

Are you respecting others based on their "religious" garb? Then read Radak, Tzefania 1:8, he disagrees. Does reputation outweigh their lack of intelligence? Then read Chovas HaLevavos' introduction. Are you attracted to the nonsensical ideas of your "religious" neighbors, even though it runs contrary to our Sages? Are you not thinking into ALL your beliefs and affairs, following only what is intelligent? God gave us EACH intelligence with which to think. Make time to learn diligently, following only God and the Rabbis - not your idolatrous co-religionists. Wisdom alone will show you the TRUTH.

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Toldot

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"And Esav said to Yaakov, 'Pour into me, now, from this very red food for I am exhausted.' Therefore, he is called Edom". (Beresheit 25:30)

Esav comes home from the fields. He is exhausted and famished. Yaakov is cooking a red soup. Esav asks Yaakov to give him the soup. Yaakov asks Esav to sell him his rights as firstborn in exchange for

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Patriarchs vs Their Children

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Rashi's commentary on Gen. 24:42. "Rabbi Acha said, 'More pleasant is the speech of the servants of the Patriarchs before God, than the Torah (commands) of their children, as we find Eliezer's account (describing his encounter with Rebecca) doubled in the Torah, while many of the central commands of the Torah are only given by way of hints.'"

This is a truly perplexing statement, as we are all of the opinion that that which is most central in the Torah are God's words. How then can a servant's words, even a servant of Abraham, be more precious to God? Was not the Torah given for the sake of the commands?

How do we approach such a question?

The first step is note what is being compared, as the quote of Rabbi Acha is one of comparison. We find that "speech" is compared to "Torah", and "servant" is compared to "Patriarchs' offspring". In both comparisons, what generates our questions is that the latter appears obviously more important: Speech does not outweigh Torah, and servants do not outweigh Israelites, (in the capacity that Israelites must keep the Torah as the world's teachers.)

I would suggest a central lesson is being taught by Rabbi Acha. He intends to draw our attention to

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Although deceived via Rebecca's lie, Isaac later confirms the blessing on Jacob.

Serving God

RIVKA OLENICK

"Serve the Lord with gladness, come before Him with exultation." Psalms 100:2

The sentence above contains both gladness and exultation although they mean the same thing. The sentence could have simply stated: "Serve the Lord with gladness." Or "Come before Him with exultation." What is the emphasis on gladness and exultation? What is the emphasis on "Serve the Lord" and "come before Him" which also appears to have the same meaning?

Unfortunately, many people believe that there cannot be gladness or exultation when serving God. They believe that the involvement in the commandments is painful and burdensome and comes only out of fear; it doesn't. We should not think that to Serve the Lord with gladness, come before Him with exultation is purely emotional and which has nothing to do with wisdom and thought. To the contrary a person can eventually understand that great joy can be produced when serving

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Patriarchs vs Their Children

□ **RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM**

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God's estimation of personal character. He first teaches, that which the Torah repeats is done so for emphasis of its importance. Based on this rule, Eliezer's words must be more important than the Torah's commands. But how so?!

I believe the one difference between the Patriarchs and ourselves, is that they followed God out of an internal realization of God's truth, with no externally imposed system. Even the speech of the Patriarchs is replete with wisdom, and their attachment to God included no coercion. The Midrash says, "At Sinai, God held that mountain over our heads commanding us in the Torah's observance, and if we refused this obligation, He would drop the mountain on us, and there would be our graves." This Midrash is of course metaphoric. But it teaches that the event of Sinai carried such clear proof of God's existence, that His commands were undeniably emanating from the Creator, one Who we would be foolish to ignore. Our acceptance of the yoke of Torah was in a manner, coerced.

Not so the Patriarchs. They all came to a knowledge and service of God on their own. This is much more precious to God. The Megilla read on Purim reads, "They arose and accepted that which they already accepted." This is referring to the Jews' re-acceptance of the Torah out of love, as opposed to their Sinaic acceptance out of fear. Again, we are pointed to the concept that adherence has levels. Greater than one who is commanded, is one who arrives at the truth using his own mind. True, there is a statement of the Rabbis, "One commanded is greater than one who is not." But this does not mean 'greater' in every way. This latter Rabbinical statement means that when one is commanded, he has more to conquer and is greater, as he must fight and additional desire to repel against "obligations". Had one no obligation and observed, he is great, but has not successfully conquered his instincts. But here we

discuss only the sphere of "conquering his instinct". A totally different question. than our topic, "adherence to God".

