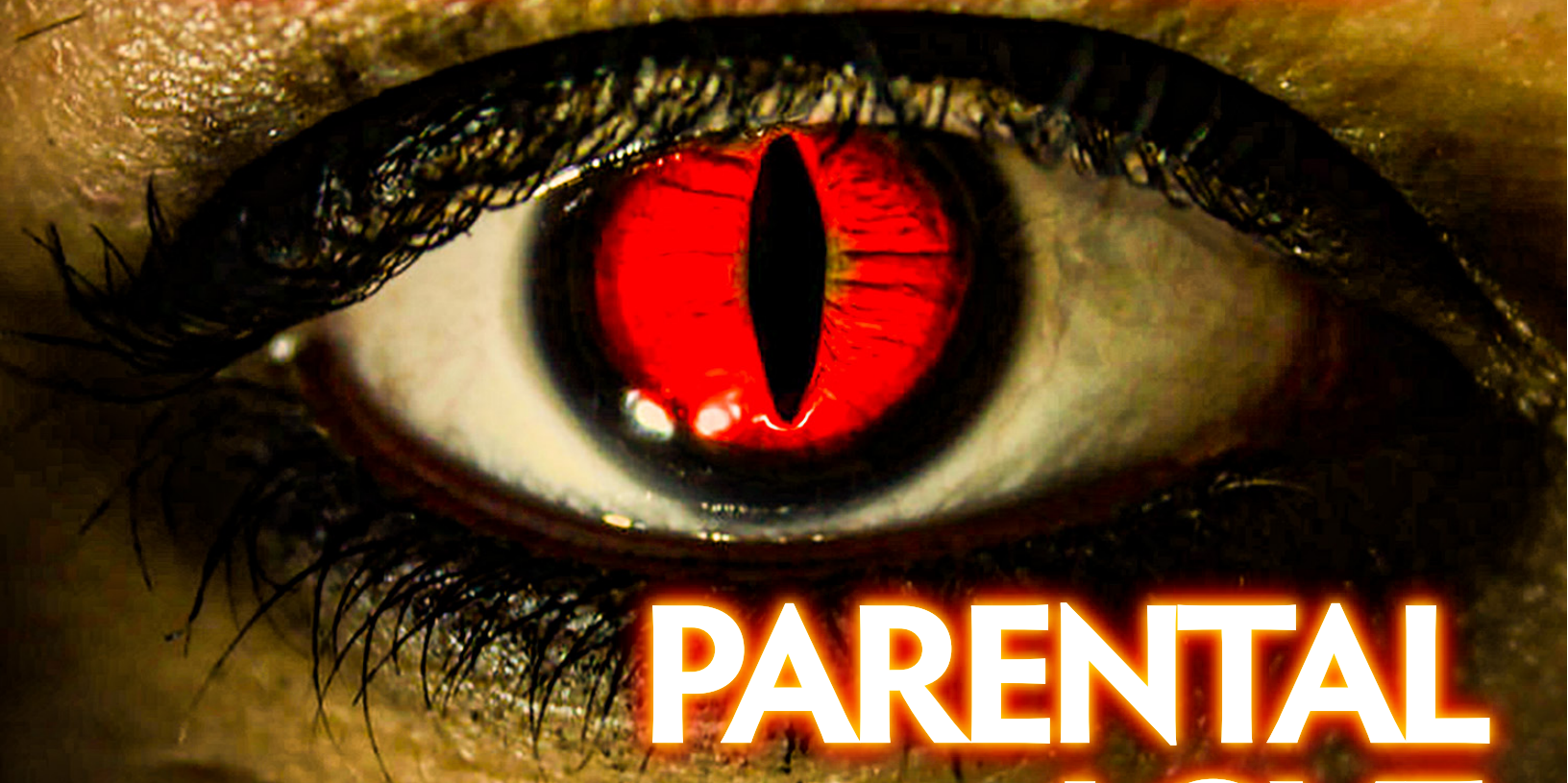


JewishTimes

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Although Abraham conquered his conflict, he sensed the same mercy we all face for our children. In contrast, Christianity imagines saints that never sin. Judaism teaches reality; Christianity preaches fantasy.

LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Sacrifice

READER: Maimonides held God used sacrifice to wean the Jews off idolatry. However, we see that Adam and his sons sacrificed, when idolatry did not yet exist. We'd have to assume sacrifice is a natural human expression, unrelated to idolatry. Any thoughts? —*Jack Hazan*

RABBI: Ramban had the same question on Maimonides. Yet, Maimonides said God commanded us in sacrifice as a response to our former idolatrous animal sacrifice. What he means is not that sacrifice never existed; Maimonides knew history. Maimonides means that the "command" of sacrifice was based on our situation, that it would be impossible for the people to abandon sacrifice. So God now started using sacrifice in a positive structure of Torah law.

Sacrifice is not inherently evil, as Adam, his sons, Noah and Abraham sacrificed. Sacrifice became distorted later on; it became an emotionally satisfy-

ing act in connection with idolatry. But through God's new Torah system, He structured sacrifice into a highly controlled practice that did not allow vent of idolatrous expression. ■

Is God Everywhere?

