

JewishTimes

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PARSHA

HOW GOD SENDS US MESSAGES

DIVINE PROVIDENCE

LETTERS

The Torah Obligation to Work

TORAH STUDY IS
NO EXEMPTION

PARSHA

Betrayal

THE RELATIONSHIP
OF JACOB & ESAV

LETTERS

Noah and the Talking Raven

METAPHORS

PARSHA

Like Father Like Son



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3 Letters

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Deciphering metaphors unlocks the Rabbis' intended meanings behind their scripted stories. This week we suggest an interpretation for the talking raven.

5 God's Messages

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Parshas Toldos offers us a fine opportunity, and detailed clues, to learn how God communicates with the righteous to guide their lives.

12 Like Father Like Son

RABBI REUVEN MANN

God forms Isaac's facial features to resemble Abraham for a particular reason.

13 God Bless America

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Rabbi Mann addresses Veteran's Day.

14 Obligation to Work

EDITORIAL

Many Torah sources provide support for a work ethic, which today is not shared in many communities.

15 Esav's Final Adieu

RABBI DR. DARRELL GINSBERG

An interesting analysis of Esav's mindset relating to his birthright sale and his desire to reclaim it.

17 Betrayal

RABBI BERNIE FOX

Rabbi Fox refers to this week's Haftorah and story of Esav and Jacob to present their two roles.

LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

A Talking Raven?

Jessie: The Talmud cites Reish Lakish's comments on the passage, "And he sent the raven...(Gen. 8:7)":

"The raven gave Noah an irrefutable argument: 'God hates me, and you hate me. God hates me as He commanded to take seven of each pure species, but only two of the impure (my) species. And you hate me, as you did not take from the pure species for your mission, rather, me. If the heat or cold will kill me, the world will lack a species. Perhaps you desire my

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mate!" Noah replied, "Wicked one! In the ark, I was forbidden to my wife, who is normally permitted to me. All the more so I am forbidden to your mate, who is always forbidden to me (Sanhedrin 108b)!"

Obviously the raven doesn't have the abstract capacity to think, make an argument, or talk to Noah. What is the idea of the Raven's suspicion of Noah being out to destroy that species? Why would the raven think that Noah would desire his mate? How are we supposed to understand this? What can the metaphor be?

Rabbi: We must first use the Torah's clues to grasp Noah's mindset, if we are to answer your questions. Upon the cessation of the rain, the Torah states:

"Noah opened up the window, "chalon", of the Ark which he made. And he sent the raven, and it went out to and fro, until the waters dried from upon the Earth. And he sent the dove from himself to see if the waters had ended from the face of the Earth (Genesis, 8:6-8)."

A few questions present themselves: When did God instruct Noah to make a "chalon", a window? Earlier (Gen. 6:16), G-d instructed Noah to make a "tzohar." Even if one follows the opinion that tzohar means window, why here did the Torah change the word from "tzohar" to "chalon?" We also notice that the passage states "...the window which Noah made." Who else could have made it?! This seems superfluous. When we see something apparently repetitive, we know there must be a lesson. And what was the purpose of sending the raven? Why is it not disclosed, as is done regarding the purpose of the dove in passage 8:8?

I believe a few proper questions will lead one to the answer.

What is a window for?

For when was the window to be used? Prior to the flood, or subsequent?

What are the differences between a raven and a dove?

A window can be used for light, let in air, shield from poor weather, or to look outdoors. We can determine that Noah knew what was on the outside as the flood waters began, as he was told by God that all life would be destroyed (Gen. 6:17). Perhaps then, the window would be used subsequent to the flood. But for what? Sending out birds alone? From the quotes above, it appears Noah harbored some undisclosed emotional conflict.

The Torah goes out of the way to tell us that it was Noah who made the window. Again, he made the entire ark, which includes this window. Therefore, the words "that Noah

made" are not a repetition of who made the ark. Torah does not repeat itself. The lesson is that Noah made the window on his own, with no command from God. The Torah is pointing out that Noah desired a window for some reason. If he knows what is occurring prior to the flood, I suggest that he was concerned with the period subsequent to the flood. Meaning, Noah worried about what he would find after the flood was over.

Prior to exiting the ark, Noah sent the raven. The Torah is concealing something, for it did not tell us why he sent the raven, as it does disclose regarding the dove. In my opinion, Noah did not want to face the corpses of his society, once the ark landed and the water subsided. The raven is flesh eating. Noah was not yet interested in seeing if the land dried up, as he didn't send the dove, for whose purpose this served. But he first sent a flesh eating bird, with a concealed purpose to discern whether there were bodies near the ark, something Noah did not want to face. If the raven did not return, Noah would know the raven found food, corpses, and he would be prepared to face the tragic site outside of the ark. This explains why he made a separate structure of a window, in addition to the tzohar.

A wise Rabbi explained why Noah planted wine grapes upon his exit from the ark. He was experiencing depression from solitude as the only members left on Earth, and used drunkenness to escape the depression. This very same worry is what prompted him to create a window, on his own accord. Now we can answer your questions.

