

"All is in the hand of God, except fear of God". (Megilla 25a) God only gave 'clues' to Rivkah, in order that she use intelligence to secure a successful outcome. God desires us all to employ our wisdom of God, human nature and natural law to live the best lives. "Fill the Earth and conquer it". (Gen. 1:28) Had Rivkah claimed "all is bashert", her failure to use her cunning could have proved disastrous.

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5771
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IN THIS ISSUE

PARSHA: TOLDOT	I-4
YAAKOV & EISAV	I,6
STRINGS ATTACHED	8
RESPECT & SUSPECT	4
ABRAHAM'S PERFECTIONS	5
ARCHEOLOGY: SODOM	7
GOD'S PROVIDENCE	9-II
OU JOBS & SINGLES	13

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Weekly Parsha

Toldot

RABBI BERNIE FOX

The Unique Role of Yitzchak among the Patriarchs

And these are the offspring of
Yitzchak the son of Avraham.

(continued on next page)

Weekly Parsha

*Yaakov and Eisav
Tzadik and Rasha*

Beyond the Labels

RABBI DR. DARRELL GINSBERG

Throughout Jewish history, we are confronted with the clash between tzadik and rasha, the person reflecting the ways of God and the individual committed to the destruction of those ways. More often than not, the two individuals are from completely different backgrounds, their first encounter is the establishment of the relationship. In this week's parsha, we again are introduced to the ideological divergence of two individuals, Yaakov and Eisav. What makes them so unique is that they were twins, raised in the same household, their relationship beginning in the womb. Yet they ended up on opposite ends of the spiritual spectrum, one as the future of Judaism and the other the antithesis of Jewish ideology and values. Studying their development, one would think the distinction between the two would be clear – and yet, as

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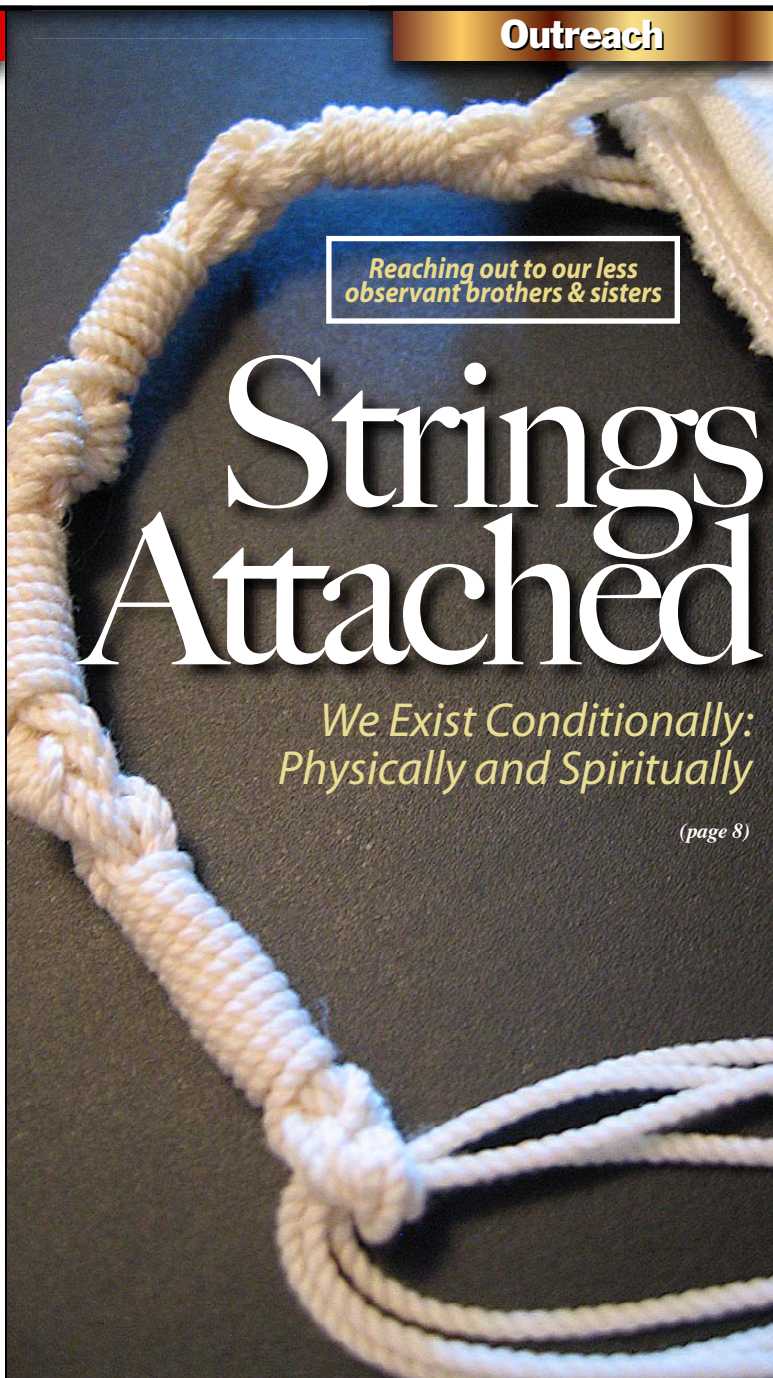
Outreach

Reaching out to our less
observant brothers & sisters

Strings Attached

*We Exist Conditionally:
Physically and Spiritually*

(page 8)