READER: It seems logical to me that G-d is everywhere. After all, He is not only formless, He pervades the whole universe and He can't do that with any kind of body. Rabbi Gutman Locks agrees that G-d is everywhere. What is your view? —*Turk Hill*

RABBI: Consider the fact that God is the creator of the universe which also means He is the creator of not only physical objects... but also the space that contains them. That means He created location and place, prior to which there was no such thing as "place" or space. Just like an idea exists and does not take up any space and has no location, God is the same way. ■

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SATAN'S LANGUAGE

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



Satan preceded Abraham to the journey (to sacrifice Isaac) and said to him: "Is it proper that the One who loves you should try you and grieve you to kill your son?" Satan continued: "You have instructed many, and you have strengthened the weak hands. Your words have upheld him that was falling...but now it [a stressful matter] comes upon you, and you are weary" (Job 4:2-5). Abraham replied to Satan: "And I will walk with my integrity" (Psalms 26:11). Satan said to Abraham: "Is not your fear of God your foolishness?" (Job 4:6). In other words, your fear will culminate in the slaughter of your son. Abraham said to Satan: "Can you think of any innocent man who ever perished?" (Job 4:7). Once Satan saw that Abraham was not heeding him, he said to him: "Now a word was secretly brought to me, and my ear received a whisper thereof" (Job 4:12). This is what I heard from behind the heavenly curtain: "The sheep is to be sacrificed as a burnt-offering, and Isaac is not to be sacrificed as a burnt-offering. Abraham said to him: "Perhaps that is so. However, this is the punishment of the liar, that even if he speaks the truth, others do not listen to him" (Sanhedrin 89b).

Who is Satan? This refers to our instincts which seek emotional gratification and avoiding difficulty. In this case, Abraham's conflict was between the love for his son and the love for God's and His commands. This midrash addresses the core conflicts Abraham confronted en route to sacrificing Isaac. Let us now interpret this midrash with the understanding that Abraham is having a conflict with his emotions, expressed as Satan's words...

Satan preceding Abraham to the journey means that as soon as Abraham set out to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham was confronted with a conflict. The first thing Satan (Abraham's instincts) do is question God's command: "As God loves me, how

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

can He possibly ask me to kill my son?" Abraham asked himself. We notice that Abraham replies to all the other arguments which Satan presents, but he does not reply to this argument. The reason is because one cannot know God's mind to answer this question. As Maimonides says, there is no response to "Why did God create man?" All we can say is that it is God's will. Similarly, Abraham realized that there is no way to understand God's command here, how it is just, as Isaac had not sinned. So there is no response. Abraham continued on his journey.

Satan then accuses Abraham of being so strong and steadfast in his philosophy when advising others, but when it comes to himself, he's finding difficulty with his own philosophy. This means that Abraham now sensed a reluctance to sacrifice Isaac due to his love for his son. But Abraham corrected himself, he realized that although there is pain now when he and not another is the subject of a trial, he must overcome his subjective feelings and react to his own trial with objectivity: "I will walk with my integrity." Abraham strengthened his convictions and did not allow subjective feelings to dilute the integrity with which he directed others throughout his life.

Satan's third approach was a response to this answer: "Your fear (integrity) will ruin you as you will kill your son!" Abraham felt by adhering to God through his fear and integrity, he will kill his son. Abraham then corrected that emotion and ignored personal gain or loss, but focused solely on God's justice, as he said, "No innocent man ever perished," a statement concerning justice. Meaning Abraham extricated his mindset from a subjective personal loss, and responded to the situation from God's perspective of justice. That is, "God commanded me and I must subjugate myself to Him and kill Isaac."

Satan's final argument is important: "Once Satan saw that Abraham was not heeding him, he said to him..." We are forced to immediately stop, and ask that if Satan saw he failed, why did he keep talking? But we must be mindful that the rabbis who scripted this allegory, intentionally wrote, "Satan saw Abraham was not listening." What the rabbis mean to teach is that Satan now took a different strategy. At first, Satan was presenting arguments stemming purely from instinctual responses: "Why would God harm one whom He loves? You're so strong for others but you can't take your own advice! Your integrity is going to ruin you!" He first argues from God's perspective, and then from Abraham's perspective. These were Satan's first three approaches. Now Satan changes his strategy and claims that he "Heard a secret from behind the curtain," meaning he knows God's true intent...to sacrifice an animal and not Isaac. This means that Abraham now was hit with a different type of emotion that stemmed not from a pure instinctual source, but from a religious source, "Behind the curtain" means what is in heaven, or what is God's actual intent. This teaches an important lesson: the instincts

don't always confront us from a purely emotional argument; sometimes they will use our sense of religiosity to ruin us. In other words Abraham now contemplated, "What is God's real wish: Does he want innocent people to be slaughtered? No!" Abraham momentarily entertained this. Abraham's response was "Although there may be some truth to that sentiment, I cannot follow that path of thought since it was generated from my instincts." With the words, "The fate of a liar is that even if he says the truth, he must not be listened to," Abraham meant to say, "I cannot abandon God's command to kill my son despite my religious thinking because this is all stemming from an emotional conflict."

