

DIVREI TORAH FROM INTERNET
ON PARSHAS TOLDOS - 5756

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Date: 11/23/95 4:17pm
Subject: Dvar Torah - Toldos

[This was accidentally sent last week.]

Dvar Torah - Parshas Toldos

by Chaim Ozer Shulman
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The end of this Parsha describes how Yitzchok wanted to bless Eisav before he died, and told him: "Hunt for me delicacies the way I like them so that I may bless you before I die." (27:2-4) Why did Yitzchok need to eat his favorite dish in order to bless Eisav?

We are actually told earlier in the Parsha that Yitzchok loved Eisav because he enjoyed the meat that he hunted for him. (25:28) Again, it is strange that he should love Eisav because of the food!

From Chazal we see that Yitzchok loved Eisav, not because he enjoyed his food, but because Eisav was so zealous in Kibud Av (honoring his father). As the Midrash tells us (Bereishis Rabbah 65): Our teacher Shimon Ben Gamliel stated: "All of my days I served my father, and I didn't accomplish even 1/100th of the degree to which Eisav honored his father. When Eisav served his father he served him (wearing) royal garments." Even Raban Shimon Ben Gamliel's Kibud Av did not compare with that of Eisav. Similarly, it is brought down from the Zohar that there was no one in the world who honored his father like Eisav did, and that Zechus (merit) protected Eisav in this world.

Yaakov, on the other hand, was not as careful as he could have been with Kibud Av. This is seen from the fact that he had to mourn his son Yosef whom he thought dead for 22 years as a punishment for the 22 years that Yaakov was away from his father; 20 years hiding from Eisav in the house of Lavan, and 2 years on the way back. (37:34)

What remains to be understood, though, is why was it so important that Eisav be involved in Kibud Av at the same time that he receive the blessing.

I would suggest that there is a direct connection between Kibud Av and the blessing of Veyiten Licha Elokim Mital Hashamayim Umishmanei Haaretz (may G-d give you from the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth) (27:28). This is a blessing for the material gifts of this world. Kibud Av, the Sefer Hachinuch tells us, is a Mitzvah of Hakaras Hatov (appreciation) to our parents for bringing us into this world. And in fact, in the Aseres Hadibros (Ten Commandments) we're told that we should honor our father and mother "so that it will lengthen your days". If we honor our parents we will be rewarded with a long life. Long life is

B'S'D' an appropriate reward, Midah Keneged Midah (measure for measure), for one who shows appreciation for life by honoring one's parents who gave life in the first instance.

Because Eisav was zealous in Kibud Av his father thought that he should get the blessing of Olam Hazeh (the physical world) as a reward for recognizing the value of life and parents. It is therefore understandable why Yitzchok felt that in order for such a blessing to take effect Eisav must be involved in Kibud Av at the very moment of the Bracha.

Several commentators point out that Yitzchok always intended to give what is known as the "Birchas Avraham" (blessings of Avraham) to Yaakov. Before Yaakov leaves for Lavan, Yitzchok blesses him as follows: "May He give you the blessings of Avraham for you and your children..." (28:4) This "Birchas Avraham" is the promise given in Parshas Lech Lecha, "and I will make you a great nation," that Avraham's descendants will become the Am Hanivchar (the chosen people). The Birchas Avraham, is in a sense the spiritual blessing, while "may He give to you from the dew of heaven, and the fat of the land" is the physical blessing. Yitzchok always intended that the spiritual blessing of Avraham should go to Yaakov.

Although Yitzchok felt that the blessing of material wealth should go to Eisav, Rivka felt that even the worldly blessing should go to Yaakov. Rivka was right. In fact Yitzchok in the end draws this same conclusion when he finds out that Yaakov stole the blessing, and he says "Gam Baruch Yihiyeh" (even he shall be blessed) (27:33). He saw that when Yaakov entered the room the smell of Gan Eden (paradise) entered with him, while when Eisav entered he saw Gehenam (hell) open up under him. He also saw that Yaakov spoke in a soft respectful manner - Kum Na (please sit up), while Eisav spoke in a commanding manner - Yakum Avi (rise father). Thus, Eisav was lacking in Morah Av (reverence), which Yaakov had. The Talmud says in Tractate Kidushin (30): "The Torah equates reverence of parents with reverence of G-d." Fear of one's parents comes with fear of G-d. Eisav could never achieve this fear. Thus, the Torah acknowledges that Yaakov properly merited not only Birchas Avraham (the blessings of Avraham) but also the physical blessing of Mital Hashamayim Umishmanei Haaretz (the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth).

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Subject: Drasha - Toldos
PARSHAS TOLDOS
SOUR LENTILS 11/24/95
by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Volume 2 Issue 6

"I am going to die!"

That is what Esau wailed as he returned home one afternoon after a rampage of murder and promiscuity. He was hungry and very exhausted. His brother, Yaakov, understood Esau well and seized the moment. He offered him a steaming bowl of immediate tangible satisfaction, cloaked as hot red lentil soup, in exchange for an intangible piece of spirituality, his birthright. Esau rationalizes. "Behold," he exclaims, "I am going to die so what do I need a birthright for?" (Genesis 25:32) Obviously, Esau had no regard for the birthright or the spiritual ramifications it carried, ie. blessings, priesthood, and most important, the privilege to be the guiding force behind the traditions of his parental lineage. He agrees to trade it all for a bowl of soup.

Amazingly enough, when Jacob claims his allotment and receives the first-born blessings from Isaac, Esau goes on a rampage. He wants to kill Jacob over something he claimed for which to have had no use.

Where are the roots of this transformation?

Rav Chaim Soleveitchik was once approached by a wealthy man who owned a slaughterhouse. The man asked Rav Chaim to inspect a recently slaughtered steer that was worth a large sum of money. The steer had a questionable infection on its lung that might have rendered it non-kosher. Rav Chaim looked at the animal and shook his head. "Your fears prove true," he said. "I'm sorry but this animal does have a diseased lung and is not kosher." The man accepted the ruling with an open mind and heart. "It's all right Rebbe," he replied, "I can afford to make a sacrifice once in a while." A month later, the same person appeared before Rav Chaim together with another man. They were arguing about an insignificant sum of money, and the wealthy man insisted that they present their case before the Rabbi. Once again, Rabbi Soleveitchik issued a ruling against the butcher, but this time, however, his reaction was very different. He ranted and raved that the Rav did not know how to adjudicate even a simple question. He threatened the Rabbi and verbally assaulted him. Rabbi Soleveitchik stood silent through the man's tirade, and eventually his children expelled the man from their home.

"Wasn't this the man that revered your judgment regarding the cow? Wasn't his loss in that case almost one hundred times the loss in this particular instance? Why was he so amenable then and so incensed now?" his children asked.

Rav Chaim smiled. "This man is basically a good person. He didn't even mind taking a large loss when I prohibited the sale of the meat. However, today I awarded someone money that he perceived to be his. People are willing to lose for Heaven's sake but they can not handle the fact that someone is getting what they believe is theirs."

Esau had to make a choice -- birthright or soup. He chose soup. The birthright and all its spiritual values held no meaning for him, until his brother reaped the reward. At that moment Esau declared that "the days of my father's mourning shall come soon and I shall kill my brother Jacob." The Torah sums up his frustration exactly the way Rav Chaim explained. "And Esau hated Jacob for the blessings that he (Jacob) received from his father." Esau was not bothered about the blessings that he lost. Esau was bothered about the blessings that Jacob won! Esau was willing to sell the blessings. When the sale bore the fruit of its ramification, Esau went on a rampage. He was willing to abandon his entire spiritual future for a bowl of soup, as long as no one else would profit. When they did profit however, then things turned very sour. We all should look at the personal inherent ramifications of our own losses and gains, and not judge ourselves by how someone else fares. We'd all be much happier!

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Dedicated by Mr. and Mrs. Charles Steinberg in memory of Irving Berlin
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Subject: Torah Studies- Toldos

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B"H
Torah Studies
Adaptation of Likutei Sichos
by
Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Sacks
Chief Rabbi of Great Britain

Based on the teachings and talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson on the weekly Torah Portion

TOLDOS

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The Sidra of Toldot begins with an account of the generation of "Isaac the son of Abraham," and adds, "Abraham begat Isaac." Why the repetition?

The Rebbe quotes four explanations, each of a different kind, each representing a different level of Biblical interpretation.

Each is apparently unconnected with any of the others, but the Rebbe explores them in depth and shows their inner relation to one another - demonstrating, by this example, the essential unity of the various ways of understanding, by this example, the essential unity of the various ways of understanding the Torah.

THE FOUR EXPLANATIONS

Our Sidra begins with the words, "And these were the generations of Isaac the son of Abraham: Abraham begat Isaac." The commentators on the Torah ask the immediate question, why does the verse repeat itself in telling us that Abraham begat Isaac?

