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[shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org](mailto:shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org) date: Thu, Nov 20, 2014 at 6:08 PM

**Families of the Four Har Nof Terror Victims Make Communal Request**

The widows of the four Har Nof synagogue terror attack victims issued a letter calling for the coming shabbat as a day of ahavat chinam ( loving others freely without judgement). See a translation and the original letter in Hebrew below:

We turn to acheinu Bnei Yisrael wherever they may be. Let us all come together to increase the rachamei Shomayim shown to us! Let us all accept upon ourselves that we will increase love and brotherhood – between each person and his fellow, between community and community, between major group and major group.

Our request is that every individual should see to it to accept upon himself on Erev Shabbos Parshas Toldos, to sanctify this coming Shabbos as a day of ahavas chinam. It should be a day that we refrain from all kinds of divisive conversation, lashon hora, and rechilus.

This will be a great uplift to the souls of the heads of our families who were slaughtered for the holiness of His Holy Name.

May Hashem look from above, see our affliction, wipe away our tears, and say, "Enough!" to our sorrow. May we merit to see the arrival of Moshiach Tzidkeinu, speedily in our days – Amen, Amen.

Signed with a broken and crushed heart: Chayah Levine and family Breina Goldberg and family Yaakovah Kupinsky and family Bashi Twersky and family

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from: Aish.com <[newsletterserver@aish.com](mailto:newsletterserver@aish.com)> date: Wed, Nov 19, 2014 at 12:05 PM subject: TERROR IN JERUSALEM

**Fighting for Life in Har Nof  
By Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller**

Dear Friends,

Yesterday at about 7am my daughter Miri called. "Mordechai just came home from shul. He said that Arabs came in and are shooting, and that a man with an axe is hitting everyone. Some of the people threw chairs at them, but it didn't help". The twelve year old had hit the floor along with everyone else

when the bullets began to fly. He was fully aware of what was going on, and what it meant.

He somehow found the courage to let go of his father's hand, crawl towards the exit and break into a run. Some of you know Miri and her family. She has had some of you over for Shabbos and holidays, and others sleeping in one of her kid's bedrooms when the crowd at my house gets too big to accommodate sanely. Mordechai is blonde, freckled, and a soft spoken somewhat introverted and studious boy, much like his father, Shmuli. He is not Huck Finn, and the courage he found at those moments were a gift straight from G-d. By the time he finished telling Miri what happened, sirens from Hatzalah ambulances, police cars, and Magen David could be heard telling her that there were casualties.

"Where's Shmuli" was the thought that entered her mind again and again as the seconds which felt like hours began to tick. She called me and said, "Say Tehillim. There is shooting in Bnei Torah". I began to say the ancient prayers, stopped myself and called Rabbi Weidan, and told him what was happening. I then began the Tehillim again, knocked on my neighbor's door and told her to do the same. Chani called and told me to look at the news to see what was really happening. Nothing was reported as yet. Of course not. It was only 7:10.

I realized that the whether or not the attack was over, that no one as yet knew whether the murderers escaped. I called again, asking that everything be done to see that no one leaves the campus, and then called Miri. Thank G-d she had the sense to stay indoors and not run to the besieged synagogue. When Mordechai came home, the shooting was still happening. By 7:20we both realized that if she didn't hear from Shmuli, something was very wrong. The police and other services had no information as yet to give to the public, but a family friend who had seen the terror with his own eyes, said that Shmuli had been taken to Haddassah EIn Karem. When Mordechai let go of his hand, he instinctively ran after the child placing himself in the sight of the terrorists. One of them attacked him with his axe, hitting him on the left side of his head, his back and his arm. Somehow he made it to the door.

Josh White, a student of Machon Shlomo was riding down Agassi on his bike. He noticed what he described later as "a lot of confusion" in front of Bnei Torah asked someone what was going on, and surprisingly (for Har Nof) the man answered him in Hebrew! In the midst of what to him was gibberish, he picked up the word Aravim (Arabs) and immediately grasped what was happening. He approached the shul and saw Shmuli who was still aware. The Machon student took of his shirt and stopped the bleeding, a move which may have saved Shmuli's life. The shooting was still happening inside. It was about 7:15! The emergency crew drew back, but because SHmuli was already outside, they evacuated him thus making him the first of the wounded to be taken to Hadassah, another factor in his survival. Before collapsing, he asked where Mordechai was, and when he was told that the boy ran away from the carnage, he said, "Baruch Hashem".