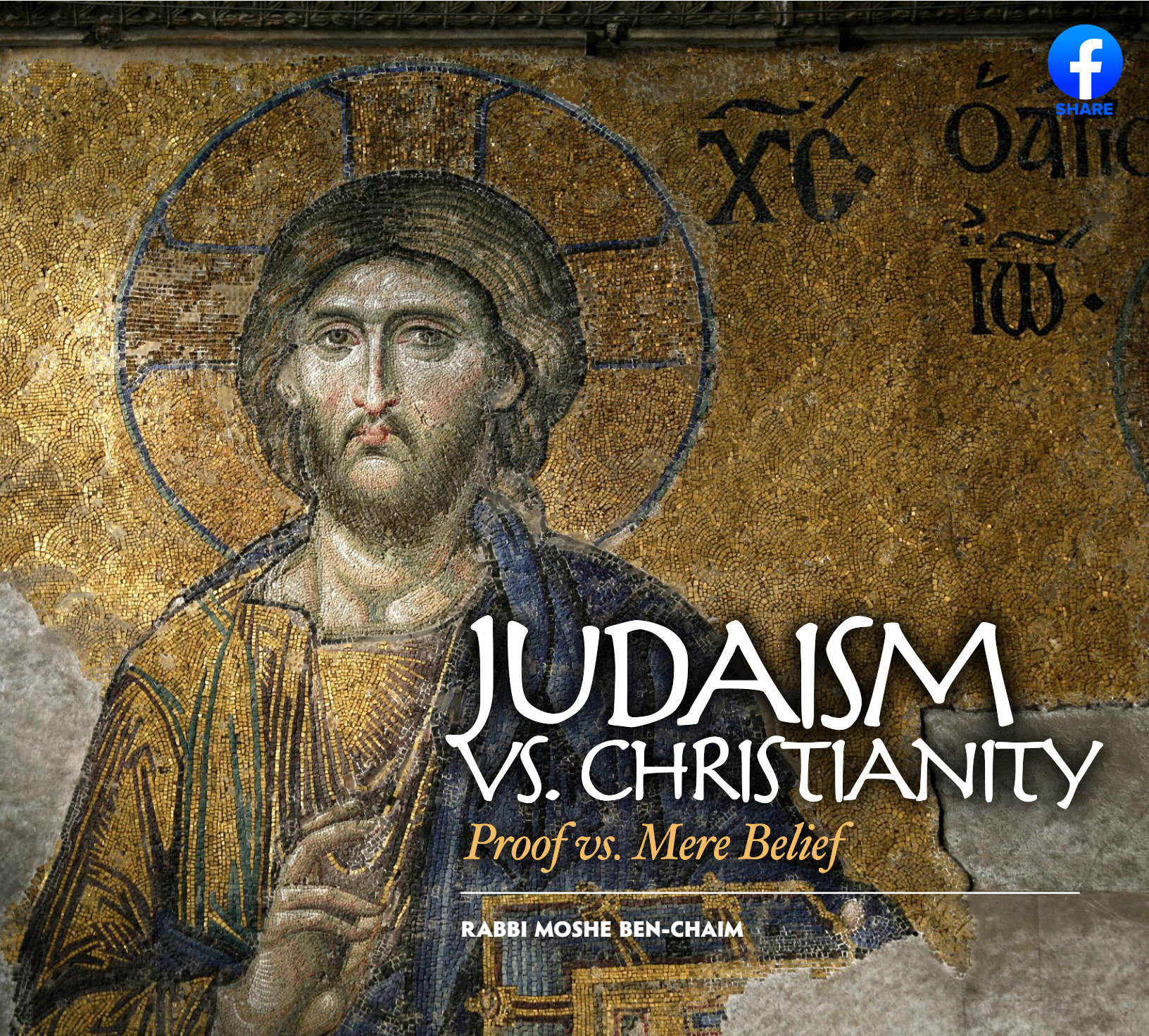
Rabbi Israel Chait taught similarly:

Chofetz Chaim said, "Satan gets us from the front and the back." The front I understand [our instincts attack us face-on]. But what is the back? This means the instincts get behind you and push you in your current direction, from the "back." For example, a person learns many hours and wants to sleep. But Satan says, "Keep learning all night." That is Satan pushing from the back, and this will run him down. Sometimes one's mistakes are not due to desires, but because one does not see reality due to an incorrect self-image that blocks the truth. The answers are all found in Judaism, but you have to be able to see them (Pirkei Avos, Chap. 5/6 pg 464).

Of course the rabbis do not know precisely what went on in Abraham's mind and heart on his journey to sacrifice Isaac. What they mean with this allegory is that even someone as great as Abraham cannot escape emotional difficulty and conflicts when asked by God to kill his son. Even Abraham most certainly will have certain conflicts which are covered in this midrash. Judaism greatly differs with Christianity which deifies man and creates saints, humans devoid of any emotion. But Judaism accepts reality, sharing all of even the greatest people's faults, for our edification.