Among the various answers given are the following:

- (i) The Talmud (and the Midrash) say that the cynics of the time were casting aspersions on Abraham's parentage of Isaac (Sarah had lived childless with Abraham for many years; and yet she bore Isaac only after she had been forcibly taken by Abimelech). Therefore, G-d made Isaac facially identical with Abraham so that everyone should recognize that he was indeed Abraham's son. The double expression of the verse gives testimony to this fact.
- (ii) The Midrash comments: "Isaac was crowned with Abraham and Abraham was crowned with Isaac." Each was the other's pride.
- (iii) The Chassidic explanation is that Abraham is a figure, or paradigm, of the service of love and kindness, while Isaac is the exemplar of fear and strictness. Each of these poles of worship has two levels.

There is the lower fear, which is adherence for fear of punishment for sin, or for any harm that may befall one as a result of sin, while the higher fear is a sense of awe in the face of the majesty of G-d, and a withdrawal from sin because it is against G-d's will.

The lower love is an attachment to G-d for the ulterior motive of reward, whether material or spiritual. But the higher love is independent of any desire for personal benefit, and is simply a cleaving to G-d for its own sake.

The verse, in its apparent repetition, is teaching us something about the relation of these four forms of service.

The order of the names (Isaac, Abraham, Abraham, Isaac) tells us that the order of the worship of G-d starts with the lower fear, ascends to the lower love, and then to the higher love, and finally reaches its highest point in the higher fear.

The lower begets the higher, for though one starts by worshipping G-d for ulterior motives, one eventually comes to do it for its own sake. And this applies to all Jews (that they must serve G-d with both love and fear ?aweX), for Abraham and Isaac and Jacob are called the "Fathers" of the Jewish people, meaning that all their descendants have inherited their capacities and the obligation to use them.

- (iv) The Zohar explains that Abraham stands symbolically for the soul (and Sarah, for the body. For the Torah says, "And Sarah died," meaning the body, which is mortal; while about Abraham it is written "And Abraham arose above the face of his dead," alluding to the soul, which transcends death).

Isaac, whose name means "laughing" or "rejoicing," stands for the pleasures which the soul will have in the world to come. So the verse, thus translated, reads: "Pleasure will be the reward to the soul" ("Isaac, the son of Abraham") in the world to come, if "the soul begets pleasures ("Abraham begat Isaac") by its service in this world.

The Inner Unity

There is a general principle that when different interpretations are given to one and the same verse in the Torah, they are connected, even though superficially they seem to bear no relation to each other.

A proof of this is that the Sages explain that the word "shaatnez" (the forbidden mixture of wool and linen) is a fusion of three words: "shuah" (combed), "tavui" (spun), and "nuz" (woven); and argue that since the Torah combines these into one word it intends that a cloth must have all three properties before the Torah declares it shaatnez (i.e., that the wool and linen must be combed, spun and woven together).

If we learn from the fusion of separate letters into one word that all three terms are connected, a fortiori must different explanations be connected if they are attached to the selfsame letters in Torah.

What is the relation between our four explanations?

All the stories of Torah have moral implication directly relevant to the life of each Jew. And we can readily understand the moral of the

Chassidic explanation above.

It is, that a Jew must serve G-d with both poles of his emotional responses: Love and fear/awe.

The implication of the Zohar's interpretation is that by the this-worldly service of the Jew's embodied soul he creates spiritual pleasures which will be revealed to him in the world to come, and by recognizing this, his whole manner of service takes on a new life.

But what of the interpretations of the Talmud and the Midrash - which on the face of it have no immediate relevance to us?

The connection between these two is that both relate events which were out of the ordinary course of nature.

If nature had obeyed its physical laws, Abraham could not have had a child: He and his wife were old and barren. This is why when G-d told him he would bear a son, the Torah says: "He brought him outside," which the Sages translate: "Break away from your astrological speculations," in which Abraham had foreseen that he would be childless.

And if the evolution of the spirit had taken its ordinary course (whereby succeeding generations diminish in spiritual stature; as the Sages say, "If the earlier Jews were sons of angels, then we are sons of men, etc.") then Abraham would not have been "crowned" in Isaac. For this implied that Isaac completed and complemented his father's service, and supplied an element which Abraham himself lacked.

So both these explanations convey to us the profound fact that a Jew may transcend the constraints of natural law, not only in spiritual matters, but in material matters as well.

Abraham had, as it were, spiritual offspring before Isaac, for "the offspring of the righteous are their good works." But the birth of Isaac proved that even in the physical domain miraculous events attended him.

And this is the real refutation of the "cynics of the generation." For their claim was (in depth) that though they conceded that a Jew might transcend limitations in the spiritual realms, to produce an effect in the physical world required the temporal power of the secular rulers (the claim that Abimelech was the father of Isaac); i.e., in material affairs he is subject to natural law.

In making Isaac facially resemble Abraham, G-d made his true parentage apparent to all, showing that the channel of physical power was Abraham (the soul, to follow the Zohar's reading) not Abimelech (the worldly ruler). The soul has no hindrances, either in itself or when it seeks to translate the devotion into action.

THE SOUL'S FREEDOM

This leads us to an understanding of the words of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak (sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe):

"All the people on the face of the earth must know this: That only our bodies have been sent into exile and the servitude of

(foreign) rulers. But our souls have not been exiled or enslaved.

"We must say openly before all, that in all matters relating to our religion, the Torah, the commandments and the customs of Israel, we Jews have no-one who can dictate to us, nor may any pressure be brought to bear against us."

This is, on the face of it, paradoxical, for what advantage is it if the soul is free so long as the body is in exile, and the soul must fulfill G-d's will through the body in the physical world?

But in fact, such is the strength of the soul's arousal that it can remove the body from its servitude to physical constraints. And this must be done openly so that "all the people on the face of the earth" (including the "cynics of the generation") should see that Abimelech (worldly power) has no domain over the Jew either in body or in soul.

SERVICE AND REWARD

The connection between the four interpretations is now clear. The Talmud belongs to the "revealed" part of Torah, so it addresses itself to the skepticism which can arise here in this "revealed" physical world, answering the challenge of the "cynics" by showing that even at a material level a Jew is not subject to the constraints of nature.

The Midrash is an intermediate link between Torah's "revealed" and "inward" aspects, so it treats the subject in the same way as the Talmud, and also gives a deeper explanation, showing that a Jew transcends nature, also the normal ("natural") spiritual order.

He stands aside from the progressive decline of the human spirit, so that "the crown of the old is their grandchildren" - the later generations perfect the service of the earlier. (And since the Midrash, in this, its second comment, speaks from a level in which cynicism has no place, it has no cause to answer it in the way that the Talmud does.)

Chassidut - which explains the path of service of G-d - also takes us into the realm of "higher than nature." Its moral was that each Jew must serve G-d with love and fear together. Now, normally these are incompatible emotions - love means drawing near; fear is the consciousness of a distance separating. But in worship of G-d the Jew transcends the natural movement of his feelings and can fuse these two opposite responses in a unique involvement of his whole being.

When he does this, he is set apart by Heaven from the course of nature, both physically (as in the Talmud's interpretation) and spiritually (as in the Midrash).

The Zohar, which expresses the esoteric aspect of Torah, speaks of the world to come, and explains that by a Jew's efforts in this world to let his soul break through the bounds of embodied existence, he is rewarded by the spiritual delights of the future life.

THE REWARD IS THE ACT

To take this further, it is said that "the reward of a Mitzvah

Mazel Tov to Daniel and Daniella Schrieber (Beit Shemesh, Israel) on the birth of their first born son whose brit, iy"n, will take place this shabbat.

PARSHAT TOLDOT

Why did Yitzchak prefer to bless Eisav over Yaakov? This famous question puzzles every student of Chumash. In this week's shiur, we will suggest an answer based on the theme of Sefer Breishit - "bchiyra" and "dchiya", as explained in the previous shiurim.

INTRODUCTION

The misleading assumption that many make when studying Parshat Toldot is that Yitzchak had to choose between one of his two sons to become his successor, EITHER Yaakov OR Eisav, but NOT both. Accordingly, Yitzchak's desire to bless Eisav is understood as his decision to appoint Eisav as the sole inheritor of God's blessing to Avraham of "zera v'aretz" (to become God's nation in the special Land), and thus the rejection of Yaakov.

In the following shiur, we will first attempt to disprove this assumption. Afterward, we will propose an alternate understanding of the original intention of Yitzchak's blessing to Eisav. Finally, we will suggest a reason to explain Rivka's intervention.