(Toldot cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

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Yitzchak gave birth to Yitzchak. Yitzchak was forty years old when he took Rivka the daughter to Betuel of Aram, the sister of Lavan of Aram to himself as a wife. (Beresheit 25:19-20)

The Torah's brevity in dealing with Yitzchak

The Torah's account of the life of our first patriarch, Avraham, is the topic of three parshiyot (plural of parasha). The life of our third patriarch, Yaakov, is the topic of two parshiyot. The Torah's account of the life of our second patriarch, Yitzchak, is limited to Parshat Toldot. Even in Yitzchak's parasha, he shares the tableau with his son, Yaakov. The impression that the Torah treats Yitzchak primarily as a bridge between his father Avraham and his son Yaakov is reinforced by the opening passages of the parasha. The Torah announces its intention to describe the life of Yitzchak; the Torah opens its account by describing Yitzchak as the son of Avraham and then immediately describes the circumstances of the birth of his two sons, Yaakov and Esav.

The Torah's account of Yitzchak's life is limited to two incidents. The first incident is his resettlement in Gerar and the surrounding area and the resultant interactions with the people of the area and Avimelech their king. The second incident is his attempt to bless Esav and Rivka's successful effort to divert the blessings from their intended recipient to Yaakov. We can understand the significance of this second incident. It impacted the future of the Jewish people. However, the message or importance of the first incident is less apparent. It seems odd that this incident should be one of the only two incidents from Yitzchak's life described by the Torah! Clearly, a closer examination of this incident is required in order to identify its message.

Yitzchak's resettlement in Gerar

There was a famine in the land aside from the first famine that was in the time of Avraham. And Yitzchak went to Avimelech, the King of the Pelishim, to Gerar. (Beresheit 26:1)

The Torah tells us that the Land of Canaan was stricken by a severe famine as had occurred in the time of Avraham. Yitzchak prepares to travel to Egypt to find relief. As Yitzchak is traveling to Egypt, he receives a prophecy. Hashem directs him to remain in the Land of Canaan. His descendants will take possession of the Land as Hashem promised Avraham. In response to the prophecy Yitzchak remains in the Land and settles in Gerar.

The morality of the people of Gerar is suspect. Yitzchak decides to conceal that Rivka is his wife and claims that she is his sister. He is fearful that if their true relationship were known, a suitor might kill him in order to take Rivka. Overtime, this subterfuge is discovered by Avimelech the King. Avimelech rebukes Yitzchak for his deceit and warns the people of his land to not harm Yitzchak or Rivka.



Despite the continuation of the famine, Yitzchak has a remarkably successful harvest. Hashem blesses him with prosperity. As he prospers the local population – the Pelishtim – becomes increasingly jealous. Wells that Avraham had dug in the region are filled with by the Pelishtim. Avimelech asks Yitzchak to move away.

Yitzchak agrees to Avimelech's request. He moves on. However, he redigs the wells of his father and restores to each the name that Avraham had assigned to it. He adds other wells to these wells. The first two wells he digs are the focus of controversy. The Pelishtim

dispute the right of Yitzchak and his shepherds to the water from these wells and insist that they have the primary right to the water. Yitzchak gives each of these wells a name that reflects strife and conflict. He is persistent and digs a third well. The Pelishtim do not dispute this well and Yitzchak gives this well a name reflecting tranquility and Hashem's providence.

Yitzchak settles in Be'er Sheva. Here, he has another prophecy. Hashem tells him to not fear because He is with him because of his covenant with Avraham. Yitzchak constructs an altar and assumes Avraham's role of teaching humanity.

Avimelech travels to Be'er Sheva and asks Yitzchak to enter into a treaty with him. Yitzchak agrees. Yitzchak then digs another well that he names Shiva.

There are many strange elements to this account. However, we will focus on two of them.

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In the first part of this narrative, the Torah seems to suggest a comparison between Avraham and Yitzchak. Both are confronted with famine. Both decide to travel to Egypt to secure relief. Yitzchak does not complete the trip and instead settles in Gerar. In Gerar, he is confronted with the identical problem encountered by Avraham when he traveled to Egypt and later in his life when he settled in Gerar. Both were afraid that as the husbands of beautiful women, their lives were in danger. Both solved the problem through identical strategies; they described their wives as their sisters.

Yitzchak's emulation of Avraham

The impression made by these passages is that when confronted with a series of practical dilemmas, Yitzchak did not attempt to develop new and original solutions. Instead, he relied upon the wisdom of his father. In each instance, his decision was to adopt the strategy of his father. Apparently, the Torah is telling us something important about Yitzchak's character. However, the lesson is not yet apparent.

In the next series of incidents, the Torah describes the successes and the challenges that came upon Yitzchak. These experiences are very different from those of his father. Avraham and Yitzchak both prospered in Gerar. Avraham became increasingly welcomed and respected. His fame and influence was acknowledged by Avimelech who asked Avraham to enter into a treaty with him. Yitzchak also prospered. But his success was greeted with jealousy and opposition. Avimelech chased him out of Gerar and his expulsion was followed by a prolonged period of strife with the local inhabitants. But the most notable contrast between Yitzchak and his father was in their role as teachers. Avraham adopted the mission of teaching others with his arrival in Canaan. According to our Sages, he actually began teaching even before reaching Canaan. Yitzchak only belatedly assumed this role. Only after achieving some level of acceptance among the local population and an assurance from Hashem that He would protect him did Yitzchak assume the role of teacher. This contrast is all the more remarkable given Yitzchak's reliance of Avraham as a model for his own behavior!