Noah's state of mind was not favorable. He knew the mission of the animals was to sustain the species. Sending the raven, Noah was grappling with this new reality. He risked a species, possibly as an unconscious expression of his troubled state of mind. Precisely using a species that had only one male and one female, Noah unconsciously expressed an aggression towards his morbid experience and the ark's purpose; sustaining the species. This is the meaning of the raven's words. The Rabbis scripted this metaphor to teach this lesson. Additionally, the raven was suspect of Noah committing bestiality with its mate. This too is a reflection of Noah's state of mind; there was no real discussion between a bird and man. Somehow the elongated stay on the ark among the animals evokes identification with them. Noah's defense was halachic in content, saying the raven's mate was a prohibited species. Using a halachic response means Noah would not commit the act of bestiality, but it can also mean that he did harbor the psychological tendency. This is similar to a burglar breaking into a home, and when caught without any stolen items, saying in his defense, "I didn't take anything!" Although the burglar did not violate robbery, he did have the intention. Noah too possessed some corruption of mind, according to the Rabbis' scripted metaphor of a talking raven. ■

PARSHA

How God Sends Us Messages

TOLDOS

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

PART I

Read 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. I).” 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 was seizing Esav’s heel. The Torah then says that Esav became a hunter while Jacob was a dweller in tents. Isaac loved Esav, for he captured

food for Isaac, while Rivkah loved Jacob. The Torah hints at an imbalance.

We then learn of the sale of the birthright. Jacob’s alacrity in requesting the birthright in exchange for the lentils appears premeditated. Later, Rivkah “somehow” hears Isaac preparing to give the blessings to Esav. Rivkah dresses Jacob in goat skins and in Esav’s garments 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 favoring Jacob, while all along Isaac favored Esav. Now our questions:

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

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

And why did she inquire 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

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Jacob clutching Esav's heel at birth was a divine message to Rebecca that Jacob possessed the potential to confront and usurp his twin



Esav's hairy nature provided Rebecca a tool through which she might obtain the blessings divinely intended for Jacob



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 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 desired to give Esav certain blessings, and not bestow them upon Jacob. Isaac was deluded by Esav's ostensible good nature, as Esav disguised himself as upright with inquiries from Isaac on proper conduct (capturing him) only to earn Isaac's favor. In truth, Esav was evil. In contrast, the Torah teaches that Jacob was a “dweller of tents” (ibid 25:27): he was complete in his perfection and delved into the study of God.

Jacob's proper lifestyle did not present the 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

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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. A wise Rabbi said he did so, for on that day, Abraham had died. Esav – a man seeking an Earthly, hedonistic existence – was frustrated that his grandfather Abraham would actually perish from this Earth. Esav's immortality fantasy was abruptly shattered. He no longer clung to any role model displayed by Abraham: "For what 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 was due to Rivkah's informing him of her knowledge obtained via that earlier prophecy. Rivkah most probably explained to Jacob what she learned, that the younger Jacob was to rule over the older. This is supported by Jacob's readiness to purchase the birthright.

Later, 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. 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. Therefore Rivkah avoided approaching Isaac with her concerns regarding her pregnancy, and also when securing the blessings for Jacob. And Isaac again confirms to Esav that Jacob was correct in taking the blessings, as Isaac says to Esav, "Your brother came with wisdom and took your blessings." Why does Isaac say "with wisdom"? Perhaps to teach Esav that Jacob was correct.

The obvious questions and the clues to their answers are the true "codes of the Torah". This is God's method of directing us to unlock the Torah's mysteries, imbuing us with an ever-growing appreciation for His wisdom, the development of our minds and souls, and understanding the perfection of our matriarchs and patriarchs.

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

(CONT. ON PAGE 10)



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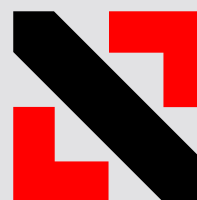
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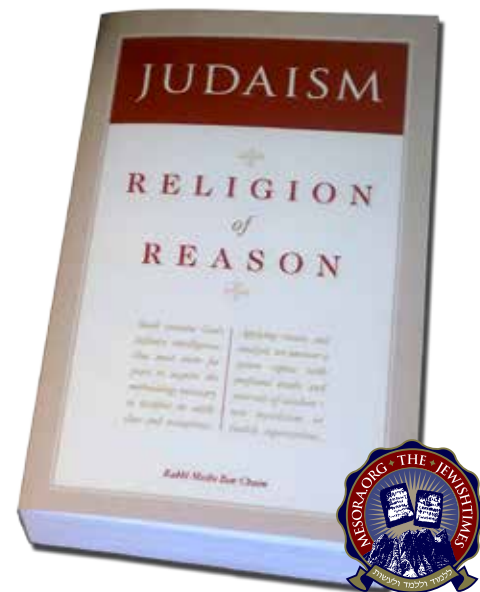
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REVIEWS



RABBI REUVEN MANN — Rabbi, Y. Israel of Phoenix

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim has written extensively on Jewish philosophy for many years. His ideas are rooted in a rational approach. He follows the great philosophers like Rambam and Saadia Gaon. He is opposed to all forms of "mysticism" and seeks to debunk all practices and beliefs which are rooted in superstition and contrary to reason. This work covers a wide variety of topics, of interest to contemporary; insightful analyses of Biblical narratives as well as the significance of many mitzvot. Rabbi Ben-Chaim demonstrates that Judaism can be harmonized with human reason. He is not afraid to ask the most penetrating and challenging questions as he is convinced that Torah is the Word of God and based on the highest form of wisdom. Jews who have a profound desire to make sense out of their religion will benefit greatly from reading this book.