What is Satan's language? It is the language of the emotions. When confronted with a conflict, our emotions "talk to us," seeking the more pleasant route of not sacrificing our son. Our emotions then question God, or we cave to our weakness and don't comply. The language of our emotions can also take on a religious bend, where we find a religious justification to reject truth, as the Crusades justified murder in the name of religion. The story of the snake and Eve too is a metaphor for how Eve's instincts manipulated her to sin. ■





JUDAISM VS. CHRISTIANITY

Proof vs. Mere Belief

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The following italics are excerpts from “The Case for Christ: What’s the evidence for the resurrection?”

by Brent Landau

<https://bit.ly/CaseJesus>

In 1998, Lee Strobel, a reporter for the Chicago Tribune and a graduate of Yale Law School, published “The Case for Christ: A Journalist’s Personal Investigation of the Evidence for Jesus.” Strobel had formerly been an atheist and was compelled by his wife’s conversion to evangelical Christianity to refute the key Christian claims about Jesus. Paramount among these was the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection, but other claims included the belief in Jesus as the literal Son of God and the accuracy of the New Testament writings. Strobel, however, was unable to refute these claims to his satisfaction, and he then converted to Christianity as well. As a religious studies professor specializing in the New Testament and early Christianity, I hold that Strobel’s book and the movie adaptation have not proven the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection for several reasons.

First Corinthians, written by the Apostle Paul to a group of Christians in Corinth to address controversies that had arisen in their community. Paul is thought to have written this letter around the year 52, about 20 years after Jesus’ death. In 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, Paul gives a list of people to whom the risen Jesus appeared. These witnesses to the resurrected Jesus include the Apostle Peter, James the brother of Jesus, and, most intriguingly, a group of more than 500 people at the same time. Many scholars believe that Paul here is quoting from a much earlier Christian creed, which perhaps originated only a few years after Jesus’ death. But what of the 500 people who saw the risen Jesus at the same time? First of all, biblical scholars have no idea what event Paul is referring to here. But one leading scholar has suggested that

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)



this event was added to the list of resurrection appearances by Paul, and that its origins are uncertain. Strobel also argues that the resurrection is the best explanation for the fact that Jesus' tomb was empty on Easter morning. Some scholars would question how early the empty tomb story is. There is significant evidence that the Romans did not typically remove victims from crosses after death. Therefore, it is possible that a belief in Jesus' resurrection emerged first, and that the empty tomb story originated only when early critics of Christianity doubted the veracity of this claim. But even if we assume that the tomb really was empty that morning, what is there to prove that it was a miracle and not that Christ's body was moved for uncertain reasons? Miracles are, by definition, extremely improbable events, and I see no reason to assume that one has taken place when other explanations are far more plausible.

This means Paul was the sole claimant, but even this is uncertain, as no one witnessed Paul making such a claim. But even had Paul made such a claim, obviously damaging to this purported claim is that the very people Paul claims as witnesses, fail to transmit the claim of resurrection. This is akin to a person reading a story of a wizard who performed in front of many, and claiming it is historical truth, based solely on the story. However, without those witnesses transmitting the story, the story goes unproven. Paul too was repeating a previous creed, not recording what he and others witnessed. "Strobel also argues that the resurrection is the best explanation for the fact that Jesus' tomb was empty on Easter morning." Paul adopted a "faith." Resurrection is a belief; it's not a "witnessed event" of a dead body undergoing resurrection. In fact, nothing was witnessed. To suggest an empty tomb proves anything is irrational.

"Therefore, it is possible that a [mere] belief in Jesus' resurrection emerged first, and that the empty tomb story originated [was fabricated] only when early critics of Christianity doubted the veracity of this claim." Thus, resurrection is conjecture.

In stark contrast, Revelation at Sinai was witnessed by 2 million Israelites, whose tribal names, family names, census, dates, and travels are unanimously transmitted for over 3300 years. Had Revelation been a fabrication, the Jewish nation today would possess that fabricated story (Moses tried to lie), plus the "actual" history of those Jews, had there been one. For masses will not accept a liar (Moses) who tells the nation 9 times in Deuteronomy "Don't forget that you heard God's voice emanating from the fiery Mt. Sinai." Had Moses lied with these words, the people would not abandon their true history and accept lies, and then lie to their children about miracles they never saw. They would never transmit the Biblical narrative Moses fabricated. But, as there is a single world history of the Jews on May 2, 1312 BC (Revelation at Sinai) this verifies Revelation as fact. Mass witnesses is the litmus test of all historical truths. This exists at Revelation and in no other religion's claims. Other nations unanimously accepted Jewish history as they too know that if masses unanimously share one history, it is impossible to get so many people to lie.

It is vital to note that the Old Testament prophets performed miracles in front of masses, such as the Jordan River splitting before Joshua and the Jews, the fire which descended from heavens in response to Elijah's prayer in front of the idolatrous Baal worshipers, the sun standing still for Joshua in response to his prayer, and Naaman's leprosy vanishing and his skin returning to that of a youth after immersing in the Jordan river 7 times at Elisha's instruction. With miracles, God thereby endorses His true prophets who taught His Biblical will. But such witnessed miracles are unheard of regarding later

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*An empty sepulcher cannot prove resurrection.
Proof is derived from positive phenomenon;
not the lack thereof.*

personalities of the New Testament or in any other religion. This is why such stories of Jesus' resurrection are doubted, as there are no witnesses. All that exists are "stories" of witnesses, but no individuals transmitting eye-witnessed events from that supposed event, and onward. The claim of resurrection first surfacing 20 years after Jesus died adds to the doubts.