"More pleasant is the speech of the servants of the Patriarchs before God, than the Torah of their children." This teaches that love supersedes fear. Our ultimate goal in life is "love of God", not fear of God - attachment to His knowledge, the true appreciation of the Source of all reality, attachment to Him. This is love of God. □

Serving God

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God, especially in our every day life.

Every day life runs its' course according to God's will. Divine Service is much more than going to the synagogue on the Sabbath. When you involve yourself in the effort and the concentration of prayer, remind yourself that you are standing before the One and Only God, that you come before the One Who created you and the entire world. Nothing can intercede the relationship between you and the Creator. Feel glad knowing that you are serving the One who knows all your needs and provides you with all your needs. Isn't it true? Thinking this way can give a person tremendous strength in understanding that by performing and understanding the mitzvos with gladness, there are great benefits. By exploring the truth and the ideas behind the purpose of the commandments, this can produce gladness in your mind. Placing concentration, effort and energy into fulfilling the commandments with this mind set can take you away from your own sadness and the sadness we observe in the world.

Each Jew is obligated to serve God with joy and gladness in wealth and in poverty in good health and even if one is ill. Serving God does produce gladness and exultation and that can take you

away from those things that are petty and superficial and can take you away from needing the approval of others.

Only God knows all your thoughts. This is a very important idea to be more cognizant of since many people feel estranged from God when they are suffering. Remember, that only God, relieves your suffering. Know that when you serve God sincerely you are fulfilling your purpose, the reason you were created and understanding this truth can bring you happiness and peace of mind. We must try to do everything possible to preserve and strengthen this relationship, which is the most important relationship we have. Hopefully, this of way thinking can give one the impetus to be more sincerely involved in chesed and Torah study, which are mainly the ways we serve God. Understanding that this is what we were created to do will bring peace of mind to you and your family. Your peace of mind and gladness will be observed by others and will hopefully encourage them to be more involved in a life that is genuinely committed to serving God. This is what can produce such gladness and exultation!

Don't be fooled by thinking that anything else can bring a person such gladness and exultation. Anything else meaning red bendels, silver rings, handwriting analysis, a mezuzah in your car, a palm reader who claims to foresee your future, or claims from someone who says they can direct your life or heal you with amulets, or anything else that you imagine is an instant miracle. This cannot create gladness and exultation. This is all false. There is only one way to serve God with gladness, through service and through the truths that we acquire in knowledge. There is only one way to have exultation before God, through truth and through service. "The feeling of steady and constant spiritual and moral growth, the continuous growth of all that is truly human in us, a blissful joy of life that is not subject to change in any manner by the outward circumstances which life may bring." Samson Raphael Hirsch, The Hirsch Psalms, pg. 195. □

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Are the Penitent Better? □

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Rashi's comments on Genesis 25:21 where both Isaac and his wife Rebecca prayed for children. Rashi notes the word selected by God's response, "And He was appeased towards HIM." (God answered Isaac but not Rebecca.) Rashi derives a principle, "There is no comparison between the prayer of the righteous descendant of one righteous (Isaac son of Abraham), and the righteous descendant of one wicked." (Rebecca's father was wicked.) Therefore, Isaac, a descendant of another righteous person, received a response from God, but Rebecca did not.

On the surface, this contradicts the principle, "Where penitent people stand, even the wholly righteous cannot stand." (Yevamos 64a) This latter statement implies that the individual's own state of perfection is the sole criteria for their status. If one is righteous, their lineage is of no regard. If this is so, Rebecca, being righteous, should have been answered as well. Why is lineage an issue?

To answer this problem, let us read Rashi again carefully: "There is no comparison between the prayer of the righteous descendant of one righteous, and the righteous descendant of one wicked." Rashi is addressing a specific act: Prayer. Let us rephrase the question: "What is it in one's lineage which determines one's level of prayer?" What is prayer? It is the institution of one approaching the Creator as the Source of all of one's fate. When one recognizes God as real, he cannot help but to beseech God for his needs, and ultimately desire a relationship via prayer, even once his needs are met. God is the true Authority.

Maimonides, in his code of law, the Mishneh Torah, Chap. VI Laws of Rebelliousness, outlines the laws of honoring parents, "Honoring fathers and mothers is a great positive Mitzvah, so too fearing fathers and mothers, and they are equated by the Torah to the honor and fear of God,.....In the manner that we are commanded to honor and fear God, so too are we commanded on

their (parents') honor and fear." Additionally, we find the Ten Commandments are split into two sections: The first five deal with man's relationship with God, the second deal with man's relationship with his fellow man. The one problem is that Honoring Parents is included not in the second five, but in the first five dealing with our relationship with God. This appears out of place. How is Honoring Parents part of the laws dealing with our relationship with God?