RABBI STEVEN WEIL — Executive Vice President, The Orthodox Union

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim asks critical, crucial and defining questions that any thinking Jew needs to ask. His method enables the reader to explore and engage our theology in a meaningful and serious way. Following the Rishonim, he forces us to define, weigh and analyze each phrase of chazal, showing there is no contradiction between an investigation of Science and an investigation of Judaism. Rabbi Ben-Chaim has written a work that addresses the thinking person of all faiths. This work speaks to the scholar and lay person alike and will help you gain insight into how the great Rishonim define how we view the world. Rabbi Ben-Chaim's website, Mesora.org is a very serious tool and resource for thinking human beings who want to engage and explore the Almighty, the Almighty's universe and do so within the realm of wisdom, rationality and intellectual honesty.



PARTIAL CHAPTER LIST

Astrology	Red Bendels
Reincarnation	Kabbala
Praying to the Dead	Mysticism
Superstition	Miracles
Demons	What is God?
Bashert	"Jewish" Souls
Evil Eye	Talmudic Stories
Rebbe Worship	Metaphors
Segulas	Belief vs. Proof
Satan	Do Rabbis Err?
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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.

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", (ostensibly 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.

Abraham sought a wife for Isaac. We thereby learn that Isaac was incapable of selecting one for himself. We may suggest, "Abraham bore Isaac," means that Abraham "raised" Isaac. In other words, Isaac – more than any other – was in need of paternal dedication and guidance. He was not as others, who approached marriage

independently. His self-sacrifice on the altar had a profound affect on his nature. He was not even allowed to leave the land, as God told him to remain in Gerar and not descend to Egypt. Therefore, this first verse emphasizes Isaac's nature as greatly dependent upon Abraham.

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

Why must we learn of Isaac's dependency on Abraham?

Why must we learn that Rivkah's father and brother were liars?

I feel these two verses answer my friend Shaye's question.

We are taught that Rivkah – one who observed 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: one of the true codes of Torah.

God's Providence

Esav born unnaturally covered with hair conveys Divine intent. The only other

mention of Esav's exterior is the means through which Jacob deceived his father. This teaches that God's providence was in play at the very birth of these twins. God ensured a means existed through which the blessings would be successfully transmitted to Jacob.

First, God provides the impetus (a troubling pregnancy) to direct the righteous Rivkah towards obtaining greater knowledge. He gave Rivkah prophetic insight into the future of the Jewish nation, emanating from Jacob. It is clear that God wishes men and women to engage their intellects – we are not to sit back while God runs the world. The opposite is the case: God desires the path and progress of mankind to be steered by mankind. We are to use all in our power to achieve the best for all others and ourselves. God says this in Genesis 1:28, "Fill the Earth and conquer it." But since man cannot know most variables or control even a few of them, God assists man when necessary. Therefore, God imparted to Rivkah His plan and the necessary tools with which to attain success. These "tools" include Rivkah's own cunning personality adopted from her brother and father, Esav's physical hairy nature, Jacob's personality as capable of usurping Esav, and the knowledge of events such as Rivkah hearing Isaac's wish to bless Esav and Esav's wish to kill Jacob. And besides reacting to God's clues, Rivkah devised her own methods, such as dressing Jacob in Esav's clothing in her anticipation of Isaac's feeling Jacob's hairy skin, and smelling the fragrance of the field, thereby deluding Isaac that this was Esav standing before him.

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



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PARSHA

Like Father, Like Son

TOLDOS

Rabbi Reuven Mann

This week's Parsha, Toldot, takes up the story of the 2nd Patriarch, Yitzchak. The opening verse states, "These are the descendants of Yitzchak, son of Avraham; Avraham fathered Yitzchak." The question arises, once we are informed that Yitzchak was the son of Avraham, why is it necessary to repeat that Avraham sired him? Rashi, citing a famous Midrash, states that it was essential to counter the "scoffers" of the time who sought to deny that Avraham was the real father of Yitzchak. They maliciously floated the rumor that it was really Avimelech, King of Gerar, who had impregnated Sarah when he had erroneously taken her to be his wife.

This is an example of the most base and arrogant type of gossip which we should avoid at all costs. The Torah explicitly states that Hashem intervened with a miracle that rendered Avimelech impotent, thus preventing any carnal contact with Sarah. In addition, Hashem communicated with the King in a dream and warned him, in no uncertain terms, that his existence would be terminat-

ed if he did not return Sarah to Avraham and solicit his prayers.

Avimelech did as he was instructed. He propitiated Avraham and Sarah and gave them lavish gifts. Avraham then prayed for him and he, as well as his entire household was healed. It is absolutely clear that Avimelech did not lay a finger on our holy Matriarch. Yet this did not deter the immoral scorners from voicing a vicious rumor.

We must ask, what was the cause of their insidious skepticism? The inability to have a child was due, solely, to the infertility of Sarah. Avraham had sired Yishamael with Hagar at the age of 86. If the cynics were skeptical about the parentage of Yitzchak, it should have been with regard to Sarah, whose ability to have a son at the age of 90 was a great miracle.