When God wants man kind to accept a truth, He makes certain masses witness the event and the story undergoes no doubt whatsoever. This is precisely why God orchestrated Revelation on Sinai with 2 million witnesses hearing intelligence emanating from flames. For no earthly life form can speak from inside an inferno. It was God's voice, commanding the Jews in His 10 Commandments. He then dictated to Moses the Bible. God never gave another religion or changed this one. In fact, in His Bible, God forbids any alteration of the Bible: "Be careful to observe only that which I command upon you: neither add to it nor detract from it" (Deut. 13:1). Thus, the New Testament's Biblical additions, detractions and changes violate God's words. This is an authoritative reason. And from the point of reason too, this is sensible that God commands we do not change His word, for He knows the future, and no consideration demands His perfect Bible system be altered. For man remains unchanged throughout time, with his unchanging human nature: psychologically, morally and philosophically. As man does not change, God's perfect system does not change.

The Bible ends with the words that Moses was the greatest of all prophets: "Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses—who knew God face to face" (Deut 34:10). Thus, any changes to Bible proposed by Jesus violates this verse as well. The Rabbis of Jesus era did not recognize Jesus as a prophet, as he failed to comply with God's test of a prophet: "If the prophet speaks in the name of the LORD and the oracle does not come true, that oracle was not spoken by the LORD; the prophet has uttered it presumptuously: do not stand in dread of him" (Deut. 18:22). ■

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Toldos

A Study in 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.” (Guide, book III, chap. L) With this in mind, let’s recap the story of Toldos and then isolate the questions.

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

The prophet informed her that she will give birth to twins (two nations) and that the “greater son will be subservient to the younger.” This was the primary message. When she finally gave birth, Esav exited first, and the Torah describes

him as red and covered with hair. Jacob then exited; his hand was seizing Esav’s heel. The Torah then says that Esav became a hunter while Jacob was a dweller in tents. Isaac loved Esav, for he captured food for Isaac, while Rivkah loved Jacob. The Torah hints at an imbalance.

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

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

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

And why did she inquire from the prophets Abraham or Shem, but not of her own husband Isaac?

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Of what significance is Esav's hairy nature?

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

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

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

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

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

Why was Isaac shocked when Esav came before him to receive the blessings?

It is clear: God intended Rivkah to obtain information vital to the establishment of the Jewish people. Her difficult pregnancy was intended to direct her to one who would inform her of God's intentions. With that new information obtained via the prophet—"the older would serve the younger"—Rivkah now cherished Jacob over Esav, as she learned through that prophecy that a matter of "nations" depends on the younger Jacob. (She was told that two nations would issue from her.) The prophecy taught her to be instrumental in securing the younger son's success, as a means of establishing the nation of Israel. She also deduced that for good reason, God bypassed Isaac, withholding from him this prophetic information.

The patriarchs and matriarchs did not function in accord with simplistic favoritism. We must not erroneously project such motivation onto them. Thus, when the Torah teaches that, "Isaac loved Esav while Rivkah loved Jacob" it teaches an important lesson. It appears this lesson is that Isaac was not as well informed as was Rivkah about the natures of their two sons. Thus, the Torah saw fit to teach us the imbalance of their divergent loves, so we might appreciate how God orchestrated His providence. As Isaac was misled by Esav's "capturing his father with his mouth" (Gen. 25:28), Isaac desired to bless Esav and not bestow these blessings upon Jacob. Isaac was deluded by Esav's ostensible good nature, as Esav disguised himself as upright with inquiries of proper conduct (capturing him) only to earn Isaac's favor. In truth, Esav was evil. In contrast, the Torah teaches that Jacob was a "dweller of tents" (ibid 25:27): he was complete in his perfection and delved into the study of God.

Jacob's proper lifestyle did not present the facade offered by Esav's veneer. Esav presented himself in the manner he knew his father would cherish. He "captured his father with his mouth." Thus, the Torah thereby informs us of the need for God's providence to work through Rivkah; she had clarity. From the very outset of the lives of Esav and Jacob, Rivkah was taught that the younger Jacob was to rule his older brother and that Jacob was to receive the blessings. This was also substantiated through Jacob's clutching of Esav's heel. This strange phenomenon taught



Rivkah that Jacob—right out of the womb—was one who could contend and usurp his twin. Rivkah relied on this knowledge later in her plan to deceive Isaac.

