

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Toldos

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לע"נ פעסל בת ישראל מנחם / לזכות חילינו

PEDIGREE OF DIVINITY

Baal Shem Tov

"These are the descendants of Yitzchak, the son of Avraham: Avraham begot Yitzchak..." (25:19)

True, Yitzchak's birth was greatly superior, because Yishmael was born before Avraham received the commandment of circumcision that brought him the marvelous quality of perfect faith, whereas Yitzchak was born after Avraham had become physically perfect through circumcision. Nevertheless, we could have erred by assuming that Yitzchak, like Yishmael, was no more than a biological son of Avraham.

Therefore, G-d set the record straight: Yitzchak's pedigree is beyond being "the son of Avraham." He has the exclusive privilege of "Avraham begot Yitzchak." For our Sages explain this phrase to imply that Avraham's facial appearance was replicated only in Yitzchak. This special pedigree was subsequently transmitted by Yitzchak exclusively to Yaakov, who transmitted it as an eternal inheritance to each subsequent Jew.

You can now appreciate the value of the Jewish souls, as expressed in the verse (Devarim 14:1), "You are sons to the L-rd, your G-d." You, the Jewish nation, have the exclusive pedigree of being a part of G-d's Infinite Essence.

DESIRE BREEDS AWE

Reb Noson of Breslov

"These are the descendants of Yitzchak, the son of Avraham: Avraham begot Yitzchak..." (25:19)

Yitzchak represents awe and fear of G-d. Avraham was the first to seek G-d; he is the father of all converts. Avraham had not received the Torah, just a burning desire to serve G-d.

His desire, longing and love brought about the revelation of G-d and the ability to fear Him and stand in awe of Him. Thus, Yitzchak is the son of Avraham. (Likutey Halachot VII, p. 234)

DISCIPLINE WITH KINDNESS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"These are the descendants of Yitzchak, the son of Avraham: Avraham begot Yitzchak..." (25:19)

In Kabbalah, Avraham was the embodiment of kindness (chesed), while Yitzchak embodied severity (gevurah). The wording of this verse alludes to an important lesson both in educating young children as well as in how we are to conduct our personal interactions. The second mention of Avraham's name in this verse occurs immediately after the first, whereas the two mentions of Yitzchak's name in this verse are separated by several words.

This teaches us that although it may occasionally be necessary to employ disciplinary measures, we should never do so twice in succession. There must always be an interval of kindness between every two such occasions.

In fact, Yitzchak's name never appears twice in succession throughout the entire Torah, in contrast to the names of Avraham (signifying kindness) and Yaakov (signifying tiferet, "harmony"), which do. (Likutei Levi Yitzchak on Zohar 1:11) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

PURE KINDNESS

Rebbe Nachman

"These are the descendants of Yitzchak, the son of Avraham: Avraham begot Yitzchak..." (25:19)

Even though it is written, "Yitzchak, the son of Avraham," it was necessary to state that "Avraham gave birth to Yitzchak" because cynics of that generation were claiming that Sarah had become pregnant by Avimelech. She and Avraham had been together for many years, and she had not conceived by him. Therefore, G-d made Yitzchak's facial features so similar to Avraham's that everyone had to admit that "Avraham gave birth to Yitzchak." (Rashi)

The sefirah of Chesed precedes the sefirah of Gevurah. When a person's acts of kindness (chesed) are pure, then the judgments (gevurot) that may issue forth afterwards are holy and serve to direct him towards G-d.

But if his acts of kindness are impure, then the judgments that follow are tainted as well, and bring suffering that distances him from G-d.

Avraham represents the sefirah of Chesed, and Yitzchak, the sefirah of Gevurah. Holy and pure Chesed leads to holy and pure Gevurah. Because Avraham was a holy source, Yitzchak too, was holy, and even sacrificed himself completely for G-d's sake. This could not have happened had Yitzchak come from a blemished source such as Avimelech. (See Likutey Moharan I, 74)

THE STRUGGLES OF THE "FFB"

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

"Yitzchak entreated Hashem opposite his wife, because she was barren. Hashem allowed Himself to be entreated by him, and his wife Rivkah conceived." (25:21)

The Torah tells that Yitzchak and Rivkah were unable to have children for many years, until ויעתר לו ה' - G-d answered Yitzchak's tefillos, and Rivkah conceived (25:21).

Rashi finds it significant that the Torah emphasizes that Hashem answered specifically Yitzchak's prayers, implying that God granted him a child in response to his prayers, but not in response to Rivka's prayers. The reason, as Rashi explains based on the Gemara (Yevamos 64a), is because אין דומה תפילת צדיק בן רשע לתפילת צדיק בן צדיק - "the prayer of a righteous person who is the child of a wicked person is not the same as the prayer of a righteous person who is the child of a righteous person." The prayers recited by Yitzchak - a tzaddik who was raised by righteous parents - were more powerful, and hence more effective, than the prayers recited by Rivkah - a tzadekes who was raised by sinful parents.

Intuitively, we would have assumed that to the contrary, Rivkah's merits would exceed those of Yitzchak, because of her background. Unlike Yitzchak, who was raised by Avraham and Sara, Rivkah was raised by corrupt idolaters. She had to struggle against her upbringing in order to be kind, generous and G-d-fearing. Shouldn't her merit be greater, and thus her tefillos more powerful?

Rav Yosef Sorotzkin, in Meged Yosef, explains that in a certain sense, the challenge of those who were raised with Torah observance ("FFB" - "frum from birth") exceeds the challenge of ba'alei teshuva, those who embraced Torah observance later in life. For the person who made the decision to join the community of Torah-devoted Jews, every tefillah, every mitzvah, every page of Gemara, is new and exciting. They are brimming with excitement and enthusiasm. They are thrilled to prepare each week for Shabbos, to prepare each year for Pesach, to put on tefillin each day, and so on. Those who were raised with Torah observance, however, can fall into boredom and lethargy, and see the routine of mitzvos as a burdensome chore, as opposed to precious opportunities for growth and closeness with Hashem.

The Torah describes Yitzchak as davening לנוכח אשתו - literally, "facing his wife." Rav Sorotzkin explains that Yitzchak davened with the same enthusiasm and passion as Rivkah. Although he was a צדיק בן צדיק, someone who grew up with the belief in Hashem and with the concept of tefillah, he never lost his emotion or his love for prayer. This is what made his tefillah so special, even more than Rivkah's.

The unique challenge of the "FFB" is to remain charged, to remain passionate, to be able to invest emotion and energy into each and every mitzvah, despite having performed mitzvos his or her entire life.

GROWTH MINDSET

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"And the boys agitated within her..." (25:22)

Parashas Toldos tells the story of Rivkah bearing twins, Eisav and Yaakov, and how they struggled in her womb (25:22). The boys seemed to respond extemporaneously in utero as Rivkah passed specific locations; Eisav seemed to be gripped by brothels while Yaakov was drawn to study halls. Considering the Midrash that babies learn the entire Torah inside the womb (and forget it once born), Rav Chaim Shmulevitz asks why Yaakov would want to leave the womb to enter a study hall.

Rav Chaim Shmulevitz explains that while Yaakov was able to learn Torah in utero, he was still missing the effort and challenges associated with acquiring that knowledge. It is natural for us to appreciate challenges once we overcome them, but adopting the attitude of a growth mindset, always striving to improve will help us embrace life's hurdles and the process of overcoming them.

STRIKING THE FINAL BLOW

Reb Simchah Bunim of Pshischa

"And the boys agitated within her... and she went to inquire of Hashem." (25:22)

That He would tell her what would happen in the end. (Rashi)

We are told that whenever Rivkah passed a Jewish house of study, Yaakov would move convulsively in an effort to emerge; however, whenever she passed a pagan temple, Eisav would strain to emerge.

Rivkah thought that she was bearing only one child, and therefore she assumed that the convulsive movements she felt within her when she passed houses of study and heathen temples were indicative of a struggle between the good impulse and the evil impulse in the child she was to have. Sometimes, she thought, the evil urge won the day and the child wanted to rush out to worship idols. At other times, the good inclination would gain the upper hand so that the child wanted to emerge to go to yeshiva to study Torah.

Naturally, Rivkah was anxious to discover “what would happen in the end”; she wanted to discover the outcome of the inner struggle that she thought was taking place within her child. Good or evil - which of the two would strike the final blow and emerge as the victor?

Throughout our lives, a war against our evil inclination is waged. Sometimes we will win; at other times the evil within us will gain the upper hand. Regardless of temporary reverses, we should see to it that we will be able to strike the final blow and emerge as the victor in the struggle.

TOILING IN TORAH

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“And the boys agitated within her...” (25:22)

Rashi notes that the root of the word “agitate” in this verse stems from the word “run.” As such, we are being told that when Rivkah - who was pregnant with Yaakov and Eisav - passed by a place of Torah, Yaakov would “run” to try to go there, and when she passed a place of idol worship, Eisav would “run” to try to go there.