Yet, strangely, she was not the target of their ridicule. Apparently, the matter of her pregnancy was so well publicized that denying it would have been futile. However, the jokers could not reconcile themselves to this miraculous event and sought to cast

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

PARSHA

aspersions on the fatherhood of Avraham. Therefore the Torah emphasized, "Avraham fathered Yitzchak" to teach that Hashem caused Yitzchak to look exactly like Avraham, thereby blatantly refuting the obnoxious chattering of the maligners.

I would like to suggest an additional layer of interpretation. We must ask, what was it that so troubled the scoffers? Why did it matter so much that Avraham had sired Yitzchak?

In my opinion they could not tolerate Avraham's philosophy which was rooted in man's obligation to "know" G-D and follow Him. This meant that there is an ultimate reality and an objective moral truth that everyone must subscribe to. The sophists couldn't tolerate this. They needed to maintain that there is no truth and all are free to live according to their emotional whims. They lacked the intellectual ability to stand up to Avraham and defend their position in a logical debate.

They were greatly disturbed by the success of Avraham in spreading his message and winning adherents. They took comfort from the fact that he would soon be gone and that would spell the end of his teachings. They did not envision the continuation of his "movement."

All their hopes were threatened by the miraculous birth of Yitzchak. Nothing frightened them more than the possibility that a successor to the leadership of Avraham had been found. In denying the fatherhood of Avraham they were seeking to negate the continuity of the Abrahamic movement.

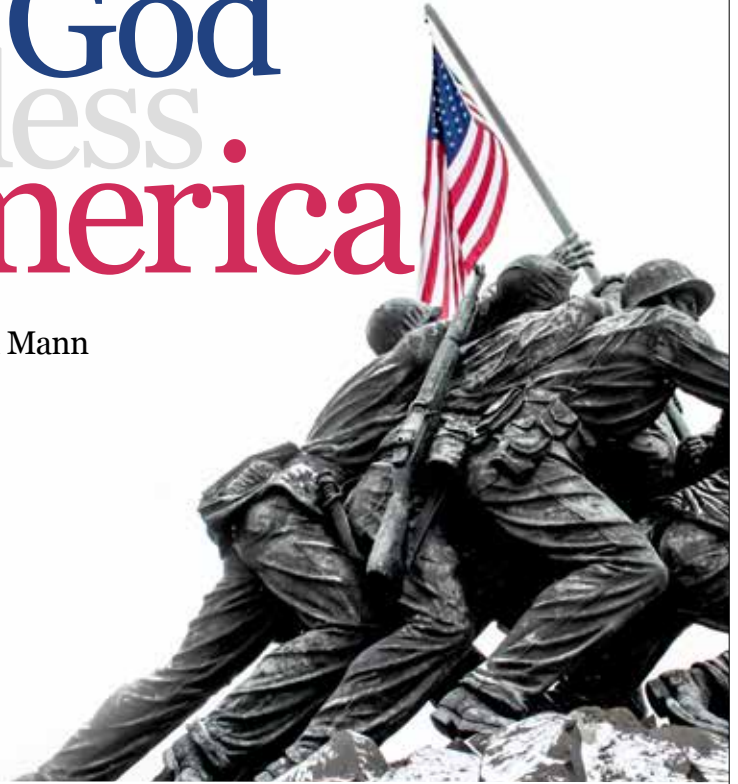
Hashem rendered Yitzchak an exact physical replica of his father. Avraham "begat" also means that he imparted to his son all of his exalted teachings and ideals, the Abrahamic way of life. The scoffers could not accept that the movement begun by Avraham would be perpetuated through Yitzchak and by countless subsequent generations.

Our obligation is to study Torah for ourselves, teach it to our children and emulate the Avot by striving for it's eternal perpetuation.

Shabbat shalom.. ■

God Bless America

Rabbi Reuven Mann



This past Wednesday our country celebrated Veterans Day. It's basic theme is that we should be cognizant of the vital role that the American soldiers have played in defense of this great country and all that it stands for.

As Jews we have special reason to honor our Vets. This is not just a civic duty but a religious obligation, as well. Hakarat Hatov (appreciation of a "good") is an overarching value of Torah. We must be grateful to America. No country in history has been as kind as accepting of Jews as this one. Nor is any country as supportive of Israel, economically, politically and militarily as the U.S. American power and leadership is vital to world stability in these stormy and dangerous times. The American soldier stands at the front lines in the war against the forces of chaos and terrorism that seek to destroy civilization as we know it. We should respect, honor and appreciate all of our Vets. ■



the obligation to work

There is a common practice today where young men ask their father in law, or others, to financially support them so they can study Torah. It sounds like an honorable request, but what do God and the Rabbis teach? Asking another person to support my Torah study is unfair. Making such a request, I thereby make that person abandon their study while they labor to earn money so I can eat. But they have the same obligation to study as I do, so asking them to work is unjust. Perhaps I should work so they can study more! But don't take my word...what does Torah say?

Genesis 3:19

"By the sweat of your brow you will eat bread...(Gen. 3:19)." Adam was punished for violating God's command not to eat the forbidden fruit. In other words, God told Adam he must work.