Inside, the terrorists were continuing their "work". When they entered they turned to their left, and immediately cut down Rabbi Twerski and Rav Kalman Levine who were standing in the corner. Reb Kalman was the husband of Chaya, formally Markowitz who was a student and later a madrichah at Neve. Her husband was not a regular attendee of Bnei Torah. He would generally daven in the earliest possible minyan so he could get in a couple of hours of learning before beginning his day. Yesterday he had a question about something he had learned and had gone after davening to Bnei Torah to put the question to its erudite rav, Rabbi Rubin. The question will now only be resolved in the Heavenly Academy. Rev Avraham Goldberg, the third man to be killed is Breina Goldberg's husband. Many of you know Breina as the warm caring efficient secretary cum mother figure at the front desk in the afternoon. I don't as yet know how her husband, or Reb Kupinski the fourth victim met their deaths. The only thing that I know, is that it was brutal and swift. The first policemen to enter were traffic cops who knew what they were facing, and also knew that they were not wearing

protective gear. They entered anyway and together with the forces that came afterwards ended the bloodbath. By 7:30 the murderers were apprehended.

Miri, my daughter Guli, and her husband were in Hadassah. Miri's other kids were watched by relatives and friends for the day. Mordechai was urged to speak about what he saw again and again in order to diminish the damage of the trauma he had undergone. The rest of the family flowed in, saying Tehillim and waiting for updates. The hospital social worker, Aviva, who is blessed with the rare gift of being empathic without being overbearing, and the women of Ezer Mitzion (a volunteer organization) kept us well supplied with food, calming conversation and practical advice.

We were allowed to see Shmuli who was put under anesthesia. We don't know if he heard us or not, but we were talking to him stressing that Mordechai was fine. In the hours before the surgery was done, we found ourselves with Risa Rotman. Her husband, Chaim Yechiel ben Malka, was also attacked, and the extent of his wounds are very serious. Some of you may know Risa (who if I am not mistaken also is an OBG) and those of you whose husbands learned in Ohr Sameach or who recall Reb Meir Shuster who he helped unstintingly for years, may know him as Howie. The policeman who entered first, passed away. May Hashem avenge his blood.

Every day in Eretz Yisrael is a gift and a miracle. I have no pretensions of knowing Hashem's will, but I do know that everything He does is purposeful, and that His compassion that is often hidden from the human eye. Anyone who values human life and reality and the eternal nature of the soul is appalled by the idea of people entering a synagogue and killing people who they never met randomly.

Except for CNN. They reported the entire event as an attack on a mosque.

Except for BBC. They reported that the Israeli police killed two Palestinians (they meant the murderers). The victims of Israeli brutality presumably were going on a stroll through scenic Har Nof when attacked by the racist troops....

Please post the truth to whomever you can reach.

Please please continue saying Tehillim for Shmuel Yerucham ben Baila and the other victims. Daven that Hashem give strength to the five new widows and 24 new orphans. Most of all thank Hashem that we are not Them, and treasure Hashem's Torah and His Land.

Love always,

Tziporah

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from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org> reply-to: shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org date: Thu, Nov 20, 2014 at 6:08 PM

**Reflections from a Har Nof Neighbor  
Rebbetzin Chaya Tavin**

[Chaya Tavin's husband is the regular gabbai at the shul in which the attack occurred.]

November 20, 2014 We heard the ambulances. We heard there was a terrorist attack.

Then we heard it was at our shul down the road.

We got a phone call from Chaya Levine asking my husband to please look at the shul next door to see if Rav Kalman was there. My husband had davened neitz with him just a short time ago—Rav Kalman gave him a hearty “yashar koach” for his duchening, and went back to learn.

My husband came home to get Binyomin Dovid ready for the school bus. You see, Tuesday morning is Abba day—Binyomin Dovid looks forward to Tuesday morning all week. Maybe because Abba puts ketchup on the cheese sandwich, or puts more pretzels in the bag than Ima does, or more salt on the salad. Or maybe because he so loves his Abba and their special morning together.