The divergence in the personalities of Avraham and Yitzchak

Yitzchak's delay in taking-on the role of teacher provides an important insight into his personality. Yitzchak waited until he was accepted by the people and assured by Hashem that he should not

fear before establishing himself as their teacher. Avraham did not wait for acceptance and needed no assurance. He found the truth and immediately began his life-mission of sharing that truth with others. Avraham was not only a sage. He was also a perceptive and shrewd student of human nature. He was confident in his ability to reach others and to impact their convictions. He had a truth to share with humanity and he developed strategies and practices to facilitate his work. Yitzchak was a sage. Perhaps, building upon the discoveries of his father, he added to the body of knowledge handed down to him by his father Avraham. But he did not perceive in himself his father's understanding of human nature, or his shrewdness in dealing with others. Avraham taught others with the confidence that he could shape their opinions – even their perceptions of him. Yitzchak taught those who were prepared to accept him as a sage. But their acceptance of him preceded his assumption of the role as their teacher.

Avraham's facility in understanding people and reaching them led to his rapid ascent in Gerar. Yitzchak achieved Avraham's success and even a comparable level of acceptance. However, he did not achieve these through his astute insight into human character; he achieved his success and acceptance through sheer tenacity. The Pelishtim attempted to forget Avraham and the lessons he had taught them. They filled his wells, attempting to erase his legacy. Yitzchak re-dug the wells and returned to them the names assigned by Avraham. He dug a well and the Pelishtim fought with him over it. He dug a new well. When they disputed his right to this well, he dug a third. Ultimately, his repeated successes could no longer be ignored. The Pelishtim abandoned their campaign and accepted Yitzchak's success as an expression of Divine providence. With this acceptance, Yitzchak realized that his time had come to continue Avraham's mission; he erected an altar and began teaching. Ultimately, even Avimelech who had expelled Yitzchak from Gerar was forced to accept Yitzchak as Avraham's spiritual heir and to acknowledge that the providence that permeated Avraham's life extended to his son.

Now, Yitzchak's wisdom in emulating his father's responses to famine and danger can be appreciated. Too often a scholar is intoxicated by his own wisdom. A master in one field, he imagines himself a sage in areas of knowledge in which he has no expertise. Yitzchak understood his own greatness, but he also appreciated that in his deep understanding of the complicated workings of the practical world and human nature, his father was the true master. Yitzchak accepted his father's example as his guide and adopted the strategies developed by his father as his own.



Yitzchak's attempt to bless Esav

When Yitzchak became aged his vision dulled. He called to Esav his elder son and he said to him: Here I am. (Beresheit 27:1)

The Torah's description of these events is an essential prelude to its presentation of a second event in Yitzchak's life – his failed attempt to bless Esav and the diversion of the blessings to Yaakov. The Torah tells us that Yitzchak preferred Esav and that the greater portion of Rivka's love was directed towards Yaakov. Yitzchak decided to bless his beloved son Esav. The ensuing events are well known and require only a brief review.

Rivka persuades Yaakov to disguise himself as Esav and to divert his father's blessings to himself. Yaakov is successful in executing his mother's strategy. Esav discovers his father's error and implores him to bestow a blessing upon him. Yitzchak protests that he has no further blessings to distribute. However in response to Esav's anguish, he does bless him. Rivka realizes that Esav's anger places Yaakov in danger and she persuades Yitzchak to send Yaakov away to the home of her bother Lavan.

Many aspects of this account are troubling. However, there are two questions that stand out. First, the previous incident provided a basic delineation of Yitzchak's strengths and his limitations. With that account we can understand his failure to fully comprehend Esav's character and the full breadth and depth of his flaws. However, it is more difficult to explain his perspective on Yaakov. How could he not recognize Yaakov's greatness? Why would he wish to bless Esav rather than Yaakov?

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Second, the dialogue between Yitzchak and Esav is confusing. Esav beseeches his father to bless him. Yitzchak protests that he has no additional blessing to bestow. However, when pressed he does come up with a blessing. What changed that allowed Yitzchak to bless Esav? Furthermore, Yitzchak's protest that he had no further blessings is contradicted by the blessing that he apparently held in reserve and only bestowed upon Yaakov before his departure for Lavan's home.

Yitzchak's understanding of the blessings and his design for their distribution

Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno explains that Yitzchak fully appreciated Yaakov's greatness and his superiority over his brother Esav. The last blessing – held in reserve – was the blessing of Avraham. This blessing was to be bestowed upon the son who would continue Avraham's mission and possess the Land of Israel. Yitzchak never doubted that Yaakov was the spiritual giant of his sons and that this blessing was his destiny. However, Yitzchak believed that Esav was the appropriate recipient of a blessing that would bestow material success and even conquest. According to Sforno, Yitzchak believed that the distribution to these two blessings to their appropriate recipients created the best possible outcome for each. Yaakov would assume the role of spiritual leader unburdened by the distractions of dealing with the material world. Esav would assume responsibility for confronting and overcoming the mundane challenges of material existence. He would be a conqueror and ruler and he would benevolently care for his younger brother and free him from the distractions of the mundane. [1] In other words, Yitzchak attempted to create for Yaakov the life we would imagine that Yitzchak would have desired for himself.