I believe the answer traces back to the design of man's entrance into the world, and his maturity. Man is not created today as was Adam, fully grown. Man enters the world as a dependent infant, he grows through various processes, losing and regaining his teeth, acne, becoming more full of hair, reaching adolescence, child rearing, and old age. Why? Is this just accidental? Of course not. This is part of God's design. To cover each stage would be a lengthy topic requiring many hours. Additionally, it would remove us from the topic. The one stage to which we should direct ourselves is childhood, and in particular, our dependency on parents.

A child learns from early on, the concept of "authority". Parents are taller, stronger, more capable, they punish us, and they nurture us. They are the source of our good and "evil". We turn to them for all our fears and desires. In short, God designed mankind in a manner where he must learn the concept of an authority figure. Had man been born complete, tall, and independent, with all the knowledge needed to survive, he would have no need for parents, and he would forfeit the lesson of authority. But it is vital that this lesson be learned, as it is essential for the recognition of one other need, recognition of God. It is only through our state as feeble and dependent infants, that the role of authority may be successfully permeated into our being. We require some semblance of authority to be projected ultimately onto God. Without learning what authority is from youth, we

cannot begin our approach to God.

"Honor your father and your mother.....Equated by the Torah to the honor and fear of God." This is the lesson of Maimonides. The equation is that fear and honor of God is modeled after fear and honor of our parents. For this reason, the command to fear and honor parents is rightfully placed in the section dealing with our approach to God, not our fellow man.

Now we understand why Rebecca was not answered, her role model was not complete, in fact, he was wicked. Rashi intimates that Rebecca suffered a marred image of authority, and this had some effect on her prayer. God did not answer her. But if she had been the only one praying, we do not know God's response. She might have been answered. Perhaps, her lack of response, according to Rashi, was a lesson of some sort, teaching that only in this scenario, Isaac had the right role model from whom he could build upon his fear and love of God. God therefore selected only him as the recipient of an answer.

In prayer, this makes a great difference, as prayer is where one is in dialogue with God - the true Authority. (My chavrusa asked, "But did not God grant children to Abraham, whose father was wicked?" One possible answer is that Abraham did not pray for children, God bestowed children on him as God's own plan.)

This is not the case with the other statement, "Where penitent people stand, even the wholly righteous cannot stand." This refers to one's ability to exercise his free will and perfect himself. It is not discussing one's relationship to God as an authority. There is no contradiction.

Fear and honor of God parallels the evil and good from parents learned from youth.

We see how essential our proper actions are, not only for ourselves, but for the perfection of our children. Let this concern be prominent in our eyes as we raise our children to fear, and ultimately love God. □



Toldot

RABBI BERNARD FOX

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the food. Esav agrees. Through this incident, Yaakov acquired Esav's birthright. The Torah quotes Esav's exact words. He refers to the soup as "very red food." The Hebrew word Esav used to refer to the "very red food" is *adom*. The Torah explains that Esav acquired the name Edom as a result of this incident. Edom is derived from the term *adom* – Esav's term for the red food. Apparently, the Torah attributes some importance to Esav's manner of referring to the soup. He called it "very red food." The Torah includes this detail in relating the incident. This detail is further stressed through the name Edom. Giving this name to Esav provides a permanent reminder of this detail of the incident. Of course, this raises a question. Why is this aspect of the incident so crucial? Why does the Torah endeavor to memorialize Esav's reference to Yaakov's soup?

Various answers are given to this question. One of the most unique responses is provided by Nachmanides. He argues that, in fact, there is no specific significance to the color of Yaakov's soup. The Torah does not intent to memorialize this detail of the incident. Instead, the Torah wishes communicate an important message about Esav. Esav was not fit to be Yitzchak's spiritual heir. He was completely absorbed in the material world. He was instinctually motivated. This caused him to sell his birthright for a bowl of soup. In order to accomplish this objective, the Torah gives Esav a name that recalls this incident. The name, Edom, accomplishes this goal. Esav referred to the soup as "very red food." The name Edom is derived from Esav's reference. In short, the color of the food is not important. However, the color provides a basis for creating a name for

Esav. This name is designed to recall this incident.

