esav and said to him, "My son." He answered, "Here I am." And he said, "I am old now, and I do not know how soon I may die. Take your gear, your quiver and bow, and go out into the open and hunt me some game. Then prepare a dish for me such as I like, and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my innermost blessing before I die." (Gen. 27:1-4)

The Torah tells us that Yitzchak decided to bless his son Esav in his elder years, when his eyes were too dim to see. Is there some sort of connection between providing the blessing and his eyes dimming? We know eyesight tends to degenerate as a person ages, so of what significance is this detail mentioned?

Rashi, noting the seemingly unnecessary added detail, provides us with three responses:

HIS EYES WERE DIM - through the smoke raised by these women in offering incense to idols (Midrash Tanchuma, Toldot 8). Another explanation is: When Isaac was bound upon the altar and his father was about to slay him, at that very moment the heavens opened, the ministering angels saw it and wept, and their tears flowed and fell upon Isaac's eyes which thus became dim (Genesis Rabbah 65:10). Another explanation is: They became dim just in order that Jacob might receive the blessings (Genesis Rabbah 65:8).

Rashi notes that there is a causal relationship between the dimming of the eyes and the giving of the blessing, however, what does each answer reveal to us?

We can note that the second answer tells us that his eyes became dim during Akeidat Yitzchak, an event that occurred many years earlier. Therefore, it must not be that he was blinded immediately prior to conferring this blessing. However, the third answer seems to say that he was blinded at this point in time in order to allow Yaakov to receive this blessing. What then can we observe about the first answer? Was he blinded immediately prior to this event, but not for the sake of Yaakov? Additionally, if according to the second answer he was not blinded at this time, why would the Torah make reference to his lack of sight at this point?

It seems clear that the second answer, concerning Yitzchak becoming blind upon the altar, shows that the midrash is highlighting a casual relationship. He may have become blind years earlier, but is this midrash saying that the entire purpose of his blindness is due to being able to provide Yaakov with



a blessing that Yitzchak intended for Esav?

When Esav was forty years old, he took to wife Judith, daughter of Beerli the Hittite, and Basemath, daughter of Elon the Hittite; and they were a source of bitterness to Yitzchak and Rivkah. (Gen. 26:34,35)

The Torah tells us that prior to attempting to bless Esav, Yitzchak and Rivkah were bothered by Esav marrying certain Hittites. Rashi, quoting Midrash Rabbah, tells us that Yitzchak and Rivkah were bothered by this because, "they worshipped idols" (Midrash Rabbah 65:4). How does being bothered by this event lead to the Torah next telling us that Yitzchak looked to offer a blessing to Esav? In fact, how are we to understand that the smoke of Avodah Zarah blinded Yitzchak; was he attending these offerings? If so, how many [times] was he attending to cause such permanent damage to his eyesight? Additionally, Elyahu Munk, in his translation of Rabbeinu Bachya's Torah commentary asks, why were Rivkah's eyes not dimmed as well?

Perhaps according to this understanding he was not literally blinded. I would like to suggest that according to the first answer, the forethought, the prophecy of Yitzchak, had ceased at this point.

The Gemara tells us that, "The Divine Presence does not rest upon an individual from an atmosphere of sadness" (Tal. Shabbos 30b). Perhaps Yitzchak was saddened by witnessing Esav marry idolaters, and therefore his prophecy ceased. In fact, this fits with the storyline because Yitzchak then asks Esav to prepare him a meal in order to bless him. Yitzchak was not in a soothing state to properly provide a prophetic blessing so he requested that Esav be the one to make him feel better. He hoped that this would allow him to garner a more appreciative feeling towards Esav in light of the recent events.

This line of reasoning fits in line with another Midrash Rabbah comment (Genesis Rabbah 65:7) that Yitzchak was blinded by this "bribe" of Esav. This shows that not all felt that this was a literal blindness, and furthermore, they saw from the text that Yitzchak was trying to turn a blind eye to Esav's personality.

Rivkah however was not subject to this type of sadness. The Torah testifies that Yitzchak loved Esav

and Rivkah loved Yaakov (Gen. 25:28), along with the rest of the narrative pointing to Rivkah being closer to Yaakov. As such, even though she too was bothered by Esav marrying the idolaters, it was nonetheless expected. She did not feel disheartened because she was more aware of Esav's personality, so her eyes were not dimmed.

Without prophecy, he could not know about the habits of Esav other than what he saw. He knew that he had negative habits, which is why Esav married idolaters, but he didn't know the full gamut. As Rashi tells us, Esav was wont to deceive Yitzchak:

A CUNNING HUNTER: literally, understanding hunting — understanding how to entrap and deceive his father with his mouth. He would ask him, "Father how should salt and straw be tithed?" (Genesis Rabbah 63:10). Consequently his father believed him to be very punctilious in observing the divine ordinances. (Rashi on Gen. 25:27)

Yitzchak recognized that Esav was not perfect. He attempted to deceive Yitzchak, yet Yitzchak was aware that Esav married idolaters. So Yitzchak saw an incomplete, not fully accurate, picture of Esav.

What can we glean from these three answers? It seems that the first answer focuses on Esav losing the blessing, not Yaakov earning it. The third answer seems to say that for no other reason did Yitzchak become blind other than to provide Yaakov with this blessing. As such, one approach focuses on Esav causing the loss of the blessing and one focuses on Yaakov earning the blessing. In regard to the answer provided that Yitzchak was blinded during the Akedah, perhaps the midrash is telling us that Yitzchak's nature was changed, irrespective of his children.

After going up on the altar as an Olah sacrifice, he was forever changed. We see midrashim highlight practical applications. He was not allowed to leave Canaan (Rashi on Gen. 25:2) and he would not take a maidservant to have children with (Rashi on Gen. 25:26); he was a new person. He had sacrificed his soul before Hashem (Tal. Shabbos 89b). Perhaps what led to this confusion of who should receive the blessing is just a natural outgrowth of Yitzchak being who he now was. As a changed man, he viewed the world differently than other people.

What was the reason for Yaakov receiving the blessing intended for the first born? Was it because Esav lost it, was it because Yaakov earned it, or was it due to some characteristic of Yitzchak? We may not know which of the three reasons caused Yaakov to receive the blessing, but we do know those three details existed.

Sometimes we may merit something due to our achievement, due to someone else's failure, or due to merely living a certain way. Perhaps we can learn from this Rashi that we cannot expect one of the three reasons to be the constant cause, but rather we should strive to improve ourselves in all three areas. We should strive to seize opportunities for growth, we should try to not do something that might inhibit our growth, merely relying on other actions we have done. Finally, we should not think that we are generally doing well and just rely on the status quo to remain the same. We need to look to all three fronts, and not blind ourselves from the other possibilities. ■

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