BECOMING A NATION

The theme which we have followed thus far in Sefer Breishit has been God's promise to Avraham that his offspring would become a great nation in a special land ("zera v'aretz"). Although this nation was to emerge from Avraham's offspring, not all of his children were chosen to fulfill that destiny. Even prior to Yitzchak's birth, God informed Avraham that only the children of Yitzchak were to be considered his special progeny:

"ki b'Yitzchak yi'kareh lcha zarah" (21:12)

["For it is through Yitzchak that your offspring shall be continued"]

God even confirmed this blessing directly to Yitzchak before he went to Garar:

"Reside in this land and I will bless you... for I will assign all these lands to YOU and YOUR OFFSPRING" (26:2-5)

This 'filtering process' - choosing only one son while rejecting all the others - obviously could not continue forever, for in order to become a nation, an entire family must be chosen and then multiply. Should only one 'favorite son' be chosen from generation to generation, a nation could never develop. Considering this, and the fact the his two children were from the same mother, it would have been reasonable for Yitzchak to conclude that both of his children would constitute the 'first family' of this special nation. Why then did he decide to bless Eisav?

BRACHA OR BCHIYRA

To answer this question we must first differentiate between two types of blessings found in Sefer Breishit. For the sake of simplicity we will refer to them as (1) "bchiyra" and (2) "bracha".

"Bchiyra" will be used in reference to the Divine Promise to Avraham of "zera" (offspring) and "aretz" (a national homeland). [Later in Sefer Breishit, this blessing is actually referred to as "birkat Avraham".]

"Bracha" will be used in reference to a blessing of personal destiny (e.g. prosperity, power), usually given by a father to his sons. A typical example - the "brachot" which Yaakov, before his death, bestows upon each of his twelve sons (49:1-28). In those blessings, Yaakov is neither choosing nor rejecting. He is blessing each son with a unique "bracha" based on his character and potential (see 49:28).

[To borrow a parallel from government politics ("inyanei d'yoma"), "bchiyra" could be compared to choosing which party will form the government, while "bracha" could be compared to choosing the various responsibilities of the ministers forming that government (based on their abilities and potential).]

YITZCHAK'S BLESSING OF EISAV

In order to determine Yitzchak's original intention, whether it was "bchiyra" or "bracha", we need only examine the blessing which he intended to give Eisav, (the blessing which Yaakov received through trickery):

"v'yiteyn lcha ha'Elokim mital ha'Shamayim..."

"May God give you of the dew of heaven

and the fat of the land,

and an abundance of grain and wine.

Other nations shall serve you, and bow down to you,

Be master over your brother,

and let your mother's son's bow down to you ...

(27:28 -29)

In this blessing, we find no mention at all of "zera v'aretz". Instead, we find agricultural prosperity and political leadership, in language very similar to that of the blessings which Yaakov himself later bestowed on Yehudah and Yosef (see 49:8 & 29:25). Therefore, this blessing is clearly "bracha" and not "bchiyra".

Now that we have established the nature of this blessing - the personal destiny of his eldest son - we can better understand Yitzchak's actions.

ALL IN THE FAMILY

Yitzchak believed that the Divine Promise to Avraham would include both of his sons. They were both from the same mother (twins!), a situation quite different than he and Yishmael. [Hashem never told him that only 'frum' children are considered 'Am Yisrael'.] His intention in blessing Eisav was NOT in order to award him with the BCHIYRA over Yaakov, rather it was to give him a BRACHA of prosperity and leadership as PART of the divine nation.

Yitzchak, especially after his dealings with Avimelech (see chapter 26), realized that in order for his children to become a nation, many qualities are necessary, both spiritual and

worldly. A nation must be able to fight battles, till the soil, harvest the land, build and conquer. It must also have teachers, judges, and spiritual leadership. Considering that Eisav was an "ish sadeh" (a man of the world), Yitzchak intended to bless him with the family leadership in the mundane realm, e.g. prosperity, political power, etc.

Being the eldest, Eisav is called upon first to receive his "bracha". One could assume that afterward, Yitzchak planned to bless Yaakov with a blessing of a more spiritual nature. Yaakov, the "ish tam, yoshev ohalim" (a man of the book), could fulfill leadership responsibilities such as education, justice, etc. (similar to the ultimate duty of shevet Levi).

RIVKA KNOWS BEST

Our explanation of Yitzchak's intentions seems quite logical, yet Rivka found it necessary to intervene. Was she simply jealous for her 'favorite' son, or did she perceive the situation differently? To answer this question, we must return to the beginning of the Parsha.

In the opening story of the Parsha, Rivka is troubled by her difficult pregnancy, and asks Hashem for an 'explanation'. Carefully note God's answer:

"va'yomer Hashem LAH - SHNEI GOYIM b'vitneich..."
"And God answered HER saying - There are TWO NATIONS in your womb, and TWO SEPARATE PEOPLES shall issue from your body; One people shall be mightier than the other, and the older shall serve the younger." (25:23)

God had already informed Rivka that her twins will not be ONE nation, rather TWO. This being the case, only one son can become the chosen nation. Thus, Rivka recognized that the special blessing of BCHIYRA could only be passed on to one of her sons, and according to this prophesy, it should be the younger brother. From her perception, Yaakov must be chosen, and Eisav rejected.

Yitzchak, on the other hand, seems to have been unaware of this prophesy given directly to Rivka. [Note above that the Torah emphasizes "va'yomer Hashem LAH" - to her, and not to him!] For some unknown reason (see Ramban, and Further Iyun section), Rivka never discussed this prophesy with her husband. Therefore, he hoped, as any father would, that both his children would be chosen, while she understood otherwise. The years passed, the children grew up, and each parent remained with their different perceptions.

When Rivka overheard Yitzchak's intention to bless Eisav (27:5), she was faced with a dilemma. Aware that Eisav was not destined to be part of the "bchiyra", she could not allow Eisav to receive the blessing. The consequences would be disastrous. Should she now inform Yitzchak of the prophesy she had received many years back? That would be embarrassing; it was too late. So, Rivka quickly decided to dress Yaakov as Eisav, to ensure that he would receive the blessing instead. She understood this intervention as her responsibility to the "n'vuah" and to the future of 'Am Yisrael'.

[When Eisav arrived and realized that he had been tricked, he begged his father for another blessing (27:34,36). Yitzchak responded that the special blessing for Eisav (prosperity and

power) had already been given to Yaakov (27:35,37). For Eisav, there was nothing left (i.e. a blessing of spirituality would not fit his personality). Finally, Yitzchak does bless Eisav with prosperity (27:38-39), however, this blessing of power is limited and dependent on the fall of his brother (27:40).

The significance of this entire incident and its effect upon future generations is an exciting topic, but beyond the scope of this shiur. We will focus only on the technical aspect in order to understand the nature of the blessings.]

THE BLESSING OF BCHIYRA TO YAAKOV

At the conclusion of this entire episode, Rivka must have finally discussed the entire incident with her husband and explained to him the reason for her actions. Yitzchak then realized that only one son, Yaakov, was to receive the blessing of "bchiyra". Therefore, before Yaakov departs to Padan Aram in search of a wife, Yitzchak blesses his son accordingly:

"... v'yiteyn lcha et Birkat AVRAHAM, lcha u'IZARACHA i'tach, l'rishtecha et ERETZ m'gurecha, asher na'tan Elokim l'AVRAHAM" (28:4)

"May God grant the blessing of Avraham to you and your OFFSPRING, that you may inherit the LAND...."

Here we find the classic blessing of "zera v'aretz" ("bchiyra")! This blessing is very different than the original blessing which Yitzchak intended to give Eisav. Instead of prosperity and power ("bracha"), we find the familiar concept of a special nation in a special Land ("bchiyra"). It was God's will that the 'filtering process' to establish "zera Avraham" extend one more generation. Now, only the children of Yaakov are destined to become "Am Yisrael". [As you may have guessed, Yaakov's name change to Yisrael relates to the this "bchiyra". Iy"h, this will be discussed in Parshat Va'yishlach.]

Yaakov, the "ish tam", although not yet possessing the leadership qualities of Eisav, receives and is willing to take a challenge that he is not yet ready for. It will take many years, many generations until Yaakov will learn to put on and use the "yadayim of Eisav" to become the nation of which Yitzchak had dreamed.

I would like to close this week on a personal note. Rebbi u'mori ha'Rav Amital shlita, the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Har Etzion, was appointed this week a minister in Israel's cabinet. On behalf of all the 'talmidim' of the parsha list, I would like to congratulate Rav Amital on his appointment. At this critical time in our history, when our predicament is perceived differently by two camps, each sincerely striving for the best interest of our country, national unity is of utmost importance. It is our blessing to Rav Amital that he be successful in providing spiritual guidance to our political leadership, and b'ezrat Hashem, help guide us towards achieving our national destiny.

shabbat shalom
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. It is not clear if Rivka knew that Yitzchak was not aware that only one son was to be chosen. In other words, she herself, was probably unsure as to which type of blessing he intended to give Eisav ("bchiyra" or "bracha").