Nachmanides' insight provides a solution for another interesting problem. The Torah generally refers to the land settled by Esav and his descendants as the land of Edom. Why is this land not referred to as the land of Esav? The name Edom represents an idea. Esav sold his birthright. He abandoned the right to become Yaakov's spiritual heir. Therefore, he and his descendants do not have a right to the land of Israel. His land is the land of Edom. In other words, the Torah is stressing that the land of Edom belongs to Esav's descendants. They have no claim on the land of Israel.

"And Yaakov gave Esav bread and a soup of lentils. And he ate, drank, arose and went. And Esav rejected the birthright of the firstborn." (Beresheit 25:34)

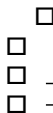
Why was Esav willing to sell his birthright to Yaakov? The commentaries offer a number of explanations. Rashi offers two explanations. He explains that the birthright was essentially the right to the priesthood. Esav was not interested in this position. According to Rashi's first explanation, this was because Esav realized that the priesthood would eventually be transferred to Shevet Leyve. The second explanation is that Esav recognized that the priesthood includes various restrictions. Violation of these restrictions is, in some instances, punished with death. Esav was not interested in this burden.

Rashi's comments present some difficulties. However, the theme is clear. As firstborn, Esav had the right to the priesthood. He simply was not interested in rising to an essentially spiritual

position. Nachmanides offers another explanation. His explanation is based upon Esav's own words. Esav tells Yaakov he will sell him the birthright. He explains that he is destined to die. Therefore, the birthright will not provide him any benefit. Nachmanides begins by explaining Esav's comment that he is destined to die. He infers that Esav lived a dangerous life. He constantly sought thrills and placed himself in dangerous situations. This was the root of Esav's keen interest in hunting.

Esav's personal goal was to maximize the intensity of pleasure and excitement in his life. He did not expect to live a long life. In fact, Esav did not expect to outlive his father, Yitzchak. Nachmanides further explains that the birthright would only become significant with Yitzchak's death. The right gave the firstborn preference as an heir. Therefore, Esav did not expect to ever benefit from the birthright. Esav sold it to Yaakov because it was of little value to him. The comments of the Targum Yerushalmi seem to support Nachmanides' explanation. The Targum Yerushalmi explains that in selling the birthright, Esav rejected the concept of the afterlife and the resurrection of the dead. Superficially, there is no evidence of this heresy in the *pesukim*. However, according to Nachmanides, the Targum Yerushalmi can be understood. Esav sold his birthright because he was completely focused on his material and temporal existence. He wanted to maximize his thrills in this world. He was not at all concerned with eternal existence. He did not consider the impact of his behavior upon his soul or the afterlife. Implicit in his decision to sell the birthright were a rejection of the afterlife and the resurrection of the dead.

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Toldot

RABBI BERNARD FOX

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Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra offers a controversial explanation of Esav's motives. He explains that Esav perceived the birthright as a claim to an additional portion of Yitzchak's possessions. Yitzchak was poor. Esav concluded that the birthright was of little value. Ibn Ezra offers a number of proofs that Yitzchak was poor. First, Esav earned his father's affection through providing him with delicacies. Were Yitzchak wealthy, he would not have been dependant upon Esav for these foods. Second, Yaakov later disguised himself as Esav. He borrowed Esav's fine clothing in order to complete the deception. The son of a wealthy man would not need to borrow another's princely wardrobe. He would have his own expensive clothing. Third, eventually Yaakov fled his father's home. The Torah creates the impression that he left as a pauper. Why did his loving mother, Rivka, not provide Yaakov with money? Apparently, there was not much wealth in the household. Ibn Ezra responds to an important objection to his thesis. How could the Almighty allow a tzadik – a righteous person – to live in poverty? Ibn Ezra responds that wealth is not one of the perfections of the tzadik. Yitzchak was not the only tzadik to live in poverty. Eliyahu, the prophet, suffered the same fate. Ibn Ezra further explains that we cannot know the reason the Almighty denied Yitzchak wealth. Hashem also allowed Yitzchak to lose his eyesight. The Almighty had some reason for allowing Yitzchak to experience this affliction. Similarly, because of considerations that are less than obvious, He deprived Yitzchak of wealth.