Rivka was a shrewder judge of human character and she did not trust Esav to be the benevolent ruler envisioned by Yitzchak. Therefore, she disrupted Yitzchak's plan and diverted the material blessing to Yaakov and away from Esav.

The blessing received by Esav

Sforno's explanation of Yitzchak's reasoning explains his initial response to Esav – his insistence that he had no blessing to give him. Yitzchak had not envisioned a blessing whose sole end was material success. He conceived of a spiritual blessing. This was the blessing of Avraham that he gave to Yaakov. He also conceived of a blessing of material success and conquest for the purpose of supporting and nurturing Yaakov's spiritual development. This is the blessing he had intended to bestow upon Esav. But Yitzchak recognized that Divine providence had assisted Rivka and the diversion of this blessing to Yaakov only occurred because he had been mistaken in his assessment of Esav. Esav would not use

material success and conquest to nurture spiritual growth – not Yaakov's and not even his own. A blessing of material success without a spiritual end was not envisioned by Yitzchak. Neither could he imagine the value of such a blessing. Therefore, when Esav pleaded with Yitzchak to bless him, Yitzchak could not imagine an appropriate blessing. Only after Esav insisted that his father reconsider did Yitzchak realize that he could bestow a blessing on his son Esav. It was not the type of blessing that Yitzchak had ever considered as worthwhile or of value. But it was a blessing that he belatedly recognized as appropriate for Esav – a purely material blessing devoid of any spiritual objective.

Now, Yitzchak's role as a bridge between Avraham and Yaakov can be appreciated. Avraham was the first patriarch and he discovered the truth that would become the foundation of a new nation. Yaakov designed the structure of this nation. He intimately understood the character, strengths and weaknesses of each of his twelve sons. He organized them into the forerunners of a nation that would optimize these strengths and minimize the failings. Between these two giants Yitzchak existed served as a bridge. His greatness and conquests were in the spiritual realm. He was the patriarch that embodied complete devotion to Hashem uncompromised by the distractions of the mundane. This super-human dedication allowed him to nurture, develop, and transmit to his son Yaakov the truths of his father Avraham. But the very source of his greatness – his total, absolute devotion to the spiritual – made him inappropriate for the more practical responsibility of nation builder to be assumed by Yaakov. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 27:29.

Respect & Suspect

Rabbi Reuven Mann

In this week's parsha, Toldot, we read about the birth of twin sons to Rivkah. Generally, there is a great deal of similarity among twins. However, Esav and Yaakov could not have been more different from each other. Yaakov was a (pure) person who "dwelled in tents." The meaning of this statement is that he spent his time in the "Beit Medrash" studying Torah and wisdom, day and night. On the other hand, Esav was an expert hunter, an outdoorsman. The parents did not share the same attitude toward their children. Yitzchak loved Esav, because the "hunt was in his mouth: and Rivka loved Yaakov."

At first glance the reason for Yitzchak's love of Esav is not easy to understand. Rashi explains that Esav practiced the art of deception with his father. He would come to him with all types of shailot (questions of Jewish law) e.g. how does one tithe salt and straw, which gave Yitzchak the impression that his older son was very meticulous in mitzvot. Rivka, however, was apparently unimpressed. She came from a family and culture of "deceivers". Her brother, after all, was the great con man Lavan. She knew that there were people whose entire religiosity was geared exclusively to making an impression on others. Esav was in the field all day where no one could observe his true behavior. Anyone is capable of being on good conduct for short periods of time. Yaakov however spent all of his time engaged in study and the pursuit of knowledge. That type of dedication cannot be manufactured to impress people. The Rabbis say "Respect him and suspect him." We should treat people with consideration but should not be overly impressed by outward appearances of righteousness. We should always retain an element of suspicion until we can ascertain that a person is genuinely upright. And we should be just as suspicious about ourselves. We should honestly examine if the good deeds we do are essentially to impress others. There is nothing wrong with "seeking credit" and a pat on the back but we must also foster a genuine love of Hashem and a desire to the good when only He is watching. –Shabbat Shalom ■

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Abraham's intellectual and moral perfections

Moshe Abarbanel



Were the five sister cities of Sodom and Amora interconnected?

When Abraham questions God to understand His Justice, he presents a strange series of questions. (Abraham is not negotiating with God. As God is perfect, His justice must be perfect. Therefore, to negotiate would imply some imperfection in God's reasoning)

In Genesis 18:23-33 Abraham starts by stating, "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?!" We see from here that Abraham is addressing the Creator's Justice. We also understand that the Creator plans to teach Abraham about his justice as it states, "For I have known him, to the end that he may command his children and his household after him that they may keep the way of Lord to do righteousness and justice, to the end that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which He spoke of him." (Gen. 18:19) God decided to reveal to our forefather an aspect of justice that the human mind cannot achieve without divine assistance. ("Will I keep hidden..." ibid 18:17)

Abraham continues his quest to understand divine justice by asking "Perhaps there are fifty righteous within the city, will you indeed sweep away and not forgive the place for fifty righteous that are there?" Abraham attempts to understand how the All-Powerful calculates His Justice. God answers that for the 50 He will not destroy the inhabitants. Abraham asks if five are lacking, will You still spare them? God answers he will not destroy because of the five lacking from the 50.