Ethics of the Fathers – Pirkei Avos

2:2 – "Rabban Gamliel the son of Rabbi Judah HaNassi would say: Beautiful is the study of Torah with the way of the world, for the toil of them both causes sin to be forgotten. Ultimately, all Torah study that is not accompanied with work is destined to cease and to cause sin."

3:19 – "Rabbi Eliezer the son of Azariah would say:, If there is no flour, there is no Torah; if there is no Torah, there is no flour." Meaning, one must work so as to buy food, i.e., "flour".

4:5 – Maimonides' lengthy commentary on this Mishna cites many Rabbis who refused to make their status as a Torah student into a tool through which they would gain monetary benefit. Rabbi Tarfon once did, and mourned for his error. And this he did to save his life. Nonetheless, all great Rabbis viewed Torah as an ends in itself, and not

a means to personal benefit. The reason being that this distorts one's view of Torah as that which benefits the soul, and renders it into a personally benefit. This corrupts one's view Torah, and lowers man's level of righteousness.

Maimonides: Hilchos Talmud Torah

3:7,8 – "The Rabbis commanded that man minimize his work, and maximize his Torah study."

The Rabbis did not say "stop" working, but to work...but not overindulge. Thus, work is endorsed.

Duties of the Heart – Chovas Halevavos (Gate of Trust, chapter 3)

Work benefits man in two ways: 1) his character may be perfected and demonstrated through his ethical dealings to attain external needs, 2) man is kept far from sin. For if he had all his needs, he would rebel and sin. Man's state of laboring for his needs keeps him humble. In contrast, the state of luxury and overabundance makes man become full of himself, he grows arrogant and rebels against God. Actual quote is below:

"The reason the Creator obliged man to exert himself and search for the means of [obtaining] a livelihood and other necessities is twofold.

First, since Divine wisdom demands the trial of the soul with service of God or rebellion against Him, God tries the soul with what will reveal its choice in the matter, namely, with the need and want for that which is external to it - food, drink, clothing, shelter, and sexual relations. He commanded human beings to seek and obtain these requirements through the available means, in specific ways, and at certain times. What the Creator decrees a man should attain of them the man realizes and attains through ample means which are provided him. What the Creator does not decree that he should attain of them he does not attain, and the means are withheld from him. His service or sin is demonstrated through his intent on and choice of one to the exclusion of the other, and this then determines reward or punishment, even if he does not carry it out in deed.

Second, if a man did not have to trouble and busy himself in seeking means of obtaining his livelihood, he would rebel and chase after what is forbidden, and would pay no attention to what he owes God for His goodness to him, as it says: "They have lyre and harp, timbrel and flute and wine at their feasts, and they do not notice God's works, they do not see His handiwork" (Yeshaya-hu 5:12); "Yeshurun grew fat and kicked; you grew fat, thick, and gross." ■

Esav's Final Adieu

We are taught that Esav is one of the penultimate personifications of evil in the Torah, to the point where most Jews see him almost as a caricature. Certainly, when reading the words of the Sages, Esav is not a person to admire. And yet, the Torah's portrayal of Esav is not nearly as negative as our image of him. No doubt he has contemptible moments, but he does not qualify as a competitor to the evil of Haman or Lavan. Reconciling the outlook of the Sages with the way Esav is described in the Torah is critical to an understanding both of Esav himself and of the nature of evil in the eyes of the Torah.

Yitzchak instructs Yaakov to flee to his relatives and search for a wife there. The Torah records Esav's "perspective" on the final stages of this dramatic episode (Bereshit 28:6-19):

"And Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him away to Padan aram, to take himself a wife from there, and that when he blessed him, he commanded him, saying, 'You shall not take a wife of the daughters of Canaan. And Jacob listened to his father and his mother, and he went to Padan aram. And Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan were displeasing to his father Isaac. So Esau went to Ishmael, and he took Mahalath, the daughter of Ishmael, the son of Abraham, the sister of Nebaioth, in addition to his other wives as a wife.'"

The next verses (the beginning of next week's Torah portion) detail Yaakov's subsequent journey to Charan.

The description of Esav is strange, to say the least. First off, we see Esav "seeing" two times, noted in verse 6 and verse 8. Why the repetition? Additionally, what is the difference between Esav's first assessment of Yitzchak's command to Yaakov not to take a wife from the Canaan women, versus his

Rabbi Dr. Darrell Ginsberg

reflection that these same women were “displeasing” to his father? What did he truly hope to achieve in marrying the daughter of Yishmael? Finally, why is the Torah recording Esav’s thinking, especially since the focus should shift to Yaakov and the building of the Jewish nation?

The Rashbam offers a fascinating explanation. He explains that when Esav first evaluated the sequence of events, he realized the true nature of the crime against him. He understood that Yaakov had received the blessing of Avraham from Yitzchak, that he had been promised the Land of Israel, and that he had been instructed not to marry a Canaanite woman. To Esav, all of this demonstrated that the blessing had been stolen from him, and he needed to figure out a way to get it back. He then concludes that the only way to retrieve the blessing would be to marry someone from Avraham’s family, thereby entitling him to the Land of Israel. This final deduction comes from the second “seeing”, where Esav understands the problem is rooted in marrying a Canaanite woman.