And because Tuesday is their special day, my husband davens at the neitz minyan next to our house, instead of his regular minyan in Kehillas Bnei Torah. My husband might have gone to his regular minyan anyway. Since he was often the only Kohen, on Tuesdays he would pop in for chazaras HaShatz just to duchen for them. The carnage occurred during chazaras

HaShatz. But Hashem had other plans for my husband. A few months ago a member of the shul, a Kohen, became an aveil (a mourner) and he asked my husband if he could be the regular ba'al tefila.

This Tuesday my husband did not go back to duchen because he knew there would be a Kohen in his minyan. So after neitz at HaGra, he came home from shul.

But Kalman—where was Kalman?

My husband went back to HaGra to look for him. But he had left. Kalman had gone to Rav Rubin's shul to ask the Rav a question. And Kalman did not come home.

We heard names—we heard rumors—we didn't want to believe they were true.

Rav Moshe Twersky, the kind talmid chacham who always made time for those who came to him for guidance and halachic advice, and then taught and learned until late at night. He was the one to whom my husband would turn with questions that came up in the minyan. It was Rav Moshe who said at his son's aufruf that this minyan was like mishpacha.

We had lost a family member.

R' Aryeh Kupinski. R' Aryeh? No- not R' Aryeh? Haven't they suffered enough? When his daughter Chaya died suddenly in her sleep he was mekabel the din with pure deep faith—and went on to be mechazek others. R' Aryeh was always running to help others; always a smile on his face despite constant challenges. R' Aryeh was the one who yelled “you run, I'll fight” using a chair against a gun and a hatchet to buy time so that others could flee. The ultimate chesed.

The names to daven:

Shmuel Yerucham ben Baila. Chaim Yechiel ben Malka. Eitan ben Sarah. Yitzchak ben Chaya.

All still in need of tremendous rachmei shamayim. Please continue to storm the gates of rachamim on their behalf.

Avraham Shmuel ben Sheina. Then the rumors turned to agonizing truth. Avraham Shmuel ben Aharon hy”d. Mr Goldberg. That nice warm smiley gentleman who loved Torah and Torah scholars, and every single Jew. Who learned every morning and only then went to work. My husband would set up a shtender for Mr. Goldberg and he in turn would lay out a siddur for Rav Twersky. That was the kind of minyan it was. It can't be. But it was.

What about Rav Kalman?

We still didn't know for sure – rumors flying—but Rav Kalman was the most alive person in the world. He was the reason many people came to our shul on Simchas Torah—to see Rav Kalman's ecstatic dancing with his beloved Torah.

We should have known if he didn't come home and didn't call something was terribly wrong. But we couldn't believe it could be. And then we heard. The brutal animals shot as they yelled out their vicious war cry. They butchered Rav Kalman as he stood in the hallway absorbed in a sefer; those few seconds gave some of the men in the minyan time to flee out another door. Rav Kalman's last act of ahavas Yisroel was to save the life of his friends.

And now—Rav Moshe הי”ה, Rav Aryeh הי”ה, Rav Avraham הי”ה, Rav Kalman הי”ה are in the Beis Medrash shel maalah—with their beloved Torah.

Between the hope and the tears we spoke. “Chaya, do you remember....”. Binyomin Dovid was a sickly baby with Down Syndrome and a host of medical issues, and I needed chizuk. I made my way to Bnei Brak to see Rebbetzin Kanievsky. I waited outside until it was my turn. I came in to her with a sleeping baby in my arms. Rebbetzin Kanievsky took one look at him and said “you don't know what shmira (protection) you have in your home.”

I thought I understood. Perhaps, I thought, other things would be easier because this would be difficult. But now, almost 13 years later, I understand. Binyomin Dovid was the only reason my husband was not in his minyan that morning. And because he knew my husband wasn't coming, his post-davening chevrusa—a stalwart regular in that minyan, decided to daven

elsewhere that morning. We could not have imagined so many years ago that our son would save his father's life and the life of his chavrusa.

The stories abound of those who were saved.

Rav "E", an elderly gentleman who takes a cab the half a block each morning, but this morning the cab didn't come.