The Gemara (Niddah 30b) says that in the womb, a fetus is taught all of the Torah by an angel. If so, why would Yaakov run to leave the womb to learn Torah; surely, he had access to the entire Torah where he was?

Rav Chaim Shmuelevits answered this question when he was once asked why we do not stand up for a pregnant lady despite the fact that the child she is carrying knows the entire Torah? Rav Chaim answered that Torah knowledge without Torah study may be impressive, but it is not praiseworthy. Only through hard work and dedication can one truly be praised for knowing Torah.

For this reason, explained Rav Chaim, Yaakov was desperate to leave the womb and learn Torah, for although he may have gained more Torah knowledge where he was, he understood that that Torah’s true value only comes through hard work.

(In fact, it is precisely for this reason that a baby forgets the Torah he has learned once he leaves the womb, for if not for the toil in Torah, he would not gain any reward.)

NATURE OR NURTURE

Rabbi Ari Ciment

“And the children struggled together within her, and she said, ‘If so, why is this to me?’ And she went to inquire of Hashem...” (25:22)

Rabbi Nehorai would say: Exile yourself to a place of Torah; do not say that it will come after you, that your colleagues will help you retain it. Rely not on your own understanding... (Avos 4:13)

Where do we learn this concept of “exiling yourself to a place of Torah”? What does this ethic really mean, and why does one have to specifically exile oneself?

The answer lies in analyzing Rivkah’s pregnancy: “And the children struggled together within her, and she said, ‘If so, why is this to me?’ And she went to inquire of Hashem.”

Rashi brings down the famous Midrash here: Our Rabbis (Bereishis Rabbah 63:6) interpreted it [the word ויתרצו] as an expression of running (ריצה): “When she passed by the entrances of [the] Torah [academies] of Shem and Ever, Yaakov would run and struggle to come out; when she passed the entrance of [a temple of] idolatry, Eisav would run and struggle to come out...”

But there seems to be a basic problem with this Midrash: How can we fault Eisav for being an idolater if he was created that way? Even before he was born, with no real volition of his own, he was drawn to avodah zarah. And just as we seemingly shouldn’t fault Eisav, we also cannot credit Yaakov for his holiness, which also seemed innately inherent.

Consider the following homily: When Rivkah says, “למה אנהי אנהי,” she may be referring to the eventual first commandment: “Why is there that very first commandment of אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים אנהי ה’ אלקיך אשר הוצאתיך מארץ מצרים? מבית עבדים? After all, if my children are born with a predilection for G-dliness or for idolatry, then of what use is a commandment to believe in one G-d? Either you are born a believer or non-believer!” The answer to her own question is provided by her next action: “ותלך לדרוש את ה’ - She went to seek G-d.” The purpose of the first commandment is not simply to just believe in G-d, because as pointed out above, people are bestowed with natural tendencies to be believers or non-believers. Rather, the challenge is to constantly seek to grow in your belief.

Growth can only come about by exiting your comfort zone, removing yourself from the innate tendencies so that you can truly exceed your capabilities, or in some cases, steer away from an unbelieving future. The focus is on the seeking, and in that sense, despite the innate proclivities of Eisav and Yaakov, Rivkah took solace in knowing that their challenges were one and the same!

And that is why the Tanna says, “הוי גולה למקום תורה - One needs to ostracize himself to a holy place.” Sometimes one needs to strip oneself of the innate tendencies and/or immediate environment to truly reach their spiritual peak. This ostracizing reminds us that the trajectory is more important than where we begin because so much is merely injected in us either from our DNA or from our environment; “וואל בינתך אל תשען”, we should not merely rely on what we inherently know.

Takeaway Message: When Rivkah asks, “Why me?” perhaps she is saying, “Why have a commandment to believe in G-d if we are born with innate tendencies to believe or disbelieve?” The answer is that the challenge is less about our bestowed belief tendencies and more about how we nurture such tendencies. The seeking is the key; one must exile oneself and not simply rely on one’s own inherent knowledge in the quest to attain meaning. Nature or nurture? Nurture your nature!

GETTING AN EARLY START

Reb Mordechai of Nadburna

"G-d told her, 'Two nations are in your womb... and the elder will serve the younger.'" (25:23)

The verse states "*V'ra'v ya'avod ta'ir* - And the elder shall serve the younger." The word *rav* can be translated as "much." This is to indicate that there is *rav* (much) work in the service of Hashem. One who wishes to gain in Torah knowledge and good deeds must begin to study and work in the service of Hashem while he is still young.

INCREASING LIGHT

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"G-d told her, 'Two nations are in your womb; two powers will diverge from within you. Rulership will pass from one power to the other.'" (25:23)

Metaphorically, Yaakov and Eisav represent the two souls (and their opposing drives) that exist within each of us. We each possess an inner Yaakov - i.e., our Divine soul with its G-dly drives, and also an inner Eisav - i.e., our animating soul with its selfish drives. When our Divine soul asserts itself, it weakens the materialistic tendencies of the animating soul.

The Divine soul overcomes the animating soul in the same way that light overcomes darkness. Light does not have to actively exert itself to dispel darkness - darkness simply ceases to exist in the presence of light.

Similarly, as soon as we let the holiness and goodness of our Divine souls shine by studying the Torah and observing the commandments, the selfishness of the animating soul disappears. (Sefer HaMa'amarim 5691, p. 328) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

MUCH TO BE DONE

The Stretiner Rebbe

"G-d told her, 'Two nations are in your womb... and the elder will serve the younger.'" (25:23)

The verse states "*V'ra'v ya'avod ta'ir* - And the elder shall serve the younger." The word *rav*, generally translated as "elder," can also mean "much."

This is to indicate that there is *rav* (much) work in the service of Hashem. To be a *ta'ir* - to remain young and fresh - one must reach the category of humility.

OPPOSING FORCES

Rebbe Nachman

"G-d told her, 'Two nations are in your womb; two powers will diverge from within you. Rulership will pass from one power to the other.'" (25:23)

When one ascends, the other descends. (Rashi)

Rashi explains the phrase "Rulership will pass from one power to the other" to mean that Yaakov and Eisav would battle constantly, and that the ascent of one would result in the descent of the other.

This dynamic applies to every individual's life as well. A person cannot seek spirituality while at the same time indulging in materialism, for the ascent of one must mean the descent of the other.

A person must exert himself to engage in spiritual endeavors, for only in this way can he maintain and intensify his connection to G-d. (See Likutey Moharan I, 1:2)

INCREASED RECOGNITION

Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky

"And her days to give birth were completed, and behold, there were twins..." (25:24)

If the purpose of the angel learning inside the mother's womb with the unborn child is to lay the foundation of Torah within the child, so that he may succeed in understanding Torah later in life, how can a *ger* (convert) ever succeed in Torah?

The answer is that a *ger*, one who truly recognizes the truth of the Torah, is provided with a special *siyata d'Shmaya* (Heavenly assistance) in order to succeed. He doesn't need the extra foundation of a typical Jew, because Hashem provides him with a greater recognition and understanding.

THE CHOICE IS YOURS

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

"And her days to give birth were completed, and behold, there were twins..." (25:24)

Some people think that that they can't study Torah or serve Hashem properly because they didn't have an upbringing as good as the next person, or because their *mazal* (zodiac) influences them to behave a in certain way.

It is for this reason, explains the Ritva, that Hashem arranged that Yaakov and Eisav were born as twins. They had the same parents and were born under the same *mazal*, but led two very different paths; because no matter how challenging your nature or environment is, it's your desire to serve Hashem and the choices you make that will have the biggest impact on whether you are a "Yaakov" or an "Eisav."

THE FEW, THE PROUD

Degel Machaneh Efraim

"The first one came out red... and they called him Eisav." (25:25)

Everyone called him thus. (Rashi)

Eisav represents falsehood and deceit, while Yaakov personified truth. Of Eisav we are told “and they called his name Eisav” - in plural, because he had many followers.

Of Yaakov, however, the Torah states “and his name was called Yaakov.” The singular form of that statement indicates that Yaakov had fewer followers than Eisav because unfortunately truth has a much smaller number of adherents than falsehood.

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“The first one came out red, all of him was like a hairy mantle; so they called him Eisav. After that, his brother emerged... and he called his name Yaakov.” (25:25-26)

The Degel Machaneh Efraim asks why the Torah writes the word *vayikriu* - “and they called him,” in plural form, when naming Eisav. Yet, the Torah writes *vayikra* - “and he called him, in singular form, when naming Yaakov?”

The Degel Machaneh Efraim explains, based on the Medrash, that Eisav’s name represents *sheker* - falsehood, and the name Yaakov represents *emes* - truth.

Unfortunately, the majority of the world is enticed by deception and lacks integrity and honesty which is why the Torah uses the word *vayikriu* - “and they called him,” in the plural form, when naming Eisav. Yaakov on the other hand, who represents truth and transparency, is named using the word *vayikra* - “and he called him,” in the singular form, because this trait is not common within the world at large.

The Degel Machaneh Efraim is teaching us that as descendants of Yaakov it is our responsibility to serve as the example for the rest of the world of what honesty looks like.