This explanation paints Esav as being slightly delusional; given the way the previous events unfolded, did he really believe that this maneuver would lead to a reversal of his current fortunes and his inheritance of the Land of Israel?

The Sforno offers an equally compelling explanation. Esav first “saw” how Yaakov had received the blessing, the promise of the future Land of Israel, and the warning not to marry the Canaanite woman. Esav’s reaction to this was a non-reaction – he did not care. However, when he understood that marrying a Canaanite woman was “bad” in the eyes of his father, he reacted accordingly. Esav deduced that Yitzchak’s disapproval of his previous marriage (as noted in 26:34-35) was the reason why all these troubles had emerged. Therefore, marrying the “right” woman should rectify the breach in their relationship and win back his father’s affection.

Again, we are witnessing a presentation of Esav as being absurdly out of touch with the reality of what took place. Was Esav really this removed from reality?

Above all, why is this episode in the Torah?

It is always important to avoid caricaturizing someone like Esav, who we know our Sages paint as a rasha, an evil person. No doubt, Esav was inclined towards the path of idolatry and other behaviors that reflected a chasm between him and God. Yet he was more complex than simply being a “bad guy”, and the Torah at times seeks to contrast the ideological outlook of the evil man to the righteous one (in this case, Yaakov). The moment that Esav began “seeing”, the Torah is actually indicating to us a rare moment in his, or any individual’s, life. Esav had the chance to change his life, to recognize the truth of what had happened, and to accept that he would need to be subservient to Yaakov (as noted in the blessing). At that very moment, Esav could have re-adjusted his entire life-view. Instead, he was unable to escape the pull that is so central to his

ideological outlook, expressed in his distortion of the importance of the blessing.

The Rashbam centers on Esav’s formulation that marrying the “right” woman will earn him the blessing of the Land of Israel. Esav failed to appreciate the true importance of the blessing being given to Yaakov. Israel was not a piece of land; it was the place where the Jewish nation would be built and would thrive. The Land of Israel was not to be viewed as an acquisition of land or a conquest of territory. Its function was (and is) to serve as a vehicle to perfection and to bring us to higher level of worship of God. It is rooted in a metaphysical framework, a world that Esav had no interest in. Esav always saw the blessing as a reward of the physical world, allowing him to increase his supremacy and strength. Naturally, then, he could not see how his distorted ideological viewpoint could ever work with God’s intentions. To Esav, reclaiming his rightful inheritance could be accomplished through simple steps; after all, it was just a piece of land, and Esav could re-establish his credentials and thereby deserve the reward.

The Sforno, however, focuses on a different element of Esav’s distortion of the blessing. When Esav realized what had taken place, he cared little for the rewards contained within the blessing. Instead, Esav focused on how he could repair the rift with his father. It is possible that Esav refused to concede that Yaakov could possibly merit any approbation from their father. Esav was the warrior, the scion of might and power, the man whose path led him to world domination. How could Yitzchak possibly see something greater than that in Yaakov? It was this sad perspective that was truly so destructive to Esav. He was unable to investigate his own flaws, to recognize that it was the type of person he was that ensured there could never be a relationship of true value between him and his father. To Esav, where success was derived through the physical world, a Yaakov outlook made no sense. Thus, he searches for some mistaken action he might have done to cause Yitzchak’s misguided perception. It was that first marriage that he therefore focuses on and attempts to repair through his next marriage, believing that all could be squared away with his father.

We can now understand the objective in presenting this final episode of Esav’s grasping for absolution. The blessings given to Yaakov reflect his future role as the spiritual builder of the Jewish people. Yaakov represented the ideology of Judaism, where the focus turns from self-gratification to the worship of God, as well as the willingness to investigate one’s own flaws. The Torah seeks not just to show us the positive, but to understand how destructive the other ideology can be. Esav only saw power and strength, the physical world at his beckoning. The allure of such an outlook is something very difficult to deny, as is clearly demonstrated in so many societies throughout history. We must always be aware of the Esav outlook, while embracing the viewpoint of Yaakov to the best of our abilities. ■

A Story of Betrayal

TOLDOS

Rabbi Bernie Fox



The prophecy of the word of the L-rd to Israel through Malachi:

"I have loved you", says the L-rd. Yet you say, "How have You loved us?"

"Was not Esau Yaakov's brother? says the L-rd. "Yet, I loved Yaakov."

"And I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the serpents of the wilderness."

Whereas Edom says, "We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places."

Thus says the L-rd of hosts, "They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, 'the border of wickedness', and, 'the people against whom the L-rd has indignation forever.'"

And your eyes shall see, and you shall say, "The L-rd will be magnified from the border of Israel." (Sefer Malachi 1:1-5)

1. The salvation of Bnai Yisrael and the punishment of Edom

The passages above open the haftarah reading for Parshat Toldot. The haftarah is a reading from the prophets that in most

instances corresponds with the week's Torah reading. The haftarah reading for Parshat Toldot is from the navi Malachi. Not much is known about Malachi who may have been the last of the prophets. However, it is evident from his prophecies that he lived during the beginning of the second temple period. He addressed himself to a generation who returned to the Land of Israel after seventy years of exile. They were faced with the challenge of rebuilding a devastated land and reestablishing a vibrant Jewish life in the land of their fathers and ancestors. They faced many challenges and opposition. It is apparent from Malachi's message that they wondered whether the suffering Jewish people are really favored by Hashem. Malachi's first recorded prophecy addresses this issue.