Rashi states "Will you destroy for the lack of the five if there be nine (righteous) for each city and You the Righteous One of the world will be included with them to make up the tenth in each?" (ibid 18:28) Here, Rashi teaches us that each city must have ten. God in His compassion will allow nine per city but no less. That is why – according to my understanding of Rashi – that Abraham does not seek less than ten men at the end of his inquest.

Yet, Abraham persists in asking the Judge of Judges what if there 40, 30, 20 and finally 10? What is his line of reasoning? If he already determined that ten upright people are required for salvation, why continue asking in decreasing progression by tens? Rashi is also bothered by this and writes, "Perhaps there shall be found there forty and four of the cities will be saved, and similar thirty will rescue three of them (cities) or twenty shall rescue two or ten shall rescue one of them." (ibid 18:29). What is Rashi teaching us? He already established that each city must have ten in the previous sentence.

I believe Rashi is telling us something new here. I believe Abraham is now is trying to understand the interconnection between these five cities. Each decrease represents not only one city but a different evaluation of the entire community known as Sodom. The five cities were considered part of one larger community collective called by the largest cities names – "Sodom and Amora".

Abraham now wishes to learn if, of the complete set of 50, there is an initial breach of that full 50 (only 45 righteous) in four of the cities, will the Almighty spare the remaining cities? God answers that these cities will be spared. What if only a majority (three of the five) of cities contain the righteous, will God save the majority based on 30 righteous souls? The Almighty answers he will save the majority. After this, what if upright people are only found in the minority of cities, 20 upright people in two of the five cities, will the Creator spare the two cities...a minority? Abraham is taught that a minority of dwellings can qualify for saving. Finally when Abraham gets down to ten righteous people in one city he now wants to know if the cities are interconnected. Will one city be spared for the upright people living there while the rest of the cities that comprised this community are destroyed? We find the answer to be that even one city by itself with only ten righteous people can be spared.

Thereby, each of Abraham's questions were intended to understand a new element of Divine Justice. This was not simply a numbers game. ■

Choosing a Burial Plot

How does one choose his last resting place? Should it be a quiet place? A place with a view? Near family? Last week when Sarah died Avarham found himself with this exact problem. Some people make plans for interment years in advance. It seems that Avarham did not. Did he just accidentally choose to bury Sarah in Hebron? Did he like the location? We are given many details in the parsha that may hint to what Avarham was doing. First he goes specifically to the Beni Chait and humbly requests "achuat kevar" a possession of a burying place. He also beseeches the elders to intercede on his behalf to speak with Ephron the son of Zohar "that he may give me the cave of Machpelah which he has" (Genesis 23:9). Avarham has the presence of mind in middle of his grief to request a specific location to establish burial plot for Sarah and ultimately himself and the other Avos and Emaos. If this is so what was so special about this location?

Rashi may give us a hint in Genesis 23:2. He is bothered by Torah name for city Hebron, Kirath-Arba. "And Sarah died in Kirath-Arba the name is Hebron". Rashi gives two explanations on the name Kiraiath-Arba, literally the city of four. Rashi states in his second explanation is "because of the four pairs that were buried there, man and wife; Adam and Eve, Avraham and Sarah, Issac and Rebekah and Jacob and Leah." Why did Avarham want to establish burial monument linked to Adam the first man? He seems to know according to Rashi that Adam and Eve were buried there and Avarham specifically wants to bury Sarah with them. What is the connection?

I believe that Avarham knew that just as in life he and Sarah represented to people the true ideas of Monotheism that their resting place had to accomplish the same. But even more, he desired to link their discovery of One True God to first man because Adam HaReshon was the first Monotheist. Created by God directly Adam knew his maker and understood that there were no other deities besides HaShem. He tried to fulfill God's Will (even though he originally failed). Over the next twenty generation between Adam and Avarham people forgot the one true God. Avarham and Sarah reestablished the concepts of Monotheism that Adam lived by. So it was fit to link their permanent resting place with Adam thereby linking the first Monotheist with reestablishers of Monotheism.

Rambam [1] says all altars were erected at the site of "Adams creation": the altars of David, Noah, Abraham, etc. Why? This is so that all subsequent generations should recognize monotheism, i.e., God. Knowing that we are "created" and created by HIM, is emphasized by linking all sacrifice to the location of Adam's "creation", that location being exclusively identified with man's creation, and thus, the Creator. ■

[1] Hilchos Bais Habechira chap 2; halachos 1 and 2.

will be shown, they did not actually seem so different at first.

The Torah famously tells us (Bereishis 25:22) that during Rivkah's pregnancy, the two children "clashed inside her." Rashi, based on the Midrash, offers his famous analysis of this struggle within the womb (ibid):

"Our Sages explain it as having the meaning of moving quickly: When she would pass the doorways of Torah study of Sheim and Eiver, Yaakov would agitate and rush to come out. When she would pass doorways of idol-worshippers, Eisav would agitate to come out."

The distinction between these two individuals could not be any clearer: Eisav, the penultimate rasha, Yaakov, the paradigm tzadik.

Soon after, the Torah tells us (ibid, 27) that the two became older. Rashi (ibid), again citing a Midrash, offers an interesting analysis:

"As long as they were little they were indistinguishable by their deeds and no one could know their exact character. Once they turned thirteen, one [Yaakov] went his way to houses of study and the other went his way to worshipping idols."

This presents a clear contradiction to the previous statement by Rashi. Before they were even born, Yaakov and Eisav were being identified based on each one's particular ideological identities. And yet when they were born, and until the age of thirteen, it seems as though there was nothing whatsoever distinguishing the two. Which was it then?