Like Yaakov, we are small in number, but we must serve as a light unto the nations in how we act and behave with uncompromised integrity. With this approach in mind, we are sure to make a profound impact on the world around us.

GOOD WILL OVERCOME EVIL

Reb Noson of Breslov

“After that, his brother emerged, his hand grasping onto Eisav’s heel. He named him Yaakov, and he called his name Yaakov.” (25:26)

Yaakov will never let Eisav be victorious and trap forever the souls waiting for rectification. He will grab hold of Eisav and eventually remove those souls from his grip. Thus, he is called Yaakov (יעקב), alluding to the *Eikev* (עקב, heel); he is also called Yisrael (ישראל), which has the same letters as *Ly Rosh* (לִי רֹאשׁ, I have a head - i.e., intellect), indicating that all souls will eventually be elevated to the highest levels. (Likutey Halachot II, p. 450)

JUST GETTING STARTED

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

“After that, his brother emerged, his hand grasping onto Eisav’s heel. He named him Yaakov, and he called his name Yaakov.” (25:26)

When Yaakov and Eisav were born, Eisav was delivered first, followed by Yaakov, who was holding onto Eisav’s heel. Yaakov was thus given the name יעקב, a reference to “עקב - heel.” The name עשו, Rashi (25:25) explains, refers to the fact that Eisav was נעשה ונגמר - complete. He had hair on his body like an adult male, as though he was already fully developed.

Rav Dan Segal comments that these names reflect the vastly different characters of Yaakov and Eisav. Eisav was a “finished product” in the sense that he was not interested in growing; he accepted who he was, and never made any attempt to advance, to improve, to make himself better. Yaakov, however, was always just getting started. The heel is the first part of the foot that hits the ground when taking a step, and Yaakov was thus called יעקב because he was always at the beginning, at the first stages, looking ahead to what there was still left to accomplish, constantly aspiring and striving to move forward.

Rav Segal explains on this basis a subtle difference between Yaakov’s naming and Eisav’s naming. When Eisav was born, the Torah relates, “ויקראו שמו עשו - They called him Eisav.” It seems like this name was given by everyone, by all those who were present. After Yaakov’s birth, however, “ויקרא שמו יעקב - He called him Yaakov.” Rashi writes that this refers either to Hashem, or to Yitzchak. Either way, whereas Eisav’s name was given by everyone, Yaakov’s name was given by only the one closest to him - his father - or by Hashem, who of course knew him and his essence better than anyone. Rav Segal explains that since Eisav remained static, נעשה ונגמר, as a finished product that would never change, everybody knew who he was. With him, it was “what you see is what you get” - who he was at any given time was the same as he would always be. Yaakov’s essence, by contrast, was defined not by who he was at any given point in time, but by his potential. As he was always growing, nobody knew who he could or would become. This was known only to Hashem, or, according to the other opinion, to Yitzchak. Only they knew who Yaakov truly was, because they knew that he had the potential to become greater than he had already become.

We must not make the mistake of defining ourselves based on our current standing, on who we are right now, on our achievements to this point in our lives. No matter our age, we should be defined only by our potential, by what we can still become. At all times, we should see ourselves as standing just at the “heel,” at the first stage, with so much more left to achieve. This is the way we are to look at ourselves - not as a finished product, but as filled with as-yet-unrealized potential, which we are committed to actualize to its very fullest.

GRASPING FOR HOLINESS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“After that, his brother emerged, his hand grasping onto Eisav’s heel. He named him Yaakov, and he called his name Yaakov.” (25:26)

Eisav and Yaakov serve as metaphors for our animating and Divine souls, respectively. Just as Eisav emerged from Rivkah’s womb before Yaakov, so does our inner Eisav get a head start on our inner Yaakov: whereas our Divine soul manifests itself gradually, only becoming fully manifest when we reach the age of maturity, our animating soul is fully manifest from birth (see Zohar 1:179b).

Yet, “his hand was grasping Eisav’s heel”: Our inner Yaakov, our Divine soul, grasps at our inner Eisav, our animating soul. The purpose of our Divine soul’s descent into this world is to refine the animating soul and actualize its inherent potential for goodness.

Moreover, Eisav’s heel symbolizes the lowest levels of Eisav, meaning the lowest levels of animalistic materialism. Our Divine soul strives to elevate and refine even those aspects of life normally considered intrinsically outside the realm of holiness. (Sefer HaSichot 5751, vol. 1, pp. 145-146) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

A LIFE OF TRUTH

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“Yaakov was a wholesome man...” (25:27)

You shall give truth to Yaakov and kindness to Avraham. (Micha 7:20)

Each one of our Avos is identified with a different character trait. As the above pasuk mentions, Avraham is known for chesed, Yitzchak is recognized for his gevurah, and Yaakov is described with emes.

After reading through the episode involving Yaakov’s deception of Yitzchak in order to receive Eisav’s brachah, emes is not the trait that would come to mind when speaking about Yaakov. How is Yaakov identified as a man of truth when he behaves in a manner that does not seem to suggest that?

Rav Eliyahu Dessler (Michtav M’Eliyahu) explains that the word emes is commonly understood to mean stating the facts as they occurred and the word sheker refers to telling falsehoods. However, Rav Dessler corrects this misunderstanding by suggesting that emes means living a life that conforms to the expectations of Hashem. Sometimes that means telling the facts as they are, but sometimes, it may warrant concealing the truth and perhaps even deceiving someone. For example, everyone would agree that while one who speaks lashon hara may be speaking truths, that person is nevertheless not following the rules of the Torah, thereby not living a life of emes. Living a life of emes means observing the Torah in the manner in which Hashem instructs us to do so.

We can now understand how Yaakov is identified as a man of emes. The seemingly deceitful manner in which he attained the brachah was instructed by Rivkah, who knew through prophecy that he was to receive the brachos.

Therefore, Yaakov was in fact demonstrating emes by bringing to fruition that which Hashem intended.

This insight from Rav Dessler serves as a powerful reminder of how we are to live our lives. As we progress through our lives, we are to constantly ask ourselves: “Is this what Hashem would want me to do? Am I living a life of emes?”

If these questions are regularly brought into focus, we are sure to conduct ourselves in a manner which will allow the Shechinah to dwell amongst us.

ADMIRABLE HONESTY

Shelah HaKadosh

“Yaakov was a wholesome man, dwelling in tents...” (25:27)

You shall give truth to Yaakov and kindness to Avraham. (Micha 7:20)

Of all the superior character traits possessed by our ancestor Yaakov, the Torah chooses “an honest man” as the highest praise, to teach us that nothing is more worthy of our respect and admiration than a life lived with honesty and righteousness.

COMPLETE WISDOM

Rebbe Nachman

“Yaakov was a wholesome man, dwelling in tents...” (25:27)

“Yaakov” alludes to intellect and wisdom. One who seeks true wisdom - the knowledge of the Divine - is said to be *tamim* (whole and complete). (See Likutey Moharan 1:end)

MERCY TOWARDS ALL

Reb Meir Premishlaner

“Yitzchak loved Eisav...” (25:28)

Yitzchak recognized Eisav for who he was but loved him nonetheless in order to have what to say later on. For should Hashem ever seek to punish Klal Yisrael, *chas v’shalom*, for neglecting the Torah, Yitzchak could say, “Merciful G-d, I also had a rebellious son to whom I, of flesh and blood, showed love and compassion. Surely, You can do the same!”

SEEING BEYOND THE FACADE

Reb Naftali of Ropshitz

“And Rivkah loved Yaakov...” (25:28)

This statement teaches us that innocence alone is not necessarily a good quality. Yitzchak was very innocent and naive so that when Eisav asked how to give tithes from salt and straw, he thought that it was an honest request. But Rivkah, coming from a home where deceit was prevalent, understood why Eisav asked that question. She knew that there was a possibility that one could ask questions as if one were very careful in observance and yet be a wicked person. That is why it is written, "And Rivkah loved Yaakov" - for Rivkah saw the truth.

MINDFUL OF OTHERS

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"And Yaakov boiled a stew..." (25:29)

It seems strange that Yaakov would be making his own stew. After all, he was raised amidst phenomenal wealth, with an abundance of servants. And more importantly, Yaakov was completely immersed in Torah studies. Is this, therefore, an appropriate way to spend his precious time when he could have been learning?

The Medrash Hagadol answers that Yaakov was only making his own food because he had just returned from the beis medrash and found all the servants asleep. So, demonstrating great humility and care for others, he decided to make the food himself - even though he was certainly entitled to wake them, and even though it would take away time from his Torah studies!

There are many times when we are entitled to the assistance of others, whether as a child, parent, spouse, or employer: Yet we see from here that just because we can use their services, it does not mean that we always should. Therefore, even when it may cause us discomfort or extra time, we should always consider whether we really need to "bother" other people to get what we want done.

This message was illustrated by Rav Yisrael Salanter when he was invited by one of his students to Shabbos dinner. He told his student that he would only agree to go after hearing exactly how the meal was going to be run. His student told him proudly that the food is the highest standard of *kashrus*, and the kitchen is run by the widowed wife of a great Torah scholar - someone very hardworking and trustworthy. He described the beautiful songs that would be sung during the meal and the lengthy Torah discussions they were planning to have.