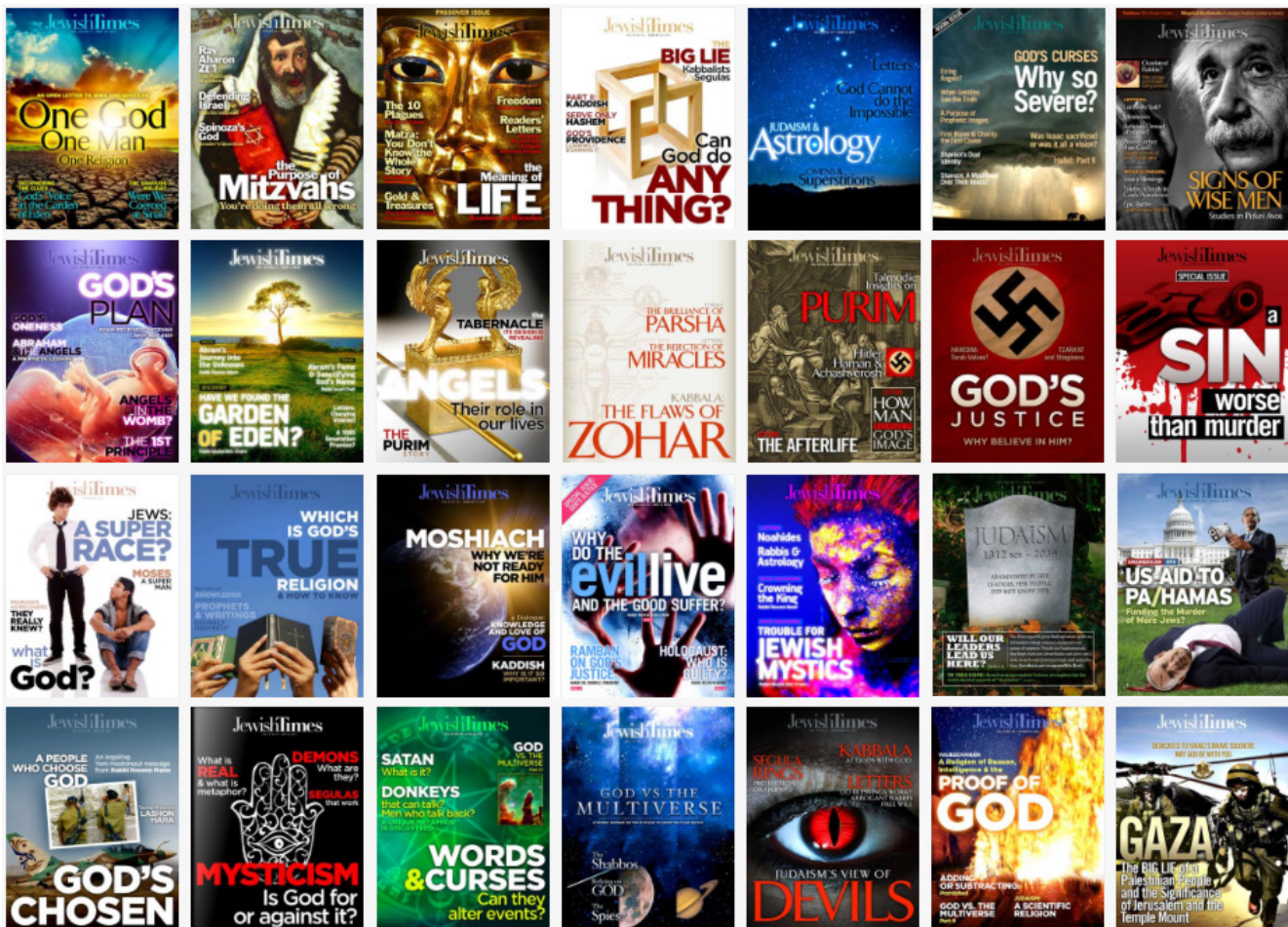
It was also vital that Rivkah receive the prophet's communication before giving birth. Now that she understood the younger was to be favored, she could interpret Jacob clutching Esav's heel as a divine message. God was showing Rivkah the means that He implanted into human nature to ensure her success.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

The Torah tells us how Esav arrives home exhausted. The Rabbis teach he had murdered, committed adultery and idolatry, for on that day, Abraham had died. Esav—a man seeking an Earthly, hedonistic existence alone—was frustrated that his grandfather Abraham would actually perish from this Earth. Esav's immortality fantasy was abruptly shattered. He no longer clung to any role model displayed by Abraham: "For what good is life, if it ends?" Esav felt. He therefore went astray from Abraham's values and committed these grave acts. Esav, exhausted and famished, requested the lentils which Jacob had cooked. Jacob "instantly" countered with his offer to purchase the birthright from Esav, in exchange for the lentils. Thus, Jacob's purchase was premeditated. He had already planned to obtain the birthright prior to this event; now the moment was ripe. We might explain Jacob's readiness to obtain the birthright was due to Rivkah's informing him of her knowledge

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obtained via that earlier prophecy. Rivkah most probably explained to Jacob years earlier what she learned, that the younger Jacob was to rule over the older. This is supported by Jacob's readiness to purchase the birthright.