We must have a basic insight into the first Midrash in order to help resolve this contradiction. Obviously, to imagine a scenario where the two yet-to-be-born brothers were moving only when passing certain types of buildings raises all sorts of difficult questions – a literal reading would be out of order here. What concept is being taught? Yaakov and Eisav's births did not mean they emerged immediately as tzadik and rasha. However, the Midrash is indicating that both sons had certain innate tendencies, personality traits that were part of their development even before birth. These innate characteristics meant that both Eisav and Yaakov possessed the psychological framework that could lead each one down opposite roads. There is a similar description found in the circumcision of a son that emphasizes this point. At a bris, the final bracha recited starts off with a reference to God Who "sanctified the beloved one from the womb." Tosafos (Shabbos 137b) explains that, based on the Talmud in Menachos, the beloved referred to here is Avraham. Understanding that there was a unique relationship between Avraham and God is obvious. However, what does it mean he was sanctified from the womb? If Avraham truly was sanctified in the womb, why

would it have taken him forty years to discover God? Upon his birth, he should have immediately destroyed his father's idols! Obviously, to take this concept literally is quite difficult, to say the least. The explanation, then, is similar to that of Eisav and Yaakov. It would seem that Avraham also had certain innate personality traits that would be of great assistance and importance in his role as the progenitor of monotheism. These characteristics would only play their part if he made the right decisions in life. The key point here is that to assume that the life decisions for all these great people were determined before their birth does not make sense – instead, it refers to tendencies and traits.

This opening helps clarify the second Midrash. Both Eisav and Yaakov had inborn personality traits pointing in opposite directions. The Midrash emphasizes, though, that there was nothing whatsoever distinguishing the two at an early age. In a society enamored with labeling people, one would think that someone as "evil" as Eisav would demonstrate those "evil" behaviors at a very early age. This assumption might be true when discussing a sociopath. The same could be argued regarding Yaakov, that one might think his righteousness would be on display at the earliest possible age – maybe pre-school enrollment at Yeshivas Shem V'Ever. Yet Yaakov seemed to act no differently than Eisav early on in their lives. This drives home a crucial point, namely that ideological directions are the results of conscious decisions. It is man's choice to be the tzadik or rasha, not some sort of pre-determined fate. It is no coincidence that the Midrash focuses on the age of thirteen. As we all know, it is at this age that a young man becomes obligated in all mitzvos. His intellectual and psychological developments are at the point that he can benefit from the ideas of the mitzvos, a monumental step in his life. At this stage in life, the ability to make these decisions, to exercise his bechira, comes to the forefront. So too with Yaakov and Eisav. They were not "forced" to become the future of the Jewish people or the paradigm of evil – they were conscious decisions by each of them.

The Midrash does offer one other important point, which helps unify the above ideas. Both Eisav and Yaakov had these innate traits that would play a significant role in the lifestyles they would choose. It is interesting, however, that there



was nothing obvious in their actions as to which direction each would take. Parents tend to get fixated on actions alone when dealing with their children. It is always a source of pride that one's child scored well on an exam, read a difficult book, or hit the home run. This might even lead to "bragging rights," discussing with other parents how little Timmy is just such a great kid. However, the Midrash is pointing out that while the actions of both Yaakov and Eisav were indistinguishable, this does not mean their motives were identical. The same action, whether it be something minor or something monumental, can have a completely different effect on the child depending on what is driving him to that behavior. Our concern must be focused as much on what drives our children to act the way they do as the results of their actions. This concept reflects our approach to mitzvos as well. The action of picking up a lulav, for example, has limited benefit to the participant if he does not understand why he is doing it and what is motivating him to act in this manner. Clearly, here, the fact that Eisav and Yaakov never acted in a manner that separated their identities did not necessarily mean they were not different people.

This is not to say that we shouldn't be proud of our children's accomplishments or concerned when they act out, but making assumptions on a child's future on the basis of their actions as children is clearly impossible—if Yaakov and Eisav couldn't be differentiated, who can? It is fascinating that we turn to two people who personified the identity of tzadik and rasha to understand how we should shy away from simplistic labels and self-indulging conclusions about our children. We should always keep in mind that as much as we want what is best for our children, ultimately it is their decision that will determine the type of life they ultimately live. ■

<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,343674,00.html>

RESEARCHERS: Asteroid Destroyed Sodom & Gomorra

Tuesday, April 01, 2008



A clay tablet that has baffled scientists for 150 years has been identified as a witness's account of the asteroid suspected of being behind the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Researchers who cracked the cuneiform symbols on the Planisphere tablet believe that it recorded an asteroid thought to have been more than half a mile across.

The tablet, found by Henry Layard in the remains of the library in the royal place at Nineveh in the mid-19th century, is thought to be a 700 B.C. copy of notes made by a Sumerian astronomer watching the night sky.

He referred to the asteroid as a "white stone bowl approaching" and recorded it as it "vigorously swept along."

Using computers to recreate the night sky thousands of years ago, scientists have pinpointed his sighting to shortly before dawn on June 29 in the year 3123 B.C.

About half the symbols on the tablet have survived and half of those refer to the asteroid. The other symbols record the positions of clouds and constellations. In the past 150 years scientists have made five unsuccessful attempts to translate the tablet.