Rav Yisrael agreed to come on condition that the meal lasted no more than two hours. Of course, his student agreed but did not dare ask what important task Rav Yisrael had to rush off to do after the meal. By the end of the meal the student could not contain his curiosity. "Rebbe, what errand is so important on Friday night that we had to rush the Shabbos meal?"

Instead of answering directly, Rav Yisrael summoned the widow who had done the cooking and serving. He turned to her and said, "Please forgive me for rushing you so

much this evening. I know you are accustomed to having a nice, long break between each course."

"May Hashem bless you, and may you be a guest here every Shabbos!" she answered. "The meal usually goes extremely late, and after a full day's work, I can hardly stand on my feet! Tonight, thanks to you, the meal moved very quickly, and I'm now free to go home and rest."

Rav Yisrael turned to his student and explained that while his regular Shabbos routine is incredibly uplifting, it should not come at the expense of others.

PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE

Reb Noson of Breslov

"Eisav said to Yaakov, 'Feed me some of that red, red stuff, for I am exhausted.' Therefore, he was called Edom." (25:30)

Eisav's eating is gluttonous: "Feed me." In contrast, a Jew must practice patience in his eating habits. First he arises in the morning and recites his prayers. Then he washes his hands and recites the blessing over food. Only then can he begin to eat. Likewise, before partaking of meat, he must slaughter the ox, remove its blood and fats, and so on. All of these preliminaries teach patience, helping us ascend beyond the level of Eisav, the level of "Feed me."

SEEKING WISDOM

Rebbe Nachman

"Yaakov said, 'Sell, as the day, your birthright to me.'" (25:31)

One must always seek the hidden wisdom in everything in order to find the G-dliness within it. Doing so constitutes true wisdom, which is compared to sunlight - a light that illumines a person's path so that he may know the way to travel. As the verse states: "A man's wisdom illumines his face" (Koheles 8:1). Indeed, "Wisdom gives life" (ibid., 7:12). One who does not seek the G-dliness in everything has closed his mind to wisdom and to life. And whether or not a person applies his mind to this wisdom represents the principal battle between his good and evil inclinations.

This idea is reflected in Yaakov and Eisav's battle for the birthright. The birthright is generally intended for the "firstborn," which connotes wisdom, as in the verse (Tehillim 111:10) "The first is wisdom." The name Yaakov (יעקב) also connotes wisdom, as in the phrase *vaya'akveini* (ויעקבני, he outwitted me) (Bereishis 27:36).

Yaakov sought the birthright of wisdom and so spent his days in the "tents of study" (Rashi on Bereishis 25:27). Eisav, on the other hand, sought material gratification and despised the birthright of wisdom and the knowledge of G-d.

When we seek the spiritual root within everything and study Torah, as Yaakov did, we draw close to G-d.

RIGHTFUL EARNINGS

Avnei Ezel

"...and he [Eisav] ate and drank, and rose up and went his way, and Eisav degraded the birthright." (25:34)

This is Eisav's way. He and those like him are ready to give away their most sacred trust for a little food. When they are hungry they care little for even their birthright or for worship, because their entire being is dominated by a powerful craving for food and drink.

This is unlike Yaakov and others similar to him. Their senses are not ruled by the quest for food and drink. They acquire their birthright by industry and toil, and thus gain predominance in matters of the spirit.

At that point Eisav becomes angry and claims that Yaakov has deceived him. "He has outwitted me these two times..." (Bereishis 27:36).

But we say to him: "Remember, wicked Eisav, that you cast away your birthright by your own indolence and base cravings. Yaakov earned the birthright by means of honest toil. He gained the birthright not through deceit, but through moderation in all the physical pleasures, including eating and drinking."

OWNING OUR MISTAKES

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

"...and he [Eisav] ate and drank, and rose up and went his way, and Eisav degraded the birthright." (25:34)

One can't help but ask why the Torah feels the need to tell us that Eisav humiliated the birthright. It is fairly obvious that he mocked the birthright, he sold it for a mere bowl of lentil soup. What does the Torah add when it states that Eisav degraded the birthright?

Rav Yehudah Leib Chasman (Ohr Yahel) explains that not only initially did Eisav have no qualms about selling the birthright for a bowl of lentil soup, but even after the fact he had no regrets, even when it was clear to the rest of the world that it was a poor decision with far reaching consequences. This is what the Torah means when it says that Eisav embarrassed the birthright.

There are two ways that a person can reflect on a mistake which he or she has made. The first way is to acknowledge the wrongdoing, but then attempt to learn and grow from it in order to become a better person. The second way is to not only commit the error initially, but then after the fact, when confronted, justify why it was ok to have done so.

As human beings, we are going to make mistakes. The question is: How will we respond? Will we learn from them to become better, or will we rationalize our behavior even after the fact and continue to be flawed in our conduct?

Let us learn from Eisav how not to act so that we can continue to grow as Jews and as people.

HAPPINESS VS DEPRESSION

Reb Noson of Breslov

"Yaakov gave Eisav bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank, and rose up and went his way, and Eisav degraded the birthright." (25:34)

The main conflict between Yaakov and Eisav centers on joy versus depression. Originally, the sacrifices in the Temple - which represent joy, as in "You will rejoice before G-d [when you bring your sacrifices]" (Devarim 12:12) - were to be brought by the firstborn sons, such as Eisav. By partaking of the sacrifices and eating in holiness, a person could attain true joy.

However, the type of eating that interested Eisav was "Feed me some of that red, red stuff." He ate like a glutton, not in a state of holiness - a type of eating which represents depression. Thus, Eisav despised the birthright and the service of G-d, while Yaakov merited both the birthright and the blessings, because he sought true joy. (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 146a)

The birthright refers to intellect. Desiring this world, Eisav was willing to sell even his birthright, his intellect, for porridge - for materialism. Yaakov took advantage of Eisav's gross lusts and gluttony to persuade him to sell the birthright. Thus, Yaakov, who subdued his material desires, acquired the intellect, and left Eisav the material world. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 290)

NOT AT THEIR EXPENSE

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

"...inasmuch as Avraham obeyed Me and kept My charge: My commandments, My laws, and My teachings." (26:5)

Later in the parsha, G-d reaffirms to Yitzchak the promises He had made to Avraham and assures him that He would fulfill those promises because Avraham strictly obeyed all of G-d's laws. Chazal derive from this pasuk that Avraham - as well as Yitzchak and Yaakov - observed all the Torah's laws, even though the Torah was not given until many years later.

The Ramban, commenting on this pasuk, raises the famous question of how Yaakov married two sisters - Rachel and Leah - if he observed the Torah's laws. The Torah strictly forbids marrying sisters, so how was Yaakov allowed to marry both Rachel and Leah? The Ramban answers this question by positing that the avos observed the mitzvos only in Eretz Yisrael, but not outside the land, and Yaakov was in Charan when he married his wives.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky, in Emes L'Yaakov, makes an important comment about the Ramban's discussion. He writes that the Ramban was not addressing the question of how Yaakov was permitted to marry Rachel after Lavan deceived him and gave him Leah. There can be no doubt, Rav Kamenetsky asserts, that Yaakov was dutybound to fulfill his commitment to Rachel and marry her despite the

Torah prohibition against marrying two sisters. Before the Torah was given, the avos observed the Torah's laws not out of obligation, but as a measure of special piety. And Yaakov clearly had no right to adhere to this voluntary stringency at somebody else's expense. His admirable decision to obey the Torah's laws before they became obligatory was not allowed to get in the way of the commitment he had made to Rachel.

Therefore, Rav Kamenetsky writes, the Ramban's comments must be understood as addressing the question of why Hashem arranged that Yaakov would end up marrying two sisters, against Torah law. But Yaakov's marriage to Rachel after having been deceived into marrying her sister requires no explanation at all.

Accepting *chumros* - halachic stringencies and religious practices that are not strictly required - is certainly laudable, but only if we adopt them for ourselves, without imposing them on others. The observance of a *chumra* must never come at our fellow's expense. If we choose to make sacrifices for the sake of a worthwhile *chumra*, then this is admirable - but not if this forces others to make sacrifices, as well, as this is something which we have no right to do.

HEALTHY BALANCE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Yitzchak settled in Gerar..." (26:6)

Yitzchak assumed that the famine was meant to induce him to journey outside the Land of Israel in order to disseminate Divine teachings there just as his father Avraham had (Bereishis 12:10). But G-d told Yitzchak not to leave the land, thereby affirming that his particular mode of bringing Divine awareness to the world differed from Avraham's.

Avraham travelled to his audiences, tailoring his message to his listeners' ability to grasp it. Yitzchak, in contrast, was to focus on intensifying his own Divine consciousness and the Divine consciousness of his immediate surroundings. The force, clarity, and vigor of Yitzchak's spirituality would give him a magnetic charisma that would draw the outside world to him and make them aspire to learn from him.