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

In summary, Rivkah required divine instruction due to the imbalance between Esav and Jacob, and between her and her husband. She would have to act to bring about the nation of Israel. God orchestrated an abnormal pregnancy precisely to educate Rivkah on matters of this pregnancy: the issuing nations of Jacob and Esav and how they must be guided through her, as "she loved Jacob," i.e., in this matter she grasped reality whereas Isaac did not. Compelled to inquire from a prophet, she avoided asking Isaac about the pregnancy as she understood Isaac was lacking clarity. Rivkah became equipped with the divine knowledge, vital to ensure the blessings are bestowed upon the proper recipient.

There was a need for Rivkah to learn of the different natures of her two sons. She learned through prophecy that Jacob would be the superior. But she also learned one more essential lesson through seeing his hand clutching Esav's heel: Jacob possessed the natural tendency to usurp Esav. It was only through this knowledge gained by seeing his hand grabbing his brother's heel that Rivkah thereby learned that she must harness his nature to ensure the prophecy comes to be. Had she merely received knowledge that Jacob was to be superior, this knowledge alone does not compel her to act through Jacob. Rather, it was the act of Jacob grabbing his brother's heel whereby Rivkah understood she was seeing this for a reason. She deduced that this competitive display was necessary to indicate that her two sons have various natures, through which she must play a role to ensure these natures are acted out. She must make Jacob topple Esav in "status" when the time is right.

Rivkah teaches Jacob this prophecy when he is young, and from that point forward, Jacob is ever-prepared to purchase the birthright. And at the right moment, Rivkah and Jacob strategize a plan that succeeds, but again, only through God's providence. For we see that, "no sooner that Jacob left, did Esav return." This is to teach that God controlled the timing to the second, ensuring Rivkah and Jacob's success (Gen. 27:30). And finally, Isaac too attests to Jacob's rightful receipt of the blessings, as he tells Esav, "and he is surely blessed" (ibid 27:33). For Isaac realized that since he was able to utter the blessings, then it must have been God's will that Jacob had received them.

Isaac's sudden fright (ibid 27:33) also explains why Rivkah did not



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OUR PURPOSE: WISDOM & MORALITY



God created man to
live by truths
concerning Him,
creation, others and
ourselves.

We must study God's instruction
about what He is, what is
idolotrous or fallacy, we must
study nature, psychology,
philosophy and morality. This
draws us closer to God and He to
us, and creates societal harmony
which fosters greater Torah for all.

MORE BELOW

Kindness: As equals, all humans must treat others as we wish to be treated. Charity, kindness and justice demand we rise above personal and selfish emotions and recognize that God made others as He made ourselves. Doing so creates harmony, and earns His kindness.

Racism: A Lie: Man descends from Adam. **Black/white twins** unveil the lie of racism. Bible denounces it: Moses' wife was black, our kings married Egyptians and Messiah descends from Moabites. "Better is the day of death than the day of birth" (Eccl. 7:1). Birth doesn't define us; how we live does.

Insecurity: Man's insecurities can be false, but reality is greater, as it is truth. Man seeks security about his future, accepting fallacies like astrology, amulets, omens, horoscopes and others. God prohibited such practices precisely because they are false. God is more powerful than false notions. Rely on Him alone.

Happiness: Many think wealth and success secure happiness. But Torah teaches happiness stems from study. When pursuing wisdom, one is most happy as Torah offers childlike amazement at every turn. Study offers the daily novelty necessary to retain interest and the depth that offers amazement.

Pleasing Others: Don't seek approval over truth, Torah says. "What can man do to me?" (Psalms 56:5). "Don't fear man" (Deut. 1:17). "Desist from man whose soul is in his nostrils, for what is he considered?" (Isaiah 2:22). Mortal attention is irrelevant. Following God earns all goodness.

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ASK THE RABBI



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

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

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

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

Part II

Having read this, my friend Shaye Mann asked a fine question: "I understand that 'after' Rivkah witnessed Isaac favoring Esav, that Rivkah had grounds to omit Isaac from her prophecy and her plans. But before she even had the prophecy, prior to giving birth...she avoided asking Isaac for an explanation of her abnormal pregnancy! She asked either Shem or Abraham. How can you explain this avoidance of Isaac 'before' Isaac ever expressed any favoritism towards Esav?"

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

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

Think about this: the first verse already says, "Isaac son of Abraham." Why then does it repeat, "Abraham bore Isaac?" And in verse 2, if we are already told that Betuel, Lavan's father was an "Arami", (ostensibly a nationality), why are we told again that Lavan was also an "Arami"? If Lavan's father was an Aramite, then we know Lavan his son is also an Aramite!

There are no redundancies in God's Torah. I thought about the first question. I realized "Abraham bore Isaac" must indicate something new. Abraham sought a wife for Isaac. We thereby learn that Isaac was incapable of selecting one for himself. We may suggest, "Abraham bore Isaac," means that Abraham "raised" Isaac. In other words, Isaac—more than any other—was in need of paternal dedication and guidance. He was not as others, who approached marriage independently. His self-sacrifice on the altar had a profound effect on his nature. He was not even allowed to leave the land, as God told him to remain in Gerar and not descend to Egypt. Therefore, this first verse seeks to emphasize Isaac's nature as greatly dependent upon Abraham.