Rabbi "L" was on his way to that minyan and for some reason he cannot explain, found himself turning into a closer shul, and stayed there.

"A" was up during the night helping his wife who felt unwell, so he decided to daven elsewhere.

Rabbi "S" smashed a terrorist over the head twice with a chair to try to stop his shooting, and somehow managed to run out unscathed.

Rav "P", Reb "B", Rav "Pr" and Rav "F" who somehow ran through the line of fire out the door.

Rav "S" who was hiding behind the bimah until something told him to get out—and he managed to run through the side door.

Rav "I" saw one of the terrorists in the kitchen on his way in earlier. He thought he was one of the many who come into the shul to take a free cup of coffee in the morning. Why didn't he shoot him then? He escaped through a side door when the shooting started in the shul.

Dr. "H" and Rav "W" who ran out after throwing a table at the terrorists.

HaRav "B", who is not a young man, heard the commotion and came downstairs. As he was trying to help one of the victims, he was shot repeatedly by the terrorists, but the guns misfired four times. When they pulled out a knife he ran upstairs. An old man outrunning two young terrorists?

And those who were not saved.

Rav Kalman regularly davens shacharis elsewhere and only came to ask a question of a Rav whom he didn't know was not yet there. Rav Aryeh came perhaps once or twice a month to that minyan. The first chovesh (paramedic) who appeared at the scene always carries a gun, but he left it at home that morning.

One thing was clear. It appeared random, but it is only random in the eyes of the world. We have to know that it is exacting in the eyes of Hashem, and that while we cannot possibly understand the equation we know it is the Truth.

To us, it is clear that the world is run with exactitude, and that this brutal butchering of innocent souls had purpose and meaning. We must focus inward, avoiding politics and rage. We must focus our energy inward by asking what each of us can do better than before. That is the Jewish response.

Wednesday morning my husband davened in his minyan. He set out no shtender, laid out no siddur. R' Chaim, fighting for his life, was not there to call out "kohanim." Rav Moshe was not be there today to lein. He will not ask for an aliyah for his grandmother's yahrtzeit R"H Teves.

My husband took out his gabbai book and added ד"ה to four names.

As Rav Rubin said at the levaya, we must strengthen ourselves in emuna. We must internalize the knowledge that nothing is by chance, nothing is without purpose and meaning

We must strive in some small way to emulate the kedoshim—so different on the surface, but so very much the same—each a true lover of Torah and Talmidei chachamim, each a true lover of his fellow Jew, each a ba'al chesed, each a man with true simchas hachaim. Each of us must look inward; ask "what can I rectify?" Each one of us must make some small yet powerful change.

The family of the kedoshim asked those who came to the shiva to please take on something for Am Yisrael. This is derech HaTorah. This will give nechama to the widows, the orphans. This will be a z'chus for a refuah for the injured.

And we can pray that this will be the final chapter in the long and painful history of galus, and this will bring the Geula bimheyra biyameinu.

<http://www.kedosheiharnoffund.com/> Kedoshei Har Nof Fund c/o Cong Boro Minyan 3011 Ave K Brooklyn NY 11210  
kedosheiharnoffund@gmail.com

<http://thepartialview.blogspot.com/2014/11/rav-avrohom-schorr-on-kedoshim-of-har.html>

Thursday, November 20, 2014

**Rav Avrohom Schorr** on Kedoshim of Har Nof, we must make kabolos, Tallis and Tefillin for entire Tefillah

At an asifah Tuesday night at Khal Tiferes Yaakov, Mara d'Asra Harav Avrohom Schorr and Harav Elya Brudny, Rosh Yeshivah, Mirrer Yeshiva of Brooklyn, delivered divrei hisorerus.

Harav Schorr spoke of the korbanos who were moser nefesh al kiddush Hashem. They were killed only because they were Yidden and died al kiddush Hashem.

He said that Harav Yechezkel Levenstein, zt"l, Mashgiach of Yeshivos Mir and Ponevezh, was once riding in a taxi in Israel when the driver told the Rav that he had a story to tell: The driver and his friends were traveling the world and ended up visiting a jungle. Suddenly they heard screaming — one of their buddies had a boa constrictor wrapped around his body. They tried pulling off the snake, but couldn't. Even though they weren't religious, one of them said, "You're about to die. At least say Shema before you go!" So he started to say, "Shema Yisrael..." and as soon as he got to the word Echad, the snake released him. After that he became a baal teshuvah.