Avraham personifies those who sanctify the world from within it; Yitzchak personifies those who sanctify the world from "outside" it, ensconced within synagogues and centers of Torah study.

Since we are all descendants of both Avraham and Yitzchak, each of us must embody both their approaches. Full-time students of the Torah must take time off from their studies to teach and help others, whereas those who are engaged in the material world must take time off from their jobs and other pursuits to study the Torah. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 25, pp. 124-130) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

PURPOSE OF WEALTH

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Yitzchak sowed grain in that region that year. He reaped a hundredfold, for G-d had blessed him." (26:12)

It is clear from a close reading of the Torah's narrative that the patriarchs were astute businessmen. Nonetheless, it is also clear that they engaged in material pursuits solely with the objective of fulfilling G-d's will.

In this case, Yitzchak's true goal in sowing grain was to be able to give charity to the poor, which the Torah stipulates can only be performed with one's own produce.

Like our patriarchs, when our involvement in the pursuit of a livelihood and wealth is similarly motivated, we are blessed with overwhelming success. (Mishneh Torah, Ma'aser 2:2; Likutei Sichot, vol. 5, p. 74, based on Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer 33) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

PROFITABLE INVESTMENT

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"Yitzchak sowed grain in that region that year. He reaped a hundredfold, for G-d had blessed him." (26:12)

After the incident in which Avimelech failed to realize that Rivkah was Yitzchak's wife, the pasuk reads, "Yitzchak sowed in the land, and he found in that year a hundredfold, and G-d blessed him" (26:12). G-d blesses him only after a hundredfold was produced. It seems the pasuk is backward: Wouldn't Yitzchak produce a hundredfold after G-d blesses him?

Oznayim LaTorah suggests that the term "hundredfold" indicates Yitzchak's intentions to tithe. (Why would he need to count or know the amount, that it was a hundredfold, if not to calculate the tithe?) It is his tithing that produces even more blessings.

The same is also true for all that we have - using our assets for worthwhile causes increases their value and magnifies the blessings that materialize from them.

CONSCIOUS OF CRITICS

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"The man [Yitzchak] became great and kept becoming greater until he was very great." (26:13)

While living in Gerar, Yitzchak became so successful and wealthy that the locals grew jealous and kicked him out. The pasuk records that "the man grew, and he grew constantly greater until he had grown very great" (26:13). Why does the pasuk seem so repetitive? Also, why is Yitzchak called "the man" and not by his name?

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains that this pasuk is from the perspective of the local inhabitants. The Pilishtim didn't know Yitzchak personally; they just saw this man achieving great success and grew envious.

The Torah is replete with stories, laws, and concepts predicated on sensitivity to others. This pasuk, however, takes it to a new level, describing the hero of our story from his detractors' perspective. The Torah shows us that even as we succeed and act appropriately (as Yitzchak did), we should always be aware of and sensitive to our critics.

HUMBLE WEALTH

Reb Yitzchak of Torchiv

"The man [Yitzchak] became great and kept becoming greater until he was very great." (26:13)

It often happens that the wealthier a person gets, the smaller his essential "humanity" and regard for his fellow man becomes. Yitzchak, however, not only retained his quality of being a "man" the wealthier he grew, but continued his rise to perfection as an empathetic human being.

TRUE JOY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"He owned flocks, herds, and many enterprises, and the Pilishtim envied him." (26:14)

The Pilishtim personified unrestrained, excessive levity and mindless frivolity for its own sake. They saw no point in happiness derived from spirituality. They were thus the antithesis of Avraham and Yitzchak, who personified the joy that comes from feeling close to G-d.

The Pilishtim therefore tried to appropriate the wellsprings of joy that were produced by Avraham and Yitzchak, erroneously claiming that there is no place for laughter and joy in the service of G-d, which should be serious and solemn. Happiness, joy, and laughter, they claimed, can only be used for empty levity and scoffing. This is why they plugged up Avraham's wells and claimed Yitzchak's for their own.

Similarly, in our own lives, the forces of evil try to steer us toward sadness and depression, falsely claiming that negativity is somehow conducive to religiosity. In truth, however, nothing can foster optimism, joy, and happiness like the feeling of closeness to G-d that springs from a life devoted to the study of the Torah and the performance of the commandments. (Torah Ohr 61c; Ohr HaTorah, Shemot, vol. 2, p. 367. See Avodah Zarah 19a) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

UNCOVERING GOODNESS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Yitzchak dug anew the wells which had been dug in the days of his father Avraham and which the Pilishtim had stopped up after Avraham's death." (26:18)

Allegorically, the Pilishtim represent uncontrolled materialism, and the wells that Avraham and Yitzchak dug represent our inner wellsprings of goodness. Avraham was not really a "well digger": although he did inspire others, this inspiration was not enough to uncover their inner wellsprings of goodness, which would have improved their character permanently. Therefore, the Pilishtim were able to block up Avraham's wells.

In contrast, Yitzchak's holy charisma forced people to confront their psychological obstacles to living a Divine life. He changed them by making them uncover their own hidden goodness. Therefore, the Pilishtim could not block up his wells.

Similarly, by praying and meditating, we clear away the mental "dirt" that has blocked up our wellsprings of inspiration. But if we revel in our inspiration rather than focusing on correcting a particular character flaw, our wellsprings can become blocked again by our ingrained obsession for material satisfaction once we re-enter the world of our mundane affairs.

In contrast, when we focus on improving a specific character trait while praying, we change ourselves, enabling us to retain our inspiration. (Sefer HaMa'amarim 5698, pp. 147-153; Likutei Sichot, vol. 15, pp. 194. See Torah Ohr 17a-c; Likutei Sichot, vol. 1, pp. 27-29) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

"Yitzchak dug anew the wells which had been dug in the days of his father Avraham and which the Pilishtim had stopped up after Avraham's death." (26:18)

The Torah shares that Yitzchak re-dug the wells that Avraham, his father; had dug earlier but were filled in by the Pilishtim. A question to consider is: Why did the Avos care so much about their wells? They were never interested in materialistic ventures or real estate; what about the wells was so important to them?

The Sefas Emes explains that the wells were symbolic of the mission statement of the Avos. Avraham was the first person to discover and publicize the belief in One G-d. Avraham revealed to the world that we can't view our existence on a surface level. Rather, we must realize that there is so much more than what meets the eye. There is a Creator Who works behind the scenes to make the world go round. Yitzchak, as a loyal student and child, looked to perpetuate that very same message as a link in the chain of our tradition.

To an observer, a well looks like a pile of rocks. Only when one comes close and lowers the bucket, does one discover the water that lies beneath the surface. A well represents everything that the Avos believed in. It is the symbol of looking beyond the superficial, and that is what the Avos were looking to promote.

As the descendants of Avraham and Yitzchak, we must ensure that we model that very same approach with our children, students and colleagues. If we want our families to internalize this message, then we need to display it by constantly highlighting Hashem's prominent role in our everyday lives, by speaking about Him and by crediting Him for the miracles that we all experience on a daily basis.

DIGGING DEEP

Sefas Emes

"Yitzchak's servants dug in the valley and found a well of fresh spring water there." (26:19)

The Torah is called "water" and is therefore found everywhere. As is true with seeking water, it depends on how deep one wishes to dig and how sincerely one wants to have Torah. Just as water is the elixir of life, so is the Torah.

MAKING A LASTING IMPRESSION

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Yitzchak's servants dug in the valley and found a well of fresh spring water there." (26:19)

Although digging wells certainly served to further the advance of civilization wherever they were dug, they more importantly exemplified Yitzchak's message to the world.

As opposed to filling a pit with water brought from elsewhere, digging a well reveals an already-existing source of water concealed beneath layers of earth.

Thus, whereas Avraham's message to the world was: "Let me revive you with the refreshing water of Divine consciousness," Yitzchak's message was: "Now that you have been revived, look for your inner source of water. Dig away all the dirt encumbering your life, and you will reveal within yourself a wellspring of Divine awareness. This awareness will quench your spiritual thirst throughout your whole life."

Yitzchak's well-digging teaches us that our flashes of insight or inspiration must be followed up with self-improvement and self-refinement in order for them to make lasting changes. (Torah Ohr 17c; Likutei Sichot, vol. 1, pp. 27-29, vol. 5, pp. 71-72, vol. 15, pp. 194-195, vol. 25, pp. 123-130) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

MAKING ROOM FOR PEACE

Ramban

"[Yitzchak] moved away from there, and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it. And he called it Rechovos, for he said: 'For now Hashem has made room for us...'" (26:22)

The two wells (Esek and Sitnah) dug by Yitzchak's servants - which became objects of contention between the herdsmen of Gerar and those of Yitzchak may be taken allegorically to represent the two Temples destroyed by warring nations.

The third well, Rechovos - which did not become an object of contention - symbolizes the Third Bais HaMikdash that will be built in the future and that will never be attacked by enemy powers.

When the Third Bais HaMikdash rises in Yerushalayim, the Jews will live in "a broad expanse" and in tranquility and no nation will dare molest them.