Ibn Ezra's comparison of Yitzchak's poverty to his blindness deserves some further consideration. Ibn Ezra refers to the blindness as a secret, or mystery. He explains that we cannot understand these issues. Is

Ibn Ezra positing that we cannot understand the reason for the blindness? It seems that the Torah, itself, offers some explanation! Later in the parasha, Yaakov and Rivka conspire to deceive Yitzchak. Yaakov disguises himself as Esav. He stands in Esav's place before Yitzchak. Yitzchak bestows on Yaakov the blessing he intends for Esav. The Torah introduces this incident by explaining that, in his old age, Yitzchak was blind. The implication is that this blindness played a fundamental role in allowing Yaakov to secure the blessing. It certainly did have a reason and purpose! It seems that Ibn Ezra is not claiming that we cannot have any understanding of these issues. Instead, Ibn Ezra contends that our understanding is limited. We can, perhaps, identify the function of Yitzchak's blindness. However, we cannot comprehend the justice of Hashem's treatment of Yitzchak. Where is the justice in the righteous experiencing blindness? We cannot answer this question. This interpretation of Ibn Ezra's comments implies that we, at some level, can explain Yitzchak's poverty. As in the case of his blindness, we cannot hope to understand the justice of his poverty. However, we can identify some purpose served by this poverty. What is this purpose? Ibn Ezra compares the poverty to Yitzchak's blindness. The blindness enabled Yaakov to receive the blessing intended for Esav. Perhaps, Yitzchak's poverty served the purpose of providing Yaakov with the opportunity to purchase the birthright. The poverty caused Esav to conclude that the birthright was valueless. Therefore, he willingly abandoned this right to Yaakov.

"And he said, 'I have become old and I do not know the day of my death.'" (Bereshit 26:2)

Yitzchak explains that he wishes to bestow the blessing now because he is old. He does not know when his life will end. Rashbam explains that Yitzchak wanted to transmit this blessing personally. He must act while

alive. At his advanced age, he felt compelled to act. If he did not now bestow the blessing, he might lose the opportunity. Sforno offers a very different explanation for Yitzchak's decision to act at this time. He observes that Yaakov also blessed his children close to his death. Moshe blessed Bnai Yisrael at the end of his life. Apparently, these tzadikim felt that this time was specifically appropriate for the bestowal of their blessings. Why is this time special? Sforno explains as a person ages, the individual has the opportunity to advance spiritually. The allure of the material world fades. The physical desires, which may have influenced the person in youth, are now viewed as passing fancy. Faced with death, the importance of the brief period spent in the material world decreases. One can use this opportunity to examine values. This examination should lead to a reemphasis of the spiritual. In a tzadik, this is a natural transition. Any attachment to the material world fades with age, and the spiritual element of the personality becomes more pronounced. The bestowing of a blessing is a spiritual endeavor. The blessing requires that the benefactor enter into a very close spiritual relationship with the Almighty. In order to achieve this relationship, the individual must be able to forsake the attraction of the material world. This becomes easier to achieve in old age and with the approach of death. This is the reason these tzadikim waited for this point in their lives to bestow their blessings.

Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 25:30. Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 25:32. Sefer Beresheit 25:32. Targum Yerushalmi, Sefer Bersheit 25:34. Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 25:34. Sefer Bersheit 27:1. Rabbaynu Shemuel ben Meir (Rashbam) Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 26:2. Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 26:2. ■

Olah Temimah

RABBI REUVEN MANN

What's the idea of Isaac not being able to leave Eretz Yisroel because he's an "Olah Temimah", an unblemished sacrifice?

I discussed this with Rabbi Mann. He was saying that Isaac was a different type of personality. He was not an Avraham or Yaakov who was to concentrate his life interacting with the world. Isaac's wife initiated dealings with Esav, (she suggested the goat skins to fool Isaac). Isaac's father sought for him a wife. These are two examples of Isaac less involved in world dealings. Not leaving Israel also represents that which would not befit him. "Olah Temima" means something devoted exclusively and wholly to God. Unlike a sacrifice that is eaten, an "Oleh" is not. It is wholly consumed by flames. Isaac was wholly devoted to God.

I added, perhaps the story in Rashi that the angels' tears caused Isaac's blindness means that this act of his self sacrifice perfected him so (angels alluding to perfection) that he was removed from this world. One who is blind is removed from the physical life in a very primary way. The Torah says that one who is blind is considered as one dead. This means that he is removed from life to a great degree, i.e., removed from physical existence - a mark of perfection.

The event of the Akeida was a trial not only for Avraham, but for Isaac as well. He sacrificed his own life. This must have had a profound effect on him as the medrash that Rashi brings implies. What was that effect? Perhaps living a life subsequent to almost dying for God's word, elevates one's attachment to God in an irrevocable manner. Isaac would always be that devoted. It was not an 'event' of sacrifice, but he now lived a permanent state of sacrifice. He didn't do an isolated 'act' of Olah Temima, but he remained in that state his entire life.

There is more to be developed, but this is what I recall from our conversation. ■