Before considering the content of the above passages, it is helpful to take note of the literary style employed by the prophet Malachi. Malachi styled most of his prophecies as a dialogue. In the above passages the primary participants in this dialogue are the

people of Israel and Hashem. Hashem opens the dialogue with an assurance of His love for the Jewish people. The people respond by asking for the evidence of this professed love. Hashem responds. He reminds the people that Yaakov and Esav were brothers. Both were the progeny of Yitzchak. Yet, Hashem chose Yaakov and formed a special relationship with him. Esav was rejected by Hashem.

Hashem explains that Esav's ancestral home – the Land of Edom is in ruins. Hashem assures Bnai Yisrael that He will never allow Esav's descendants – the nation of Edom – to rebuild their land. Their efforts will be thwarted and fruitless. In contrast, the Land of Israel will respond to the labors of the returning exiles. It will flourish and be recognized by all nations as a blessed land.

2. The basis of Hashem's punishment of Edom

Malachi's prophecy raises many questions. Hashem provides two proofs of His abiding love for the Jewish people. First, He selected Yaakov over Esav. Second, Edom will never rebuild its devastated land. In contrast, the Jewish people will succeed, beyond their imaginations, in rebuilding the Land of Israel. Are these two proofs related? In other words, both Esav's and Yaakov's descendants will labor to rebuild their lands. The Jewish people will succeed; Edom will fail. Are these very different outcomes related to Hashem's selection of Yaakov over Esav?

RaDaK suggests that these two proofs are closely related. Hashem chose the Jewish people. Because of His selection of the Jewish people He gave them the Land of Israel. It is also because of this bond, that He will not allow the land to remain desolate. Edom – the nation descendant from Esav – does not enjoy this relationship with Hashem. Therefore, its land will be destroyed in response to the nation's wickedness and it will not be rebuilt.[1] In other words, the relationship between Bnai Yisrael and Hashem assures that the Land of Israel will not remain barren. In contrast, Edom's land will be destroyed in response to the nation's wickedness. Because Esav was rejected by Hashem his descendants will never rebuild their land.

Malachi's prophecy raises a second question. What terrible sin of Edom provoked this terrible punishment? RaDaK explains that Edom betrayed Bnai Yisrael.

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At the time of the destruction of the first temple and the exile of the Jewish people from the Land of Israel, Edom offered no succor to its brothers. Instead, Esav's descendants plundered the Land of Israel and enriched themselves.[2]

And Esav hated Yaakov because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him. And Esav said in his heart: Let the days of mourning for my father be at hand; then will I slay my brother Yaakov. (Sefer Bereshiet 27:41)

3. Edom's betrayal of Bnai Yisrael

RaDaK's comments are interesting. He asserts that Edom's treatment of Bnai Yisrael was a betrayal. Betrayal means that a relationship has been violated. In this context, the term betrayal implies that a fraternal relationship exists between Edom and Bnai Yisrael. Edom violated this fraternal relationship in its treatment of Bnai Yisrael.

This idea requires closer consideration. Parshat Toldot describes the development of the relationship between Esav and Yaakov. In the closing portion of the parasha, Yaakov disguises himself as Esav. Through this subterfuge, he succeeds in securing the blessing that his father intended for Esav. When Esav discovers that Yaakov has received the blessings that Yitzchak intended for him he is furious. He promises to avenge himself with Yaakov's life. From Esav's perspective, Yaakov had sacrificed any claim he had to fraternal loyalty.

Given the hostile relationship between these two estranged brothers, RaDaK's contention that Edom should have acted compassionately toward Yaakov's descendants deserves examination. Apparently, Esav's anger at Yaakov was improper. Despite all that had occurred between them, their fraternal relationship should have endured.

And these are the generations of Yitzchak, Avraham's son: Avraham begot Yitzchak. And Yitzchak was forty years old when he took Rivkah, the daughter of Betuel the Aramean, of Paddan-aram, the sister of Lavan the Aramean, to be his wife. And Yitzchak entreat-

ed Hashem for his wife, because she was barren; and Hashem let Himself be entreated of him, and Rivkah his wife conceived. (Sefer Bereshiet 25:19-21)

4. Parshat Toldot's long opening section

In order to understand RaDaK's position, the opening section of Parshat Toldot must be considered. The opening of the parasha describes the birth of Esav and Yaakov. Esav was the firstborn and his twin Yaakov was born second. After describing the birth of Yitzchak's and Rivkah's sons, the Torah explains that these two twins developed into very different individuals. Yaakov lived in the tents. The Sages understand this to mean that he was a scholar. He devoted his time to study in the tent. Esav was a man of the fields. According to the Sages, he enjoyed the thrill of hunting and the confrontation with danger.

The section ends by relating an important interaction between the brothers. Esav returns from the field. He is famished and weak. Yaakov has just prepared a meal. Esav asks Yaakov to share with him the porridge he has prepared. Yaakov responds that he will provide Esav with food in exchange for his firstborn birthright. Esav immediately declares that the birthright is of no value to him and agrees to the bargain. Yaakov is not satisfied with Esav's verbal agreement and demands that he swear to their agreement. Esav provides Yaakov with the oath he desires and Yaakov gives Esav the porridge for which he bartered and also bread and drink.