ANCESTRAL MERIT

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"G-d appeared to him that night and said, 'I am the G-d of your father Avraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you. I will bless you and make your descendants numerous for the sake of My servant Avraham.'" (26:24)

Notwithstanding Yitzchak's own substantial merits, it was only in the merit of his father Avraham that G-d assured him of success in life.

In the Temple service, the merit of the patriarchs was mentioned every day before the morning sacrifice (Tamid 2:3; Yoma 3:1), and we mention them in the opening paragraph of our daily prayers. This teaches us how important it is to constantly remember that we do not live in a spiritual vacuum; our lives are the continuation and fulfillment of the lives of those who have come before us, paving the way for us with their inspiration and accomplishments. The Torah itself tells us that we will be redeemed in the merit of the patriarchs (Vayikra 26:42).

Similarly, when we strive to be worthy descendants of all our holy ancestors - studying their teachings, following their examples of holy behavior, and abiding by their ethical instructions in order to forge our own relationship with G-d - their merit protects us from harm and ensures us of receiving G-d's blessings in the fullest measure. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 23, p. 301; *ibid.*, vol. 32, pp. 168-173) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

CONNECTING TO THE PATRIARCHS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Yitzchak's servants dug a well there..." (26:25)

There are three recommended steps we can take to prepare ourselves spiritually for prayer:

- Giving charity inspires G-d to act charitably toward us and to answer our prayers.
- Immersing ourselves in a natural body of water or *mikveh* purifies us from the spiritual defilement of negativity. This frees us to feel the joy that should accompany our prayers.

- Studying the inspirational teachings of the Torah puts us in the mood to commune with G-d.

These three types of preparation are derived from the parallel characteristic behavior of each of the patriarchs:

- Charity is alluded to by Avraham's deeds of kindness.
- Immersion in water is alluded to by Yitzchak's efforts in digging wells.
- Inspirational Torah study is alluded to by Yaakov's devotion to the study of the Torah.

Thus, by following the above-mentioned three types of preparation for prayer, we connect with the patriarchs and elicit their merit to aid us in our meditations. (Reshimot 20) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

HOLY PERSEVERANCE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[The king of Philistia and his entourage] said [to Yitzchak], 'We have seen that G-d has been with you, so we said: Let there now be a solemn oath between us, and let us make a covenant with you.'" (26:28)

At first, the Pilishtim seized the wells that Yitzchak dug, but in the end they actively sought him out to make peace with him. Similarly, even our most well-intentioned efforts or spiritual labors can sometimes boomerang, actually strengthening the forces that oppose holiness. However, we learn from Yitzchak to not be discouraged in the face of such unexpected setbacks. Rather, we should continue our endeavors, which are certain to eventually succeed. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 1, pp. 29-31) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

THIS TOO SHALL PASS

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"If you harm us, while we did you no harm..." (26:29)

It appears that we can explain this as follows: It is known what the Baal HaTurim wrote about this verse, namely, that Avimelech had intended to harm Yitzchak, but G-d reversed his plan, forcing Avimelech to treat him well.

Indeed, G-d reverses all harmful intentions, transforming them to favorable ones. See the Baal HaTurim there for further elaboration.

This is what Avimelech meant when he said, "that you do not harm us," meaning, "If your intention is to harm us, then certainly those evil intentions will be reversed by G-d to good outcomes, the proof being that we did you no harm. We indeed intended to do you harm, but G-d reversed our plan, and [as the verse continues,] we treated you only with kindness. Since G-d's way is to bestow goodness, if you seek to harm us, your evil intention will likewise be changed by G-d into a good outcome. Therefore, act friendly toward us at the outset, since ultimately it will turn out to be good no matter what your intentions." Understand this.

CONVEYOR OF BLESSINGS

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"If you harm us, while we did you no harm... Now, you are blessed by G-d." (26:29)

It seems that Avimelech's argument was that Yitzchak should act favorably toward him just as he had acted favorably toward Yitzchak, not having harmed him in the least. But this cannot really be Avimelech's argument, for it seems that Yitzchak should not be obligated to bestow any goodness upon Avimelech in recompense for Avimelech having bestowed goodness upon him, since it was only because G-d was with Yitzchak that Avimelech was afraid to harm Yitzchak - in order not to bring evil upon himself. As we find regarding all the Avos, G-d stretched forth His hand to confound (Devarim 2:15) and destroy anyone who attempted to harm them.

Nonetheless, even though Avimelech's behavior was prompted by self-interest, the good that Avimelech did to him did please Yitzchak. For had Avimelech harmed Yitzchak, G-d would have been compelled to destroy him, and the righteous have no desire to see the destruction of anything, on account of their possessing something of the benevolent nature of their Maker.

By the same token, whoever shows goodness to the righteous brings goodness upon themselves, and this pleases the righteous, i.e., that they should be the instrument through which G-d's blessings come into the world.

This, then, is what Avimelech meant when he said, "Let us make a covenant with you that you not harm us, just as we did you no harm, and we treated you only with kindness... Now, you are blessed by G-d." The meaning of his words is, "Just as we did you no harm, you too, should confer goodness on us and not evil. You should not assume that we were compelled to act favorably toward you, meaning that we were afraid of being 'scorched by your coals'" (reference to Mishlei 6:28).

To forestall such reasoning on Yitzchak's part, Avimelech concluded, "You are blessed by G-d," meaning, "Regardless of our motive, you are surely pleased that we bestowed goodness upon you, rather than evil - because now you are called blessed by G-d; meaning that you receive only blessings from G-d to relay to the world and receive no evil from Above with which to punish anyone on account of some harm they did to you. For it is the way of the righteous to prefer that blessings rather than punishment come into the world on their account. For this reason itself, it is fitting for you to favor us."

HUMBLED BY GREATNESS

Rabbi Simchah Bunim of Pshischa

"...and they [Avimelech, Achuzzas and Phicol] departed from him [Yitzchak] in peace." (26:31)

An alternative rendering of this passage is: "...and they departed from Yitzchak *at* peace."

Only heathens like Avimelech and his companions would be capable of that. Here they had been with Yitzchak; they had even been privileged to break bread with this righteous man. Then they departed, completely at peace with themselves. Jews who spend time with righteous people are not at peace with themselves because their association with the righteous has made them painfully aware of their own shortcomings, and they are humbled.

ROAD TOWARDS PEACE

Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook

"...and they [Avimelech, Achuzzas and Phicol] departed from him [Yitzchak] in peace." (26:31)

When one says "*Lech b'shalom* - go in peace" like Avimelech did to Yitzchak, one gives his friend the illusion that the road before him will be easy, that he is already in a state of peace. This is not the case, as life is full of spiritual and material stumbling blocks. A person who believes that the road of life is easy will be unprepared for its pitfalls and will come to harm.

Rather, one should say "*Lech l'shalom* - go to peace." Peace can be attained eventually, but one must go to it and work to attain it. It is not an easy road.

ENSURING CONTINUITY

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"And he named it 'Shiva,' and that is why the city is named Be'er Sheva until today." (26:33)

While living in Gerar, Yitzchak unearths the wells originally dug by his father Avraham and digs a few of his own. In reference to one of the wells, the pasuk records, "And he named it 'Shiva,' and that is why the city is named Be'er Sheva until today" (26:33). Why does the Torah claim that Yitzchak named it Be'er Sheva when Avraham was the one who named it first (21:31)?

The Sforno and other commentaries explain that while Avraham named the place to commemorate his treaty with Avimelech, Yitzchak rededicated that name and based it on the number of wells.

While the concept of rededication makes sense, why does our pasuk add the fact that its name is Be'er Sheva "until today"? One explanation could be that being consistent with the work of those before you allows those efforts to endure in perpetuity.

In these turbulent and uncertain times, it is essential to focus on consistency and continuity in our efforts to build a better future.

AVOIDING NEGATIVE SPEECH

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"And it was when Yitzchak had become old, and his eyes dimmed from seeing..." (27:1)

Instead of waiting for Yitzchak to become blind so that Rivkah could maneuver him into blessing Yaakov instead of Eisav, G-d could have simply revealed Eisav's wickedness and unworthiness to Yitzchak. G-d would not have been divulging anything to Yitzchak that he did not already suspect. Yitzchak already knew that Eisav's wives were idolaters and that he paid G-d so little notice that he hardly ever mentioned Him (see Bereishis 27:21). Yet G-d was reluctant to speak ill of Eisav.

Similarly, many years later, G-d refused to divulge to Yehoshua the identity of the person who had stolen some of the spoils that had been dedicated to G-d after the conquest of Yericho. This lone individual's embezzlement had caused G-d's protection to be removed from the entire Jewish army, exposing them to defeat. Yet when Yehoshua asked G-d to name the culprit, He responded, "Am I to be a talebearer to you?" (Yehoshua 7; Sanhedrin 11a)

All this teaches us an important lesson: If G-d Himself avoided speaking negatively about these wicked people, how much more must we take extreme care not to speak negatively of others, even if they are not of sterling character. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 15, pp. 215-216) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

FOSTERING POSITIVITY

Rabbi Jeremy Finn

"And it was when Yitzchak had become old, and his eyes dimmed from seeing, that he summoned Eisav, his older son, and said to him, 'My son.' And he said to him, 'Here I am.'" (27:1)

Rashi offers an explanation as to why Yitzchak's eyes dimmed, namely, that it was a result of the smoke from the incense that Eisav's wives offered to their idols.