1. Try to explain Rivka's reasoning for this trickery based on either possibility.
2. Why can't Rivka explain the prophesy she received in a forward manner to Yitzchak? What was the age difference between them (maximum and minimum)? (see Ramban's explanation)
3. Why, in your opinion, does this entire bchira process have to be some complex?

B. According to the n'vuah received by Rivka, Eisav was destined from birth to be rejected (nidcha).

1. In your opinion, was this inevitable or had he shown good behavior, could that Divine decision have been overturned?
Relate to the fact that Yaakov had children who misbehaved, yet they were all included in Am Yisrael.
Did their behavior affect the blessings that they received from their father?!

C. This struggle between Yaakov and Eisav remains for all generations.

1. Is there a positive aspect to this struggle?
2. In what way does the 'nation of Eisav' keep Am Yisrael in check, (see Rashi in the beginning of the Parsha).

D. In the opening episode, when Eisav sells his birthright to Yaakov, he makes a very powerful statement:

"hinei anochi holeych lamut, v'lama ze li bchora".

Eisav seems very practical. He sees no challenge in having the "bchora", he is living for the present and has no dreams or goals for the future.

1. Relate this to the above shiur, and the reason why Eisav is rejected.
2. Could it be that this attitude, a lack of appreciation of his destiny and purpose, leads to his ultimate rejection?

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STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT DELIVERED BY THE ROSHEI
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PARSHAT TOLDOT
SICHA OF HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL SHLIT" A

(Summarized by Rav Eliyahu Blumenzweig)

"AVRAHAM BEGOT YITZCHAK"

"Avraham begot Yitzchak' - for the scoffers in that generation said, 'Sarah became pregnant from Avimelekh...' so God made Yitzchak's face look similar to that of Avraham..." (Rashi, Bereishit 25:19).

Rashi's words prompt us to ask why God must 'go out of His way', as it were, and perform a special action just because of the scoffers of the day. Is it really necessary for an extra verse to be added into the Torah just because of these scoffers?

The problem of childlessness is a theme among all the patriarchs - Avraham, Yitzchak, and even Yaakov, in the case of his wife Rachel. Parallel to this physical childlessness, a type of spiritual barrenness also existed.

Avraham taught belief in the Creator to the nations and all those around him. This belief was pure, devoid of any type of anthropomorphism or physicality, and demanded ideals of charity and justice that were beyond anything that the nations had previously known or believed.

In response, those around him acknowledged that his faith was genuine, but considered it too lofty and pure, and they doubted the possibility that future generations would follow in his path and continue the same pure faith. Humanity, to their minds, was incapable of this, and therefore should continue to worship idols, out of an inability to reach the level of Avraham.

This was, in fact, a spiritual barrenness - an inability to create a nation that would have genuine and pure faith. Avraham and his descendants waged a constant battle to prove that indeed there could be a continuity of faith, and that there was a nation capable of continually following the path of truth.

It was Avraham who revealed the attribute of 'chesed', the influencing of others and calling on God's name, to the world. Yitzchak would later reveal the attribute of 'yirah' - the withdrawal and silence inherent in Divine service. But even if Avraham was no longer childless in the physical sense, can we really say that from a spiritual point of view he had a successor who would continue in his faith, or had his son left his path and created a new and innovative path of his own? Yitzchak was truly unlike Avraham, the influencer. He was withdrawn and introverted. Perhaps we might be led to imagine that Sarah had indeed become pregnant from Avimelekh, and not from Avraham!

For this reason, God made Yitzchak's face appear similar to Avraham's, in order to make it clear that Yitzchak's faith was the same as his, and that Yitzchak was indeed following in his father's way. Rather than creating a new path, he was simply adding a new track to the existing one. While Yitzchak truly 'dug new wells', these were the same wells which Avraham his father had dug before him, and he called them by the same names which his father had used.

"Avraham begot Yitzchak" teaches us that there is continuity; there is a nation which walks in the lofty paths of Avraham. It teaches us that Yitzchak is indeed Avraham's son, continuing in his path, adding scope and renewal.

(Originally delivered on Leil Shabbat Parashat Toldot 5732. Translated by Kaeren Fish.)

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Subject: Rabbi Frand on Parshas Toldos

- "RavFrand" List - Rabbi Frand on Parshas Toldos -

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion: Tape # 31, The Marrying of Relatives. Good Shabbos!

Parshas Toldos:

Rivka, Fearing A Schizophrenic Child Prefers Having "Opposite" Twins

The verse [Bereshis 25:22] tells us that during Rivka's pregnancy "...the children clashed inside her", she could not understand why this was happening to her; and she went to seek out a message from Hashem.

Rash"i brings the famous Chaza"l that when Rivka would pass the House of Learning (of Shem and Ever) a child would make a move to come out and when she would pass the House of Idolatry again a child would make a move to come out. Rivka couldn't understand what was going on. She was perplexed to the extent that she said, "If this is the case, why should I keep on living?" (Im ken, lama zeh anochi).

Then, she was told by G-d "Two nations are in your womb..." and this satisfied her.

Two questions require clarification:

First of all, why was Rivka so disturbed by the fact that she felt a child trying to come out both by the House of Learning and by the House of Idolatry?

In other words... Rivka was barren. We understand the trauma that women have today when they are childless. In those times, it was an even more severe situation. Is it then logical for a woman who was barren for many years until she finally became pregnant to feel that life is not worth living, just because she experienced something she could not understand regarding her pregnancy? What was so extraordinary that caused her to say, "If this is the case, I don't want to have a baby?"

Second of all, why was Rivka satisfied with the answer "Two nations are in your womb...?"

The Menachem Zion gives an interpretation which answers both questions. He says that what bothered Rivka was the fact that she assumed that it was one child with a split personality. To have a child that would have an inclination to go to the House of Idolatry -- by itself -- would be a problem, but it would be a problem we could perhaps solve. But to have the same child wanting to go to both the House of Idolatry and the House of Study (Beis HaMedrash) -- that is a far more serious problem. That warrants a `Lama Zeh Anochi'. That's why hearing that it was two different children pacified her.

Eliyahu at Mount Carmel chastised the Jewish people [Kings I 18:21] "How long will you waver between two opposing sides?" One day it's Hashem; one day it's the Ba'al. Make up your minds. Show us your true colors. But enough of this "wishy-washy-ness" and lack of commitment to anything.

That is precisely what originally bothered Rivka. Hearing, however, that she was to be a mother, not of a dual personality child, but of dual personality children, she felt relieved, knowing that she would be able somehow to handle the situation.

Medrash Relates Two Goats of Blessings with Two Goats of Yom Kippur

One of the most difficult chapters in the Bible is the story of the "Blessings" recorded in this week's parsha.

We all know the story: Yitzchak wanted to give the Blessings to Esav; Ya'akov, on the advice of his mother, disguised himself as his brother and thereby grabbed these Blessings for himself.

There is an amazing Medrash on the verse [27:9] where Rivka tells Ya'akov "...Go to the sheep and take two choice young kids..." (shnei gedayeiv izim tovim).

The Medrash states "These little goats will be good for you and good for your children" (Tovim lecha, u'levanecha). They will be good for you, because through them you will gain the Blessings and they will be good for your children because through (future goats symbolized by) these two goats, they will attain Atonement before G-d on Yom Kippur. [Referring to the two goats that were part of the Service in the Beis HaMikdash on Yom Kippur: The "Goat To Hashem" and the "Goat To Azazel"].

The obvious question is what do these two goats have to do with the goats of Yom Kippur? The Netziv says on this week's parsha, there is no characteristic which is entirely good or entirely evil. Even characteristics which we normally associate with evil (anger, jealousy, falsehood, etc.) all have a time and a place. Just as certain normally toxic substances can serve medicinal purposes so too is the case with "evil" characteristics. Even a "poison" when administered under the right circumstances in the right amount under a doctor's supervision can be a Sam Chayim (an elixir of life). Radiation is normally bad; but for cancer treatment, given in the right way, radiation itself can be life-saving.

The Netziv says likewise, normally Sheker (falsehood) is terrible. The Seal of G-d is Truth. G-d hates falsehood. Jacob's most prominent

characteristic was his honesty (Titen Emes L'Yaakov). But there was a time for Sheker. This time -- based on his mother's advice and urging -- was the time for Sheker. Under the right circumstances and supervised by the right person, Sheker was surgically used in a proper way.

Rivka was a prophetess in her own right. This is not something we can decide on our own. But when there is a Prophet or a Gadol who tells us how to use one of these things, sometimes even Sheker can be good.