Mark Hempsall, one of the researchers from Bristol University who cracked the tablet's code, said: "It's a wonderful piece of observation, an absolutely perfect piece of science."

He said the size and route of the asteroid meant that it was likely to have crashed into the Austrian Alps at K fels. As it traveled close to the ground it would have left a trail of destruction from

supersonic shock waves and then slammed into the Earth with a cataclysmic impact.

Debris consisting of up to two-thirds of the asteroid would have been hurled back along its route and a flash reaching temperatures of 400 Centigrade (752 Fahrenheit) would have been created, killing anyone in its path.

About one million sq kilometers (386,000 sq miles) would have been devastated and the impact would have been equivalent to more than 1,000 tons of TNT exploding.

Dr Hempsall said that at least 20 ancient records describe a devastation of the type and on the scale of the asteroid's impact, including the Old Testament account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the ancient Greek myth of how Phaeton, son of Helios, fell into the River Eridanus after losing control of his father's sun chariot.

The findings of Dr. Hempsall and Alan Bond, of Reaction Engines Ltd., are published in a book, "A Sumerian Observation of the K fels Impact Event."

The researchers say that the asteroid's impact would explain why at K fels there is evidence of an ancient landslide 3 miles wide and a quarter of a mile thick. ■

Editor's Note: Mesora reports such findings as points of interest – not as endorsements.

Strings Attached

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Breathing. Sleeping. Eating. We have no choice. We live, but not without following conditions. Life is not a free-for-all: there are vital strings attached. We don't perform these actions simply for pleasure, but because we die sooner if we ignore them. Against our will, we were created, and do we continue to exist. This is our inescapable design. The Creator determined these conditions. He could have created mankind like rocks, without the need for air, sleep and food...but He didn't.

These physical matters are daily reminders of our dependency. That's God's intent. We rely on God's creations of air, sleep and food. And just as we are coerced to follow natural laws, God also gave mankind spiritual laws. By the same methods we prove creation and design of this universe, we also prove that at Mount Sinai, God commanded the Jewish nation to follow the Torah. This same Creator who designed mankind and said it is necessary to breathe, eat and sleep, also designed the Torah. His message is that just as we require the physical world to exist physically, we require the spiritual world of Torah commands and knowledge to sustain our existence past our Earthly stay. It is our free choice; we can ignore God's conditions for air and food, and die. Or we can breathe, sleep and eat and live a full life. But we all die in the end. Do we choose to ignore God's Torah and die both physically and spiritually at the end of our lives? Or, do we choose to enjoy an endless existence after we leave Earth? An existence the Creator promises is far more enjoyable than all Earthly pleasures. And not only should we choose an eternal life, but a life here that is of the deepest fulfillment. As we defer to doctors to advise us on how we treat our bodies, let us certainly defer to God as to how to treat our souls. We admit through our breathing, eating and sleeping that God's natural laws are best for us. So we must ask ourselves why we ignore His spiritual laws. Does He not know what is best for our happiness? Or are we that arrogant to reject His counsel, and ignore a Jewish lifestyle following all the laws He commanded?

One of the most serious problems in Jewish life today, is the failure of most Jews to live a Jewish life. It is then the obligation of us – the observant Jew – to reach out to our brothers and sisters. If we do not educate them on Judaism, no one else will. Their lives will be lost. But if we do reach out, sharing the beauty of the Mitzvahs and Torah wisdom, we benefit another human being to the greatest degree: we give them eternal life. However, if we don't possess this care for others and we fail to act, this displays a severe sin requiring immediate remedial



measures and Teshuvah. A friend recently quoted Rav Moshe Feinstein z"tl, "We must give 10% of our time teaching Torah to others".

This reasoning alone should stop a non-practicing Jew in his or her tracks. This succinct and penetrating point cannot be ignored once heard. This is reality. But the best life is not one that is lived based on fear, but based on love. This latter type of life, of loving what we do, is developed only once when we apprehend the sensibilities in such a life, where we find principles that appeal to our minds and ring true to our hearts. Where such a life far surpasses all other options. Therefore, to reach other Jews, we must take time to share the many rational principles and beautiful explanations for our Torah laws and ideals. For a person is most impressed with wisdom, not with how far one can indulge his lusts. So if we can get past the resistance of our fellow Jews and help them to admit they do not know better than God, and that God didn't simply say to "be a good person" but said volumes more...we might perform the greatest good.

The Mitzvah of Tzitzis embodies our discussion. God commanded us to wear them for this reason: "And you shall see them and you will remember all God's commands, and you shall perform them, and you will not follow after your hearts and your eyes, after which you go astray". (Numbers 15:39)

Tzitzis is a reminder. How does it work? Well, the design of Tzitzis as strings is to parallel human hair. Just as hair is light, moves easily and this motion catches our attention, Tzitzis are also intended to attract our eyes, from all four corners, and cause us to ponder the objective as stated above, to remember all the commands. They are intended to restrain us from mistakes and from rebelling against God by following our eyes and hearts...our lusts. Seeing the Tzitzis, and the blue thread that mirrors the sapphire under the Heavenly Throne, we are reminded of God's laws we must follow if we wish the best

spiritual life, just as we follow natural laws to remain physically alive. Accepting that our physical existence depends on abiding by nature, we can also accept that our spiritual lives also require guidance.