However, Rivkah lived in the same house as Yitzchak, and she too would have seen the smoke, so why were her eyes not affected?

Tosafos suggests that since Rivkah had grown up in a house that was full of idol worship, she was used to such smoke, and therefore her eyes remained unaffected by the incense offered up by Eisav's wives.

Let us analyze this for a minute:

How old was Rivkah when Eisav married these wives? She was sixty-three years old. How old was Rivkah when she married Yitzchak and left home? According to many commentaries, she was three years old. This means that Rivkah had had no contact with idols for over sixty years!

For sixty years, she had not seen, heard, or encountered idol worship, and nevertheless, because she was exposed to the negativity of idol worship as a small child, she is less sensitive to its negative influences over sixty years later!

We see from here the importance of protecting our children from being exposed to any kind of negativity, for it is still significant, even many years later.

If this is true in the negative, it is undoubtedly true in the positive. We need to expose our children to positivity - to light, warmth, music, color, and most importantly, love. In this way, many years later, they will look back warmly at their childhood, and that warmth, happiness, and positivity will carry them through any challenge they may confront, and it will enable them to be productive, stable, and happy members of society. (L'titecha Elyon, p. 224)

BLESSED AT EVERY LEVEL

Reb Yitzchak of Vorka

"[Yitzchak said to Eisav,] 'Prepare for me savory food, such as I love, and bring it to me... that my soul may bless you before I die.'" (27:4)

Before he died, Yaakov blessed all his sons, not just his firstborn. Why, then, did Yitzchak want to bless only his firstborn? Such was Heaven's decree. Had Yitzchak provided a separate blessing for Yaakov, later generations would have argued that the Jewish people were worthy of these blessings only as long as they were on the same high moral level as Yaakov had been. Accordingly, G-d ordained that Yitzchak should intend to give the blessing to Eisav alone. Then it would be understood that the blessing would be applicable to the Jewish people at all times, even when they sank quite low indeed, for they could never become more evil than Eisav.

LEADERSHIP QUALIFICATIONS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[Yitzchak said to Eisav,] 'Prepare for me savory food, such as I love, and bring it to me... that my soul may bless you before I die.'" (27:4)

Yitzchak wanted to name Eisav his successor because he recognized Eisav's potential to become a fearless, G-dly warrior, dedicated to combating evil. Although Yitzchak had seen Eisav give in to the very temptations he should have battled, Yitzchak felt that if he would bless Eisav, Eisav would take up the cause of goodness and righteousness. With his superior power, sophistication, and skill, Eisav would then be able to accomplish G-d's purposes on earth far better than Yaakov could.

Rivkah realized Yitzchak's error. It was true that Yaakov was not the cunning, wild warrior that Eisav was. But the keen perception that Yaakov had developed by devoting himself to the study of the Torah could well provide him with the cunning necessary to overcome evil when confronted with it. Moreover, Yaakov's devotion to the Torah gave him a much stronger drive to make the world into G-d's home than Eisav could ever have.

From Rivkah's wisdom, we learn that possessing skill and power cannot on its own make us reliable leaders. We can best develop our own leadership qualities by studying the Torah devotedly, and we should consider scholars of the Torah the ones whom we look to for leadership. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 20, p. 114) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

SPIRITUAL OVER MATERIAL

Reb Noson of Breslov

"You will bring it to your father, and he will eat, so that he may bless you before his death." (27:10)

There is a body, there is a soul. There is matter, there is form. There is death, there is life. The first of each of these pairs are all one concept, as are the latter. One must strive to subjugate the material to the spiritual. (See Likutey Moharan I, 37:2)

Yaakov sought a spiritual life. Eisav sought a material life. Yitzchak thought that Eisav, too, desired a spiritual life, so he wanted to bless him with material blessings that would support the spiritual. But Rivkah knew that Eisav wanted only the material. She sent Yaakov to get the blessings in order that the material - Eisav - would be subjugated to the spiritual - Yaakov. (Likutey Halakhot V, p. 302-152a)

WAITING OUT THE STORM

Rabbi Chaim Kramer

"Yaakov said to his mother Rivkah, 'But my brother Eisav is a hairy man, and I am a smooth-skinned man.'" (27:11)

Sa'ir (שער, hairy) is similar to *Se'arah* (שערה, storm wind). (Likutey Moharan I, 8:3)

Just as a storm wind is momentary, so too, the influence of Eisav, the evil inclination, is fleeting. If one has patience and can wait him out, he can attain all the physical and spiritual blessings.

POWER OF PRAYER

Reb Noson of Breslov

"Perhaps my father will feel me. I will be like a mocker in his eyes, and I will bring upon myself a curse rather than a blessing." (27:12)

"My father" is Yitzchak, the attribute of judgment. Yaakov was worthy of receiving the blessings, but because he had to obtain them in a stealthy manner, he was afraid that the attribute of judgment might "feel" him and detect a minor flaw that would make him unworthy.

Rivkah, who represents prayer, assured Yaakov that with prayer, one can overcome even the strictest judgment. Thus, she was willing to accept upon herself any curse that Yitzchak might pronounce. (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 34b)

ELICITING BLESSINGS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"She placed the kid-goat skins on his arms and on the smooth part of his neck..." (27:16)

Yitzchak wanted to bless Eisav rather than Yaakov because he wanted to transform Eisav into a penitent. The penitent's experience of the depths to which the

forbidden realm can plunge us drives him to pursue G-d with a greater thirst - which elicits greater Divine blessing - than can be matched by someone who has never fallen. Rivkah, however, discerned that Eisav was not fit to receive these blessings, and that they had to be channeled through Yaakov.

Nonetheless, Yitzchak was correct in perceiving that only by relating to G-d as penitents can we elicit G-d's transcendent blessings. It was in acknowledgment of Yitzchak's insight that Rivkah dressed Yaakov in Eisav-like clothing. She thereby ensured that Yaakov - and his descendants - be able to elicit G-d's transcendent blessings. (Sefer Hama'amarim 5724, pp. 49-55; Likutei Sichot, vol. 10, pp. 80-87) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

DOMINATING VOICE

Vilna Gaon

"...and he [Yaakov] said: 'The voice is Yaakov's voice, but the hands are the hands of Eisav.'" (27:22)

As long as Yaakov's voice is heard in synagogues and places of study, Eisav's hand will not be able to rule over them. (Midrash)

The question is asked: The verse does not state: "but the hands are not Eisav's hands," rather "but the hands are the hands of Eisav," which implies that even when Yaakov's voice is heard, Eisav's hands will rule. So what does the Midrash mean?

Note that the word *ha'kol* ("the voice") is spelled in Hebrew without the *vav*, and may therefore be read as *ha'kal*, meaning "light" or "faint." Hence, the verse can be rendered: "If Yaakov's voice is faint, the hands will be Eisav's hands." This is to teach us that whenever the voice of righteousness - as symbolized by Yaakov - becomes faint, evil - as embodied by Eisav's hands - will gain control. But when Yaakov's voice gains full strength, (when *kal* becomes *kol* through the addition of the *vav*), Eisav's hands will no longer be in control.

SLEIGHT OF HANDS

Mishmeres Itmar

"...and he [Yaakov] said: 'The voice is Yaakov's voice, but the hands are the hands of Eisav.'" (27:22)

Eisav used two hands. One he used to befriend and to manipulate; the other hand he used for the kill.

THE BEST HAS YET TO COME

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[Yitzchak blessed Yaakov,] 'May G-d grant you of the dew of heaven and the fat of the land, and an abundance of grain and wine.'" (27:28)

There are both spiritual and material rewards for fulfilling G-d's commandments. The spiritual rewards are the sublime levels of Divine consciousness that we would not be able to attain on our own. The physical rewards are the various aspects of our material prosperity.

Until the world is refined sufficiently to enable us to experience our full spiritual reward, all we can receive is a glimmer of inspiration. And since the spiritual and material facets of reality are intertwined, our full material reward is also being delayed; in the meantime, all we can receive is an occasional trickle of it.

When Mashiach comes, however, the physicality of the world will be totally refined, and we will receive both our full spiritual and material rewards for having fulfilled G-d's commandments. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

CONNECTING BY RECEIVING

Rabbi Jeremy Finn

"[Yitzchak blessed Yaakov,] 'May G-d grant you of the dew of heaven and the fat of the land, and an abundance of grain and wine.'" (27:28)

The word ויתן seems to have a superfluous letter 'i at the beginning; why is it needed?

Rashi suggests that the 'i comes to tell us that Yitzchak was blessing his son that Hashem should give him the dew, etc., and then renew the blessing and bring the dew and give again and again.