This too is the lesson of the two goats of Yom Kippur. On Yom Kippur the Kohen Gadol offers a "Goat To G-d" and a "Goat to Azazel". Kabbalistic works explain that the sacrifice to Azazel is an offering to the Powers of Tum'ah (impurity) in the world.

Normally, we don't worship and we give no credence to Powers of Tum'ah in the world. But the Torah says that one day a year, under the guidance of none less than the Ribbono Shel Olam himself, we are told to give an offering to the Powers of Tuma'ah -- the `Goat To Azazel'.

This is the connection of the two goats of Ya'akov and the two goats of Yom Kippur. Just as Ya'akov was instructed to use the characteristic of Sheker, the antithesis of his whole personality, we too, under the right circumstances, can bring a `Goat To Azazel' on Yom Kippur and gain atonement.

The Netziv goes on to say that Sheker can only be used out of pure motives (l'shem shamayim) and even Ya'akov our Patriarch did not come out of this incident unscathed. The Netziv points out that when Esav heard that his Brochos were stolen, he let out a great and bitter cry [27:34]. Chaza"l say we paid for the anguished cry of pain that Ya'akov caused Esav many years later in Shushan when Mordechai let out an anguished cry of pain [Esther 4:1].

The Netziv asks, if -- as we see from this Chaza"l -- for every anguish we cause in this world, we have to pay in corresponding anguish, why did we not have to pay for the anguish Ya'akov caused Yitzchak -- as it says "He trembled a very great trembling" [27:33]?

The Netziv answers that Sheker can sometimes be used properly, and what Ya'akov did under his mother's guidance was correct and proper. For any pain caused in an action that is 100% for the Sake of Heaven, no payment is due. However, the Netziv says, Ya'akov Avinu must have had the slightest twinge of pleasure and satisfaction in outfoxing his brother Esav which made his action something slightly less than 100% L'Shem Shamayim.

For the trembling he caused his father, Ya'akov felt bad. He derived nothing from that and there was no need for payment. However, for the slight satisfaction he must have felt in beating Esav to the Brochos, payment was due and the debt was payed in the time of the Purim story.

The Chofetz Chaim rules in the Laws of Lashon Hara, that in certain circumstances, it is permitted to speak Lashon Hara. If one is asked advice about a shidduch (under the circumstances layed down by the Chofetz Chaim) one is allowed to say (true) bad things about a prospective shidduch. A Rosh Yeshiva is allowed to call in a Bochor and say "What's going on with your room-mate?" The Bochor cannot refuse to report on the grounds that it is Lashon Hara. The Chofetz Chaim says that under these circumstances, you can do the "Aveira L'shem Shamayim".

However, the Chofetz Chaim qualifies this by saying that if the Bochor happens to dislike his room-mate or if one happens to dislike the person about whom a shidduch is being discussed, one cannot "take advantage" of the heter to speak Lashon Hara about the person. In this case, it would be forbidden. If one is doing an "Aveira L'Shem Shamayim," it has to be 100% for the Sake of Heaven. If there is even an iota of personal motive or satisfaction to be gained from this sin, it is certainly prohibited.

Personalities & Sources:

Netziv -- R. Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin (1817-1893); Rosh Yeshiva of the famous Volozhin Yeshiva in Lithuania; wrote Ha'amek Davar commentary on Chumash.

Chofetz Chaim -- R. Yisrael Meir HaKohen of Radin (1838-1933).
Author of many basic works on Ethics & Halacha including Chofetz Chaim on laws of Slander and Gossip.

Glossary

Chaza"l -- (Chachameinu zichronum L'bracha) Our Sages of Blessed Memory

Brochos -- Blessings

Titen Emes L'Yaakov -- "Give Truth to Jacob"

shidduch -- proposed match (usually marriage)

Rosh Yeshiva -- Head of a Talmudical Academy

bochor -- (young) unmarried (Yeshiva) student

lashon hara -- (literally bad tongue) gossip, slander

Aveira L'Shem Shamayim -- a sin for the Sake of Heaven

Transcribed by David Twersky; Seattle, Washington twerskyd@scn.org

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion (#31). The corresponding halachic portion for tape #31 is: The Marrying of Relatives. The other halachic portions for Toldos from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:

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- Tape # 259 - "Sorfin Al Hachazakos" The Concept of Chazaka in Halacha
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* TORAH WEEKLY *

Highlights of the Weekly Torah Portion
with "Sing, My Soul!" thoughts on Shabbos Zemiros
Parshas Toldos
For the week ending 2 Kislev 5756
24 & 25 November 1995

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Summary

After twenty years of marriage without children, Yitzchak's prayers to Hashem are answered and Rivka conceives twins, Esav and Yaakov. The pregnancy is extremely painful. Hashem reveals to Rivka that the suffering is a microcosmic prelude to the world-wide conflict that will rage between the two great nations descended from these twins -- Rome and Israel. Esav is born first, and then Yaakov, holding onto Esav's heel. As they grow up, the contrast between the twins becomes apparent: Esav is a hunter, a man of the field, of the physical world, whereas Yaakov sits in the tents of Torah developing his soul. On the day of the funeral of their grandfather Avraham, Yaakov is cooking lentil soup, the traditional mourner's meal. Esav rushes in, ravenous from a hard day's hunting, and sells his birthright (and its concomitant spiritual responsibilities) for a bowl of soup, clearly demonstrating his unworthiness for the position of the firstborn. Yitzchak tries to escape to Egypt when a famine strikes Canaan, but Hashem reminds him that because of the Akeida (where he was offered up as a sacrifice) he has become holy and must remain in the Holy Land.

Instead he relocates to Gerar in the land of the Plishtim, where, to protect Rivka, he has to say that she is his sister. Yitzchak arouses jealousy when he becomes immensely wealthy, and Avimelech the king asks him to leave. Yitzchak re-digs three wells dug by his father, prophetically alluding to the three Batei Mikdash (Temples) which will be built in the future. Avimelech, seeing the blessings that Hashem has bestowed on Yitzchak, makes a treaty with him. When Yitzchak senses the end of his days approaching, he summons Esav to give Esav his blessings. Rivka, acting on a prophetic command that the blessings must go to Yaakov, arranges for Yaakov to impersonate his brother and receive the blessings. When Esav in a rage of frustration complains to his father that his brother has bought his birthright, Yitzchak realizes that the birthright has been bestowed correctly on Yaakov who has valued its responsibilities rather than its privileges, and confirms the blessings he has given. Esav vows to kill his brother, and so Rivka sends Yaakov to her brother Lavan where he may find a suitable wife.

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Commentaries

The Voice
 "The voice is the voice of Yaakov, and the hands are the hands of Esav" (26:22).
 The Voice is given to Yaakov. And the Hands, to Esav. The internal power which emanates from the heart -- that's the Voice. The external power of action -- the Hands. But these Hands are not satisfied just to dominate the physical world. They strive constantly to subjugate the Voice. The Hands of Esav thrust themselves into the insides of Yaakov; coarse Hands delving into the depths of the neshama; setting up an idol in the inner sanctuary of the Jewish soul. Superficiality swelling up and suffusing the innermost chambers of the heart. The Hands strangling the Voice; The Voice of prayer without the feeling of the heart; A mitzvah done mechanically -- the Hands are working. And the Voice grows quieter and quieter...
 But in spite of this, the Voice is the voice of Yaakov, destined to rise up, to dominate and elevate the Hands, to purify them and make them holy. When Yitzchak said that the voice was "the voice of Yaakov and the hands were the hands of Esav," he thought that it was Esav who was in front of him, and that Esav had acquired the voice of Yaakov -- that the Voice had sanctified and elevated Esav. The truth of the matter was that Esav had remained unchanged in his evil, while it was Yaakov who stood before him, garbed in the goatskin hides of Esav. For the Voice -- the voice of Yaakov -- permeates to the outermost layer of its skin, even to the very end of the material world.
 (Adapted from Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin - L'Torah U'L'Moadim)

Teach Your Children Well
 "And these are the generations of Yitzchak, son of Avraham. Avraham fathered Yitzchak" (25:19).
 It may be true that example is a powerful educator. But, in the education of one's children, it should not be relied on exclusively. The assumption that children will naturally want to imitate the positive attributes of their parents can never replace constant attention and clear direction. The Torah tells us that Avraham fathered Yitzchak, to emphasize that Yitzchak was not just the product of exposure to his father's success in bringing the world to recognize Hashem, but Avraham actively labored to implant love and recognition of Hashem in Yitzchak's heart.
 (Adapted from Drash Moshe)

Two's a Crowd
 "The children agitated inside her" (25:22).
 During her pregnancy, whenever Rivka passed by the yeshiva of Shem and Ever, Yaakov struggled to be born, and when she passed a place of idolatry, it was Esav who tried to leave. One can understand why it was that Esav was anxious to leave his mother's womb, for he could find no idolatry there; but why did Yaakov want to leave? After all, as the Talmud teaches us (Nidah 30), during pregnancy, an angel teaches the fetus the entire Torah. Why would Yaakov want to leave his angelic teacher? The answer is simple: You can have the best rebbe in the world, but if you've got a bad room-mate -- you've got to get out!
 (Rashi, Mayana Shel Torah)

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Haftorah: Malachi 1:1-2:7

Pass the Salmon
 "You say `Behold! It is so burdensome!' And you sadden Him...and you bring stolen, lame and sick animals... for an offering..." (1:13).