Emotional attractions are very enticing, so God gave us a number of reminders, such as Tzitzis, Tefillin and Mezuzah. The Rabbis teach that one who wears Tefillin and Tzitzis, and affixes a Mezuzah on his home will not easily sin. Our instinctual drive is relentless, and only by countering it with our minds regularly, by viewing a physical, Torah-commanded object close to us on our garments, will we recognize our lives are not intended for physical gratification but for a deeper pleasure: profound Torah insights. We can then overcome the temptation for short-lived lusts, and gain the upper hand over our emotions. Controlling our emotions will then become easier, and as we delve more into God's lessons, we will become more amazed by His brilliance.

It is interesting how Tefillin, Tzitzis, and Mezuzah are related. This is because psychologically, a person invests great importance into his home, his clothes and his body. Each of these is an area in which we identify; we feel these three represent us more than other objects. So we build beautiful homes, wear lovely dresses and suits, and care for our bodies with exercise, diets, jewelry and make up. Since in these three we invest most importance, God commands us to place reminders on all of them. God created our psyches and our emotions; He knows precisely how to counter our overestimation of ourselves. This is so we might redirect our attention away from petty egoistical desires, and towards God...towards understanding our true purpose in His creating each one of us.

So important are these three laws, that God commands us in reciting the Shema Yisrael twice each day. In the Shema, we read of these three commands. Thereby, we are not only occupied with the physical performance of these commands, but in discussing them upon waking up, and prior to going to sleep. Thereby, our days are "book marked" in a manner of speaking: we start the day mindful of not rebelling against God's laws (as we wish to do based on impulses) and we conclude our day, again mindful of whether we abided by God's laws. The Shema also teaches us of many fundamentals, such as God's Reward and Punishment system, that He knows all, He can do all, and more.

Tzitzis remind us that we are not created to simply do as we please. Such a life will cause the death of our souls, and we will not be gratified here on Earth, as we live as animals...chasing any impulse as it rises. Such individuals are of low stature and not worthy of any honor or our admiration.

Tzitzis remind us that just as our physical life must follow God's natural laws, so too, our spiritual life has "strings attached". ■

Weekly Parsha



TOLDOS

a STUDY of

God's Providence

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

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'." (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 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.

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 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 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:

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 of the prophets Abraham or Shem, but not of her own husband?

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 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 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 a reason.

The patriarchs and matriarchs did not function in accord with simplistic favoritism as we do today. We must not err and project our interpretations 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 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 loved him more. Isaac was deluded by Esav's ostensible good nature, as Esav disguised himself as upright with inquiries of proper conduct from Isaac (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 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 the more-aware Rivkah. 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. 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 that act of Jacob clutching Esav's heel as a Divine message. God was showing Rivkah the means He implanted into human nature to ensure 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. He did so, for on that day, Abraham had died. Esav – a man seeking an Earthly, hedonistic existence alone – was frustrated that his grandfather Abraham would

(continued on next page)

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 is life, 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 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!

We might explain Jacob's readiness to obtain the birthright as 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, when Rivkah overhears that Isaac was about to give the birthright blessings to Esav, she 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? 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 – although 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 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. Compelled to inquire from a prophet, 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 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 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 Jacob is thereby ever-prepared from that point forward 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 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 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 to Rivkah in their childhood home a deceitful nature. Thereby, Rivkah learned to be cunning herself and achieved a good outcome of the blessings. Through Rivkah's deceit, Jacob learned how to deal with Lavan. Lavan's cunning came full circle and ended up ruining him.

(continued on next page)

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Part II

Having read this, my friend Shaye 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", and if this means a nationality, 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 be termed as "bearing" children. That implies pregnancy. This must mean something to do with the word "bore".

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 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 is 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 a cunning personality 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. Again, 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 that he was Esav. 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 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 ourselves and all others. 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 where 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 adapted 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 anything is due to them from Isaac, now that Isaac declared Jacob his sole inheritor. ■

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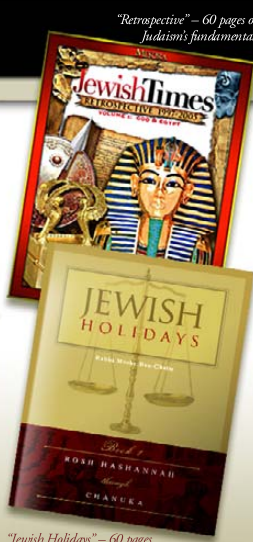
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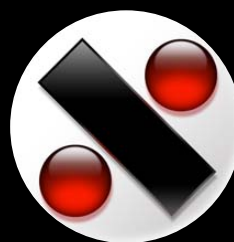
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Employment / Singles



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Phone Representatives - Syosset, NY
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The Orthodox Union Singles Connection and Young Professionals Network

November 6: Young professionals ages 25-35 are invited to an evening of shared laughs and networking with theatre games and improvisation at 9 p.m. on Saturday night, November 6 at Congregation Ramath Orah, 550 West 110 Street. Whether someone is an extrovert who can't wait to act-out, or a quiet observer who likes to sit back and watch the activities, all can enjoy the interactive entertainment, led by acting teachers Isa Freeling and Shellen Lubin. Admission is \$15 in advance, \$20 at the door. Light refreshments will be served.

November 9: Goldy Krantz, author of the book "The Best of My Worst" will present a lighthearted and introspective view on the dating world for singles in their 40's and 50's at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, November 9 at the Park East Synagogue, 164 East 68 Street. Light refreshments will be served. Admission is \$10.

To register and for more information, call 212.613.8300.