It is important to note that the Torah combines all of this material into a single section. The birth of the twin brothers, their development, and the sale of the birthright are all combined into this single section. It is odd that the selling of the birthright is not treated separately and relegated to its own section. What is the Torah communicating by placing all of these events into a single section?

The apparent message is that this material represents a single progression of events. In other words, the birth of Yaakov and Esav set in motion a series of events that were completed with the sale of the birthright by Esav to Yaakov. Another way of expressing this is that although Esav was the first born, the firstborn birthright was intended for Yaakov. Therefore, the story of their birth is only completed with the transfer of the birthright from Esav to Yaakov.

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And the children struggled together within her; and she said: If it be so, wherefore do I live? And she went to inquire of Hashem. And Hashem said unto her: Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples shall be separated from your midst; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger. (Sefer Beresheit 25:22-23)

5. The significance of the prophetic message given to Rivkah

This connection is suggested by an incident briefly described in the above passages from the beginning of the parasha. Rivkah experiences terrible pain during her pregnancy. She seeks an explanation from a prophet. She is told that she carries two sons. The sons are striving with one another within her. They both will emerge as progenitors of great nations. Their nations will compete with one another for superiority. But the elder son's descendants are destined to serve those of the younger son.

The prophet told Rivkah that both sons would be fathers of great nations. But they would not be equals. One nation would be the senior member of their partnership and the other would answer to his direction. He also revealed that the nation that would develop from the younger son would be the leader in the partnership.

The incident that closes the section – the sale of the firstborn birthright – is the beginning of the fulfillment of the prophet's message. The younger son acquires the place of the firstborn. Because it completes the prophecy, the sale of the birthright is included in the same section as the birth of the sons.

And Yaakov gave Esav bread and porridge of lentils; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way. So Esav despised his birthright. (Sefer Bresheit 34)

6. Esav has no remorse for selling his birthright

However, a question remains. Why did Hashem not just cause Yaakov to be firstborn? In order to answer this question we must consider the above passage. It is the final passage of the initial section of the parasha. It explains that Yaakov gave Esav the porridge for which he had exchanged his birthright. Yaakov also gave Esav bread. Esav ate and drank. The passage ends by stating that Esav arose, departed, and that he disdained the birthright he had sold to his brother.

What is the message of this final phrase? What is the Torah revealing to us by describing Esav's disdain for the birthright? Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno comments that the phrase should be understood as describing a series of events. Esav arose and departed; and even after these events he disdained the birthright. According to Sforno, this final phrase communicates an insight into Esav's attitudes. Sometimes, a person makes a decision and takes action under duress. Later, when the person reconsiders his decision and actions, he regrets his hastily chosen course of action. The Torah is telling us the Esav did not have remorse. He did not value the birthright. He disdained it. Even after his hunger was satisfied and he had the opportunity to reconsider his actions, he felt that he had acted properly. The birthright did not have value to him and for it he had secured a meal from his brother.[3],[4]

7. The selection of destinies

Sforno's comments provide a response to our question. Why did Hashem not cause Yaakov to be the firstborn son? Why did He cause Esav to be the firstborn? As explained above, Hashem's plan was for both Esav and Yaakov to be the fathers of great nations. These nations were to be partners. The nation that would descend from Yaakov would be the leader in this partnership. However, Hashem did not choose to impose this relationship upon the brothers. He did not cause Yaakov to be the firstborn and for Esav to be assigned a secondary role in history merely by virtue of birth order. Instead, He caused Esav to be born first.

The relationship between these brothers and their descendants was then determined by the decisions that the brothers made. Yaakov decided that he wished to attain the spiritual legacy that would be entrusted to Yitzhak's firstborn. Esav decided that this legacy was meaningless and he willingly abandoned it.

In short, this section describes the process through which the basic relationship between the brothers and their descendants was established. The section begins with their birth. However, it ends with the brothers, through their own decisions and actions, deciding the nature of their relationship.

Now, Malachi's comments are understood. Hashem's design is for the descendants of Yaakov and the descendants of Esav to have roles in a partnership. Bnai Yisrael are assigned a leadership role but Edom and Bnai Yisrael are to work together for the benefit of humanity. Edom betrayed Bnai Yisrael. Rather than responding to the bond established from birth between their forefather and Yaakov, they reveled in Bnai Yisrael's destruction and enriched themselves with the plunder of the Land of Israel. ■

[1] Rabbaynu David Kimchi (Radak), Commentary on Sefer Malachi 1:2.

[2] Rabbaynu David Kimchi (Radak), Commentary on Sefer Malachi 1:4.

[3] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 25:34.

[4] Much later, when Yitzhak gave to Yaakov the blessings that Esav had expected, he did express remorse. There are a number of explanations for what seems to be a substantial change in Esav's attitude. These various explanations deserve thorough discussion beyond the scope of this analysis. However, the simplest explanation is that Esav understood the birthright as a claim to Yitzhak's spiritual legacy. This he did not desire. However, the blessings that Yitzhak gave to Yaakov were related to material success. These were meaningful to Esav and he coveted them.

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