Things don't change. How much care and attention we put into our physical existence -- our clothes, cars, furniture and food! But to spend an extra ten or twenty dollars on a first-class mezuzah...well the other one is kosher isn't it? The Rambam writes that beyond the requirement to offer only blemish-free animals on the mizbeach (holy altar), we are obliged to give our very best to Hashem. When Bnei Yisrael were righteous, they imported choice rams from Moav for offerings, special lambs from Chevron, as well as the best doves. Now, when we import, it's Smoked Salmon from Scotland, and that's to go on the mizbeach of our own appetites!
 (Based on The Midrash Says)

ffffffffffffffffffff Sing, My Soul!
 Insights into the Zemiros sung at the Shabbos table throughout the generations.

Yom Shabbos Kodesh - "Holy Sabbath Day..."

"Meat, wine and fish -- no delights shall be missing... Yosef cut open a fish and found a jewel in its flesh"

"Yosef Mokir Shabbos" earned his title, say our Sages (Masechta Shabbos 119) because of the extraordinary fashion in which he honored the Sabbath. Stargazers informed his wealthy gentile neighbor that all of his riches were fated to go over to Yosef. To insure himself against such a fate he sold all of his possessions and bought a precious jewel which he wore in his turban. While crossing a bridge a strong wind blew off the turban and when the jewel fell into the water below it was swallowed by a fish. The fish was caught and brought to market just before Shabbos when there were no customers around. The fisherman was directed to Yosef who was renowned for buying whatever would add honor to the Sabbath. When Yosef cut open the fish he discovered the jewel and became a wealthy man in fulfillment of the maxim: "Shabbos repays the one who lends it money."

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Subject: Parshas Toldos-Kiddush

HALACHA FOR 5756

SELECTED HALACHOS RELATING TO PARSHAS TOLDOS

By Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

A discussion of Halachic topics related to the Parsha of the week. For final rulings, consult your Rav.

Kiddush at home after a Kiddush in Shul

QUESTION: Is one required to make Kiddush at home if he has already recited or heard Kiddush in Shul (e.g. at a Bar Mitzvah)?

DISCUSSION: Normally, Kiddush that is recited at Shul suffices. One need not repeat Kiddush at home. Although the Halacha is that Kiddush must be said where the meal is eaten, most authorities hold that the Mezonos eaten at a Kiddush are considered a Seuda for this purpose. [An exception is the view of the G"ra, who holds that Kiddush can be made only over bread(1).] There are, however, several crucial points to bear in mind:

At least a K'zayis of Mezonos must be eaten within a span of 3-4 minutes. A Mezonos kugel is considered like cake in regard to this Halacha(2).

One who has not eaten a K'zayis of cake at a Kiddush, must repeat the Kiddush at home before his meal.

There are Poskim(3) who hold that even Le'chatchilla one may eat fruit or Shehakol items after Kiddush is made if there is no cake available. But, then, Kiddush must be repeated at home before the meal. Other Poskim(4) allow this practice only under special circumstances, such as the case of a person who is weak and needs to eat.

Tasting the wine at a Kiddush

QUESTION: Must every person who listens to Kiddush drink some wine in order to fulfill the Mitzvah of Kiddush?

DISCUSSION: There is no need for anybody but for the person who makes Kiddush to taste the wine. As long as the listener intended to fulfill the Mitzvah of Kiddush, and he heard every word of the Bracha, he has fulfilled the Mitzvah. It is, however, considered a Mitzvah Min Hamuvchar to partake of the Kiddush cup. The following, though, needs to be noted:

The Bracha of Borei Pri Ha'gefen automatically includes any beverage which is on the table or which will be brought to the table during the Kiddush. No She'hakol is recited on soda or juice, etc. that will be drunk during the Kiddush.

Even those who did not actually recite Borei Pri Ha'gefen but heard Kiddush from another person, do not recite a She'hakol on other beverages. This rule only applies if one drank a Mlo Lugmuv (a cheek-full, about an ounce) of wine or grape juice.

If one drank less than a Mlo Lugmuv of wine or grape juice, and wishes to drink another beverage, it is questionable if he needs to recite a She'hakol on the other beverage . A possible solution is to ask someone else to make a She'hakol for him, or to make the Sh'hakol on an item of food(5).

Even one who has tasted less than a Mlo Lugmuv of wine should include Al Ha'gefen when he recites Al Hamichya over cake(6). Other Poskim oppose this ruling(7).

---->Relation to the Parsha<----

This week's parsha discusses the birth and raising of Yaakov and Esav. Part of the joy of having a son is celebrating various simchas on Shabbos. As such, the issue of kiddush and the associating Halachos often arises.

This issue of Halacha is sponsored L'zchus Haya'el Doniel Meir ben Hinda.

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FOOTNOTES:

- 1 His view is quoted by the Biur Halacha 273:5 without comment.
- 2 Shmiras Shabbos Khilchasa 54:22.
- 3 Igros Moshe OC 4:63.
- 4 Mishnah Berurah 273:26
- 5 Mishna Berurah 174:3 and Biur Halacha ibid.
- 6 Igros Moshe OC 2:109.
- 7 Harav S.Z. Auerbach quoted in Shmiras Shabbos Khilchasa 54 fn 71.

From: "kollel@mcs.com"

To: CSHULMAN, " haftorah@torah.org"
Date: 11/22/95 5:46pm
Subject: Weekly Haftorah Portion

MESSAGE FROM THE HAFTORAH
PARSHAS TOLDOS
Malachi 1

This week's Haftorah warns the Jewish people to maintain a proper relationship with Hashem. Although we enjoy a special closeness with Him, we are reminded never to take advantage of it. The prophet Malachi addresses the Jewish people shortly after their return from the Babylonian exile and admonishes them for abusing their privilege of sacrificing in the Temple. Hashem says, "I love you...but if I am your father, where is My honor? The kohanim disgrace My name by referring to My altar with disrespect." Rashi explains that the kohanim failed to appreciate the privilege of sacrificing in Hashem's sanctuary. The Jews had finally merited their return to Hashem and His land but this favor was soon forgotten. They became so accustomed to the Temple service that they began relating to sacrificial portions as if they were ordinary meals. If small portions were distributed due to the abundance of kohanim the response of the kohanim was one of great disrespect. Even the actual sacrifices were treated lightly and periodically they would offer lame or sick animals on Hashem's altar, demonstrating great insensitivity towards their sacred privilege.

The prophet Malachi reminds them of the illustrious era which preceded them.

The kohanim in earlier generations had the proper attitude towards the service of Hashem and conducted themselves with true reverence. Hashem says about them, "My treaty, life and peace was with him, and I gave him (reason for) reverence and he revered Me. And before My name he was humbled." These passages refer to Aharon, the earliest kohain to serve in the Sanctuary. They speak of a man so sacred that he was granted permission to enter the Holy of Holies. And yet he always maintained a true sense of humility and displayed proper reverence whenever he entered Hashem's private quarters. The Gaon of Vilna reveals to us that Aharon's relationship was so unique that he was actually permitted to enter the Holy of Holies throughout the entire year, given certain sacrificial conditions. This special closeness never affected Aharon Hakohain and he never became overly comfortable with Hashem and always maintained the proper reverence.

Interestingly, Malachi also draws our attention to the stark contrast between our relationship with Hashem and that of the nations of the world. The non-Jews' relationship with Hashem is expressed as one of respect and reverence. Malachi says, "For from the east to the west My (Hashem's) name is exalted amongst the nations....But you (the Jewish people) profane it by saying that the altar of Hashem is a disgrace."

The Radak explains that all the nations recognize Hashem, and those who worship idols nonetheless respectfully call Him the G-d of the gods. They afford Hashem the highest title and honor and never disgrace Him. Because they direct their energies towards strange powers and false deities, and do not approach Hashem directly, this relationship results in a sincere respect and reverence for Hashem and allows Hashem to remain exalted in their eyes. Their relationship with Him is a distant one which leaves no room for disgrace. The Jewish people, on the other hand, enjoy a very close

illustrate this point.