HaRav Shmuel Rozovsky asks that surely Hashem can give His goodness all in one go. He knows how much we need and how much we will need, so why is it a blessing that He will repeatedly provide? Why not all at once?

Rav Rozovsky answers that the actual act of giving establishes a bond between the giver and the recipient, and therefore, contained in the brachah of ויתן לך is another blessing - that through the giving and receiving, we will have a close connection with Hashem. (Talelei Oros, p. 292)

The same idea, but in the negative, can be seen in the punishment that Hashem gives the snake after it enticed Adam and Eve to sin and eat from the Tree of Knowledge.

The punishment given to the snake was that it would eat the dust of the earth.

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch asks what kind of punishment this is. The snake will always have food, as there is never a shortage of dust. Where is the punishment?

The answer is that in providing for all that the snake needs, Hashem is giving it the message that He is not interested in having a relationship with it. There will be no continuous act of giving and receiving, but rather Hashem writes out a blank check to the snake. "Take whatever it is you need, just do not have contact with Me, and I do not want to hear from you!"

The message of Yitzchak to his son was that ויתן - Hashem should provide and provide again for you, because every time you receive from Him, every time we engage in prayer to Him to provide, and every time He does provide, it strengthens the relationship between us.

This idea is also used by HaGaon Rav Zeidel Epstein to explain the difference between the brachah that Yitzchak gives Yaakov (thinking that it is Eisav) and the one he later gives Eisav.

The wording of the brachah given to Yaakov is, ויתן לך (Bereishis 27:28) and the berachah that Eisav received is, משמני הארץ יהיה מושבך (ibid. v. 39). Aren't these essentially saying the same thing?

Rav Epstein suggests that the difference is in the way that Eisav and Yaakov will relate to these blessings. With Eisav, there is no mention of Hashem as the bestower. Eisav feels that these blessings are his by right. He has worked hard for them, deserves them, and therefore has earned them. Yaakov, by contrast, is aware that all blessings are ויתן לך האלוקים - gift from Hashem, and as such, each blessing enhances the relationship between Hashem and Yaakov. (L'titecha Elyon, p. 229)

If we do not realize that all blessings are a gift from Hashem, then the blessing does not act to strengthen the relationship, and it may even serve to distance the receiver from the giver.

By acknowledging that all we have is a gift from Hashem, and every time we receive we recognize Him as the Provider, not only will we enjoy the benefits of the blessing, but we will also strengthen our relationship with the Almighty.

FUTURE BLESSINGS

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"He, too, shall be blessed..." (27:33)

The allegorical explanation of this verse would seem to be as follows: It is known that Yitzchak blessed Yaakov twice; once when Yaakov came to him disguised as Eisav and brought him the delicacies that Yitzchak had asked for, and a second time right before Yaakov fled from his brother Eisav. The first time he blessed Yaakov, Yitzchak (thinking he was blessing Eisav) blessed him with great material abundance and dominion over the rest of humanity (27:28-29). The second time he blessed Yaakov, Yitzchak blessed him with abundant progeny and the Land of Israel (28:1-4).

Now, the first blessing was the greater one, whereas the second blessing was the lesser one. We are receiving the lesser blessing in this world, whereas the greater blessing is being safeguarded for us for the future. When Mashiach arrives - speedily, in our days - this first blessing will be fulfilled.

CLEVER PURSUITS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[Yitzchak told Eisav,] 'Your brother came with cleverness and took your blessing...' (27:35)

The blessings Yitzchak bestowed upon Yaakov were for material prosperity. The fact that Yaakov obtained these blessings through cleverness teaches us how we should engage in our own material pursuits.

When eating or conducting business, for example, we can appear to be merely tending to our physical needs, similar to the materialistic Eisav. But behind this facade, we should really be thinking like Yaakov; our true purposes should be spiritual.

We should eat in order to have the strength to do good deeds, study the Torah, and observe G-d's commandments. We should earn our livelihood in order to have the financial means with which to do all these things, and so on.

This is the sort of "duplicity" that we are meant to employ in our interactions with the material world. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 3, p. 796) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

PERSONALIZED BLESSINGS

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

"Yitzchak answered, and said to Eisav, 'Behold, a lord have I made him over you, and all his kin have I given him as servants; with grain and wine have I supported him, and for you, where - what can I do, my son?'" (27:37)

As Yitzchak blesses Yaakov and sends him off, Eisav enters with his own food and demands blessings. When he learns that Yaakov received the blessings meant for him, Eisav cries bitterly (27:34). Yitzchak informs Eisav that there are no blessings left to give him (27:37).

How is it possible that Yitzchak is unable to bestow any more blessings to Eisav? Did he not intend to bless Yaakov as well at some point?

Lekach Tov explains that Yitzchak saw Yaakov's role as the spiritual continuity of G-d's promise and covenant, while Eisav's role was more financially and physically dominant in nature. Yitzchak knew that Eisav wouldn't be able to bear the spiritual responsibility and therefore couldn't bless him with those blessings intended for Yaakov.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks suggests that years later, when Yaakov and Eisav finally meet again, Yaakov recognizes that the blessings he stole may have been better suited for Eisav when he says, "Please accept the blessing that was brought to you" (33:11).

We all have blessings that are personal to us; the lesson here is to be content with our blessings and not feel compelled to seek out anyone else's.

COUNTERACTING TEARS

Rebbe Nachman

“Eisav said to his father, ‘Do you have only one blessing, Father? Bless me, too, Father!’ Eisav lifted his voice and cried.” (27:38)

Eisav’s ability to harm the Jewish people comes from the tears he shed when he lost the blessing. We, in turn, must cry to negate the power of those tears. (See Likutey Moharan II, 30)

HIDDEN OPPORTUNITIES

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Yitzchak sent forth Yaakov... to Lavan, son of Besuel the Aramean.” (28:5)

Yaakov had to shepherd Lavan’s flocks for 14 years in order to get him to agree to let Yaakov marry Lavan’s daughters. During these years, Lavan oppressed Yaakov cruelly, and when Yaakov eventually fled Lavan’s house to return home, Lavan viciously pursued him.

On the spiritual plane, Yaakov was liberating the sparks of holiness that were trapped within Lavan’s possessions by working for him. And subconsciously, when Lavan pursued Yaakov, he did so in order to present Yaakov with the sparks of holiness that Yaakov had failed to liberate on his own!

This reflects the truth that all challenges to fulfilling our Divine mission are purposeful and designed to aid us. Once we realize this, we awaken within the apparent obstacle its latent awareness of its Divine purpose, enabling it to aid us in our task of transforming the world into G-d’s home. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 1, p. 80) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

LOOKING FOR LOOPHOLES

Rabbi Shlomo Ressler

“And Yaakov obeyed his father and mother and went to Padan Aram...” (28:7)

Yitzchak sends Yaakov to his brother-in-law in Padan Aram. The pasuk then tells us that Eisav saw that his father Yitzchak blessed Yaakov and sent him away to marry someone from Padan Aram.

The next pasuk interrupts the narrative to (again) convey what we read two pesukim earlier, that Yaakov listened to his father and mother and went to Padan Aram (28:6).

The next pasuk returns its focus back to Eisav and tells us that he married someone from out of the area because he noticed his father disapproved of the local women (28:8).

Why is the Eisav narrative interrupted to repeat what we already knew before: Yaakov traveling to Padan Aram?

Rashi explains that the pasuk that seems to interrupt Eisav’s story is, in fact, providing more context by explaining Eisav’s motivation. When Eisav saw that his father blessed his brother Yaakov and then asked him to find a wife in Padan Aram, he realized that he, too, should find a mate elsewhere.

While this account seems complimentary toward Eisav, the fact is that while Eisav did marry someone from outside the area, it was nonetheless someone from Yishmael. While Eisav did in fact adhere to the letter of the “law” by not marrying a local, he violated the spirit of the law by marrying someone unsuitable regardless.

Finding loopholes may help to justify our actions to ourselves and others, but they don’t uphold the spirit of the principles we may be circumventing.

REFINED SPEECH

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Eisav went to Yishmael and married Machalat, the daughter of Avraham’s son Yishmael.” (28:9)

Eisav’s respect for his father was exemplary. He waited on his father dressed in special garments. When he decided to kill Yaakov, he refrained from doing so despite his raging anger in order not to pain his father. As soon as he heard that his Canaanite wives displeased his parents, he lost no time in marrying his cousin.

Nevertheless, Eisav’s reverence for his father did not prevent him from speaking to Yitzchak disrespectfully, saying, “My father, arise”; in contrast, his brother Yaakov courteously asked Yitzchak to “Please arise.” Similarly, Eisav later referred to his father’s death harshly, saying, “The days of mourning for my father will soon be here.”

We can learn from Eisav’s coarse behavior that an essential facet of doing what is right is doing it in a kind and considerate way. For example, the words we speak should not only be meaningful and free of any prohibited types of talk (falsehood, gossip, slander, etc.); they should also be refined and delicate, as were Yaakov’s. (Sefer HaMa’amarim 5697, p. 232) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

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