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

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

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

These two verses appear at the very start of our Parsha, as they explain the succeeding verses, and Rivkah’s actions.

No question in Torah is without an answer. This time, we were fortunate enough to discover it. Thank you Shaye.

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

God’s Providence

Esav born unnaturally covered with hair conveys Divine intent. The only other mention of Esav’s exterior is the means through which Jacob deceived his father. This teaches that God’s providence was in play at

the very birth of these twins. God ensured a means existed through which the blessings would be successfully transmitted to Jacob.

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

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





Parental Love

Rabbi Reuven Mann

This week's Parsha, Toldot, takes up the issues of: child-rearing, and the relationship between children and parents. After a stormy pregnancy, Rivka gave birth to twins, who could not have been more unidentical. Eissav, was "a man who knows hunting, a man of the field." Ya'akov, was the exact opposite, "a wholesome man, dwelling in tents." The tents that he dwelled in, were those of Shem and Ever, the great teachers of the generation. Clearly, the Chumash is not interested in telling us, what type of dwelling Yaakov occupied.

The attitude of the parents, is somewhat surprising. We are told, that Rivka loved Yaakov, and that Yitzchak loved Eissav; because the "game was in his mouth"—i.e. Eissav provided his father with delicious meals, from the animals he trapped.

What is missing from this description is, Rivka's attitude toward Eissav, and Yitzchak's feeling about Yaakov. I believe, it is safe to say, that Yitzchak loved Yaakov; because he was a perfected human being, who was steeped in learning. But Eissav, was not confined to the House of Study. He was involved in conquest and material pursuits, and his true character was open to question.

But Yitzchak believed, that he used his physical talents, for the sake of doing good and serving Hashem. Eissav, did all that he could, to convey the impression to his father, that he was deeply concerned about his religious responsibilities. He managed to convince his father, but not his mother.

The simple reading of the story, conveys the impression that Rivka withheld her love from

Eissav. But one may ask; shouldn't parents display love even to a child whose activities do not meet with their approval?

I don't think that Rivka treated Eissav with disdain. I am confident, that she showed the appropriate affection for him. I don't think she behaved in one manner toward Yaakov, and in a completely different way toward Eissav. She did not make the mistake of blatantly playing favorites with her twins.

She realized, that these were no ordinary children; but individuals who were destined, to play a major role on the world scene. When the Torah says, "that she loved" Yaakov, it is not speaking on the level of ordinary emotions. Rather, it means "love" in a more philosophical manner, which signifies approval. Thus, it means, that Rivka was absolutely convinced about the righteousness of her younger son, and therefore loved him.

However, Eissav was a different matter. Yitzchak was more vulnerable to the wiles of the "hunter"; for he was the object of Eissav's overtures. He was less inclined to be suspicious, and therefore, took things at face value.

But Rivka, was more detached; and was familiar with a type of person, who worked hard to project an image, that did not correspond to reality. So she, did not endorse Eissav's lifestyle, nor grant him her seal of approval. But, what did she view her main purpose in parenting to be?

Rivka, had an element of Divine revelation at her disposal. She had experienced an extremely turbulent pregnancy, which prompted her, "to inquire of Hashem." And Hashem said, "Two nations are in your womb, two regimes from your

insides shall be separated; the might shall pass from one regime to the other, and the elder shall serve the younger."

Rivka thus knew, that she would be the progenitor of two distinct nations, that would dominate the course of history. One, was to be the nation of Israel; whose mission would be to teach mankind about the true G-d, and the proper way for man to serve Him. The other, would be opposed to the teachings of Israel, and would seek to glorify man and his accomplishments. A state of enmity between the two, would persist throughout history, until resolution would come with the advent of Moshiach.

When the twins developed, each with his own distinct nature, Rivka knew what Yaakov's role would be; and she was determined to protect him from Eissav. That is why, she carefully watched all developments, and "heard" when Yitzchak instructed Eissav, "to hunt and bring him a tasty meal so that he could proceed to bless him". Rivka realized, that she could not allow this to happen; and she instituted the plan, that thwarted her husband's intention.

Subsequently, it was Rivka, who with her Ruach HaKodesh (Holy Spirit) divined, that Eissav was planning to kill Yaakov. She decided, it was necessary to send him off to the family of her brother Lavan, where he could be safe from Eissav; and also begin the process of having children, and establishing the "Tribes of Hashem".

Therefore, the verse tells us, "that Rivka loved Yaakov". And whatever her feelings for Eissav, they were not the same, as those for Yaakov. Yaakov was unique, in terms of his personal character traits and superlative wisdom. But there was another dimension. He was the one, who would effectuate the transformation of the Abrahamic movement; from a small group of followers, to a national entity, that would endure throughout all of history. This nation, would be known as B'nei Yisrael—the sons of Yisrael—aka Yaakov.

Rivka's love for Yaakov, was therefore unique. It was, first and foremost, because of his intrinsic characteristics. But it contained another dimension. Yaakov brought the nation of Israel into being, by siring the twelve tribes. So Rivka's "additional" love for him, reflected her love for Klal Yisrael. May we emulate her example.

Shabbat Shalom. ■

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