Parshat Toldot recounts the entire career of Yitzchak. Avraham's life and deeds are described in Lekh Lekha and Va-yeira in a series of incidents involving heroism, devotion, sacrifice and moral excellence, and this is continued into Chayei Sara. Yaacov's life is detailed from Va-yeitze until the end of Bereishit (viewing the struggle of Yosef and his brothers as belonging to the life of Yaacov - how the mission is passed on - parallel to Chayei Sara for Avraham and the second half of Toldot for Yitzchak). Yitzchak's life, his position in the trilogy of Avot, is completely encapsulated in one Parsha - Toldot. And what did Yitzchak actually do in this Parsha, other than having children and, eventually sending them on their way? He dug wells! The only incident from Yitzchak's career described in the Torah is that he dug wells in Gerar. No drama, no great deeds of heroism, no struggle, no journeys. The last point is especially indicative. Travel and wandering is a hallmark of Avraham and Yaacov. Avraham not only makes the long journey to Eretz Yisrael, he continually moves about in Eretz Yisrael, as well as a trip to Egypt. Yaacov makes the round trip to Aram and is associated with several different places in Eretz Yisrael, completing his life in Egypt. Yitzchak's life is circumscribed by Gerar on the one side and the desert beyond Chevron on the other. The picture we receive is a sedentary one, uneventful, quiescent, passive. The Torah had nothing much to tell, it seems. Why then, is Yitzchak an 'av,' a father, an archetype? An archetype of what?

Let us begin by focusing on Yitzchak's blindness. "When Yitzchak grew old, his eyes weakened from seeing" (27,1). That Yitzchak had difficulty seeing is undoubted - the deception of Yaacov in order to obtain the berakhot depends on it. Nonetheless, it is tempting to interpret his blindness as not only physical but a perceptual, spiritual inability to distinguish; for instance, to distinguish between Yaacov and Eisav, and not only in the form of their faces. How is it that Yitzchak loved and favored Eisav, when we assume he was unworthy of this preference? The answer is - he was blind, for some reason unperceptive, indiscriminating, and hence easily fooled.

There is one relatively strong indicator of this interpretation, despite its seeming "drush" character. Normally, the Torah introduces a necessary background piece of information not at the beginning of the story but precisely at the point where an explanation is demanded. For instance, although the fact that Sara is barren is clearly part of the background of the visit of the angels to Avraham, only when Sara is about to laugh at their announcement of the impending birth of Yitzchak does the Torah write, "And Avraham and Sara were old...." This is injected in the middle of the story and to modern ears sounds like an interruption. This is however standard practice in the Torah. (See also, "And Rivka had a brother...." [Ber. 24,29]). In our case, the story begins with a statement that Yitzchak was blind and continues by

stating that he called for Eisav to come. If the significance of Yitzchak's blindness is to explain how Yaacov could fool him, this statement need not appear before v. 5. On the contrary, its actual location indicates that his blindness is part of the explanation why he sent for Eisav, and from that it is one more step to conclude that we are dealing with lack of discernment rather than just physical blindness.

This principle, that explanatory material explains the nearest verse, is behind the midrashic principle of "dorshin semuchin" - proximity is a source of meaning. Naturally, the explanations need not be mutually exclusive. Not only is it possible that Yitzchak was blind in both ways, but a connection may be seen between the two. Yitzchak's physical blindness symbolizes and is reflected in his mental lack of discernment - the physical state of a Biblical tzaddik mirrors his spiritual state.

Why then was Yitzchak blind, unperceptive, not attuned to the world about him. The midrash (Bereishit Rabba 65,9) cites several explanations, some of which are quoted by Rashi. Let us examine two of them.

The midrash traces Yitzchak's blindness to something he saw during the akeida. This approach is based on the statement, "his eyes were weakened from seeing." The latter phrase, "from seeing," is unnecessary and the midrash chooses to understand it as causative - "seeing" caused his blindness; rather than modifying - his blindness was of the type which affects seeing. The first explanation is that Yitzchak, while bound on the altar, looked up and saw into the heavens, where the angels were weeping. The tears entered his eyes, seared them and, years later, caused his eventual blindness. An alternate version is that he saw the glory of the celestial throne and this sight alone resulted in blindness. Both these midrashim are clearly referring to spiritual blindness rather than physical blindness. After all, the verse explicitly states that Yitzchak became blind in his old age. Would the searing experience of angel tears have a delayed effect, if we are to understand that they in some way burn? Would the sight of the glory of heaven gradually attack the optic nerve, like a dormant virus, or would it, taking the story literally, burn away the tissues of the eye like a red-hot poker? The midrashim are describing an experience which reorients Yitzchak's perception, a tendency which increases with age and eventually when it becomes totally dominant inwardly, is reflected in his physical blindness as well. But what exactly is the connection between the experience of the akeida and blindness.

I think the explanation of the first midrash is as follows: Angels are routinely used by the midrash to express an objective rational truth, even where God disagrees. For instance, the angels argue against the creation of man because he is completely deceitful - and Truth is the seal of God (BR 8,5). God's answer is to cast Truth down - not an answer which addresses their argument rationally. Similarly, the angels protest the akeida as being "foreign" to God (BR 56,5) - meaning, not in accordance with Divine justice. In our

midrash, the angel's tears express the objective tragedy of the akeida - the world, its spiritual foundations, weep at the sight of a father sacrificing his son. Yitzchak was witness and victim - willing victim but victim nonetheless - of this act. He felt the tears of the angels while looking at his father's face, stern and determined, preparing to sacrifice him. Is it any wonder Yitzchak was unable to reject a son, even Eisav. The akeida, an episode in Avraham's section of Bereishit, was the formative experience of Yitzchak's life. While Avraham was also unwilling to reject Yishmael, he could be persuaded, by Sara, by God. Avraham appeals to God to accept Yishmael (17,18) and the appeal itself indicates he recognized Yishmael's nature. Yaacov, of course, is famous for his willingness to discern and distinguish between his sons, beginning with Yosef and ending with the individualized berakhot - and not always berakhot - to his sons on his deathbed. Yitzchak however is unable to do so, and this is due not to a simple lack of intelligence or insight but to a heightened spiritual awareness of the value of fatherhood and sonship, an overwhelming sense of the tragic fragility of human continuity, of its cosmic significance (the angels are crying) and infinite value. This sensitivity will undoubtedly interfere with the practical side of fatherhood - you can't raise children if you refuse to distinguish between them. But is it not possible that it is nonetheless a crucial part of fatherhood and Yitzchak is an 'av,' a forefather of the Jews, precisely because he exemplified that ideal?

The second explanation of the midrash relates that Yitzchak peered into the heavens, and therefore was blind. Chazal are saying that Yitzchak's eye, following the akeida, was turned inward, or heavenward. Having seen so high, so holy a sight, having been in "that world," he was unable to also see and weigh and consider the problems of "this world." Yitzchak, in other words, was so overwhelmed by spirituality as to be relatively detached from mundane concerns. He was a dreamer, a visionary, contemplative, inward, detached - a "luftmensch" - and that is to sort of disability that blinded him to a clear distinction between Yaacov and Eisav.

The first midrash, while more tightly focused, is not actually presenting a different picture of Yitzchak. Whatever the nature of the cause, the result of the akeida is that Yitzchak's heightened spiritual sensitivity makes him unable to make hard-nosed distinctions in the mundane world. His mind, is directed upward and inward; his field is depth of experience rather than practical living. From where did Chazal derive this picture. Consider the way Rivka maneuvers Yitzchak. It isn't only that she succeeds, both in the case of the berakhot and in arranging for Yaacov to be sent away, but in her apparent inability to approach Yitzchak directly. In his presence, Rivka is unable to confront or persuade. The Netziv traces this back to the story in last week's parasha of Rivka falling off the camel when first meeting Yitzchak. A touching story - but what is its significance? The Netziv explains that Rivka's first impression of Yitzchak, returning from a "walk in the field," which the Netziv believes refers to a spiritual exercise of meditation, was so overwhelming, in its spiritual force and intensity that Rivka could never

overcome the feeling of trepidation and awe in his presence, even when she knew intellectually that she was right concerning a particular matter.

This is indicated even more clearly by the lack of episodes in Yitzchak's biography. Yitzchak did not engage in remodeling his external world; his experiences were inward, contemplative. He is an "av" - this is a necessary and essential ingredient in the development of a full spiritual personality - but there cannot be much to tell. One episode in Yitzchak's life, repeated twice - digging wells - is the metaphor of this activity. Yitzchak doesn't conquer new heights, he deepens the achievements of the past. He not only digs wells in Eretz Yisrael, he re-digs the wells of Avraham. After Avraham who climbed to the pinnacle of Mt. Moriah, spiritual development requires introspection, "la-suach basadeh" (24,63), wandering through the field, digging within; and Yitzchak, in his all-encompassing fixation on the throne of glory, was the one to do that. The great achievements of Avraham will dissipate - the wells will become filled in - if Yitzchak will not return and deepen them, forgoing the advance into new areas in order to solidify what has been gained. His blindness, then, is part and parcel of his fatherhood.

Consider - God could have intervened and told Yitzchak to give the blessing to Yaacov. When Avraham hesitated to banish Yishmael, God told him to do so, for Yitzchak is to be his successor. In Yitzchak's case, God neither cures nor instructs, and his blindness results in the berakha reaching Yaacov by mistake - not despite the blindness but through the blindness. Yaacov receives a berakha in a manner where Yitzchak's blindness is part of the berakha itself. The blindness is not merely a disability; it is the obverse side of Yitzchak's depth, concentration, and single-minded dedication to the holy. Yaacov, whose personality is so different, is a product of his grandfather and father - Yitzchak gives him the "berakha of Avraham" (28,4) - and he serves the God of Avraham and the "pachad" of Yitzchak. Pachad, fear and trembling, awe and retreat, are a necessary part of the integral spiritual personality.

This understanding of Yitzchak's personality, in its one-sided extremeness, is based on Chazal's view of the avot as archetypes, all three of whom are necessary components of Jewish spiritual personality. Chazal understood that to be the deeper 'pshat' of Bereishit - a description of the roots of the People of God rather than a collection of biographies. This approach requires that we search for the significance of each incident in the lives of the avot and relate it to the theme of his life and of Sefer Bereishit, rather than merely, on the first-level of pshat, determine its historical coherence. For that purpose, the midrash is unsurpassed.

Questions and points to ponder:

1. Eli also suffered from "weak eyes" in his old age. (I Samuel 3,2). Is this physical or spiritual? See the Radak. What is the textual indicator in this case to choose

metaphoric blindness?

2. Yaacov also, when blessing his grandsons, had trouble seeing (Bereishit 48,10). In context though, the relationship between his blindness and the berakha, and hence its implications for Yaacov's personality, is the exact opposite of what is claimed for Yitzchak. What is the difference between "weak eyes" (Yitzchak) and "heavy eyes" (Yaacov)?

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Volume III, Number 8 Toldos

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"G-d should give you from the dew of the Heavens, and from the fat of the land..." [27:28] "...behold, from the fat of the land should be your dwelling, and from the dew of Heaven above..." [27:39]

As we see, there is a strong similarity between this section of the blessing

given to Yaakov, and that given to Esav his brother. Indeed, we see that there is wealth given to Yaakov, and wealth given to Esav - there are rich and poor both among Jews and non-Jews.

At the same time, these verses contain an important difference, one that depends upon the different brothers. We know that earlier in the week's reading, Esav sold his birthright - a position of spiritual leadership. The spiritual heritage of Avraham and Yitzhak was therefore given over to Yaakov and his descendants. Yaakov was the one who was responsible for offering sacrifices to G-d, and it was his descendants who would build the Temple - even though that Temple would be "a House of Prayer for all Nations."

It was critical that he who held the birthright receive the first blessing. The blessing which Yitzchak gave to Esav gave him wealth - "from the fat of the land should be your dwelling." Why is Bill Gates the richest man in America? Because it was his "Mazel" to receive the best part of this blessing. Others, of course, don't share his Mazel!

The blessing given to Yaakov does not merely give wealth. Rather, it says that "G-d should give you from the dew of Heaven..." First it mentions G-d, and then Heaven, and only then the earth. In addition, the name used here is Elokim, G-d, rather than HaShem (often translated 'the L-rd').

In Hebrew, Elokim can mean a leader, or even an idolatrous god. The name which we use only in prayer, and otherwise refer to as HaShem ("the Name"), is the "personal" name of G-d - similar to "The President" vs. "Bill Clinton." The Midrash tells us that the use of Elokim vs. HaShem can often indicate a balance between justice and mercy. This makes sense - "the President" is a great deal more formal than "Bill," while the latter indicates a close relationship.

So Rashi explains that the use of "Elokim" in this case is quite deliberate: with judgement, meaning that if it is appropriate for him he will be given wealth, and if not, not. Concerning Esav, the promise is that he will be given wealth independent of whether he is good or evil.

We might think that this means only righteous Jews should be blessed - but we see that this is not true. The Chofetz Chaim explains that the intent here is not that _good_ people be given wealth, but those for whom there is a spiritual _benefit_ be given wealth. What does Rashi mean that it is "appropriate" for a certain person to receive money? The answer is, whether it is spiritually beneficial.

We know that "the righteous of all nations will receive a share in the World to Come" - everyone can be spiritual, and come close to G-d. Jews, on the other hand, are pushed. Everything that happens to a Jew is intended to direct him or her to G-d - even the number of dollars in the bank depends upon spiritual factors! In the '70s, American cults were filled with Jews - and even today, representatives of many cults say that half of their adherents are Jews [see Henschel Teller, "Give Peace a Chance"].

Why? Because Jews are "pushed" towards meaning and spirituality. There is no question that non-Jews can be spiritual, and can gain a share in the World to Come. Perhaps the reason that Jews are asked to do more, is because we have the wind at our backs...

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Please do not send mail to the various teachers, asking them to remove your address. They are performing a wonderful service by giving these classes, and are generally very busy with their activities outside Project Genesis. Your help (and consideration!) is much appreciated.

TRAVEL ANNOUNCEMENT: I will be in the Palo Alto region from December 21-28, one month from now, as mentioned a few weeks back. I will be available to speak - the topic that interests most people (especially in Silicon Valley) is "Judaism on the Information Superhighway." I've already received several inquiries, so please write now so that we can confirm a date. I am also very interested in meeting informally with subscribers, so please don't hesitate to contact me at menken@torah.org.

Rabbi Shaya Karlinsky, Dean of the Darche Noam Institutions (and the teacher of our MAHARAL class in Pirkei Avos, the Sayings of the Fathers), will be in England from Nov. 27 through Dec. 4. He will be giving classes and lectures in Leeds (Nov. 27), Manchester (Nov. 28-29), Cambridge (Nov. 29), and London (Nov. 30 - Dec. 4). For more information about these shiurim, or to meet with Rabbi Karlinsky about studying at the Darche Noam Institutions, contact Gerald Seymour at 181-950-4090.

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IF YOU'VE BEEN ON THE NET - you may know that Rabbi Yaacov Haber was on the Net before there was an InterNet, and was posting to the Jewish newsgroup before there was a soc.culture.jewish. Rabbi Haber's Divrei Torah, which can still be found on the Net today, were originally delivered on net.religion.jewish as early as 1986.

Rabbi Haber now has a tape series called "The Six Greatest Medieval Jewish Philosophers: Why Judaism wouldn't be the same without them." He covers the Rambam [Maimonides], Rav Moshe Chaim Luzzato, Rav Moshe Cordovara, the Vilna Gaon and Rav Tzadok HaCohen, explaining each one and his contribution. The

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QUOTE OF THE WEEK: "I think you should advertise yourselves. This is a great project and more people should know about it."

Thanks! It's time to reinstitute the Quote of the Week, and this is a beautiful way to restart.

THANKS (and apologies) to all those who have been waiting so patiently for a package from us... there have been a series of mishaps and delays, and yet I hope to have "books in hand" by December 10.

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Good Shabbos,

R. Yaakov Menken

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ZTL over many years.

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Shiur HaRav on Parshas Toldos

"And Yitzchok was forty years old when he married Rivka..." (Bereishis 22:20). Rashi explains that Yitzchok was 37 years old at the time of the Akeida. At the conclusion of the Akeida the news was received of the birth of Rivka. He waited until she was three years old and then married her. Rabbi Soleveitchik explained the reason for this seemingly long delay in marrying:

Yitzchok was the first of the Avos to be Kodosh M'rechem: holy from the time of birth (NOTE: The Rav did not offer a specific source for this statement). This Kedushah was that of an intended Korbon. From the time of his birth Yitzchok was intended to be a Korbon Olah and this was the mission which he had to fulfill. Until this mission was completed Yitzchok could not marry, have children, or engage in any other worldly pursuit, since to do so would have been Me'ilah Bekodoshim-improper use of an intended korbon. Just as Yitzchok could not profane himself with the mundane, likewise Avrohom could not send Eliezer to find Yitzchok a wife because to take a wife would have been me'ilah bekodoshim. Once the Akeida was accomplished, Yitzchok acquired the status of a "Dovor Shena'asis Mitzvos"-property of Hekdesh whose Mitzva had already been completed. For such property, the prohibition of Me'ila no longer applies and hence Yitzchok could marry.

(c) Dr. Israel Rivkin, Gershon Dubin and Josh Rapps.
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