Harav Levenstein asked the driver, "But — what about you?"

And the driver answered, "It didn't happen to me!"

Today we are all in this situation. We all saw what happened. Are we going to go away and not change ourselves? We have to understand it happened to us... not to someone else.

The Rambam says at the beginning of Hilchos Taanis that when something major happens we must not attribute it to natural causes. We hear "reasons" and we forget that there is a Yad Hashem.

A beis medrash is a fort; it should be impregnable, said the Rav. The passuk says: "Vera'u kol amei haaretz ki shem Hashem nikra alecha v'yarum mimeka — And the nations will see that the name of Hashem is upon you and they will fear you" (Devarim 28:10). What will the nations see that will inspire them to fear Klal Yisrael? "Eilu tefillin she'berosh," the Gemara explains.

How could an Arab possibly go into a beis medrash and kill Yidden wearing tallis and tefillin? How is it possible? It can't just be happenstance.

The Ribbono shel Olam sent us a message to wake us up, said Harav Schorr. The Yid Hakadosh of Peshischa, zy"a, said that he already hears the shofar of Moshiach. What we just heard, said Harav Schorr, was the sound of that shofar. A devastating kol shofar was heard today... heard to wake us up from where we are and to make a change in our lives.

This is not about the gruesome scenes. It's about a korban for Klal Yisrael, Harav Schorr emphasized. But a korban needs nesachim. The Sfas Emes says a korban without nesachim means a korban without tears. We need to cry from the depths of our hearts — tears that inspire us to change and to come closer to Hakadosh Baruch Hu and not to go back to business as usual.

We lost such a Kadosh, someone dedicated to ruchniyus; someone who said no to everything the world had to offer and only wanted to live for Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

Maybe we are being told that we have to emulate that nefesh. We have to become such souls that reject all worldly distractions and devote ourselves to ruchniyus.

Harav Menachem Mendel of Shklov, zt"l, said that now, when we no longer have korbanos in the Beis Hamikdash, we have a different kind of korban — a blatt Gemara. The Gemara in Menachos says, Kol ha'oseik baTorah, k'ilu hikriv olah.

But that is only when we sacrifice something for Torah. If we give up some of this material world we wouldn't need such korbanos. Of course, we have no neviim today to point a finger and say "This is why the tragedy happened." But each of us knows in our own hearts what is missing.

We know that we can't be like the dog the Chofetz Chaim described: Pnei hador k'pnei hakelev — If someone hits a dog with a stick, the dog bites the stick. He doesn't look beyond the stick at who is wielding it. While we know this terrible korban was caused by human enemies, we must realize that they are just the stick. We have to look beyond to see this is from Hashem.

If murderers can come into the beis medrash and slaughter Kedoshim wrapped in tallis and tefillin, clearly, we must make changes. And the most obvious change to institute as a kahal is in the kedushah of the beis medrash and the kedushah of tefillin.

Harav Schorr called for three simple kabbalos:

To wear tallis and tefillin for the entire davening.

Never to do something in tallis and tefillin that is inappropriate.

Never to stroll around outside our shuls wearing tallis and tefillin, engaging in worldly activities that are unfitting. Hopefully, we can make a tikun in the terrible chillul Hashem of Jews being slaughtered wearing tallis and tefillin — something we haven't seen since the Nazis, ym"ss.

**Harav Elya Brudny** followed Harav Schorr, saying that this was not a random killing. The reshaim knew who they were attacking. These were among the yehidei hador, dedicated to Torah and avodah. The Torah says, "Uvacharta bachaim l'maan tichyeh — choose life, in order that you may live." We have to understand, said Harav Brudny, that what happened does not contradict l'maan tichyeh. We have to know this is a message. As the Messilas Yesharim says, this world is only a vestibule to the real world. What happened in Har Nof is reminiscent of the massacre in the Slabodka Yeshivah in 1929, said the Rav. Then it was also the same rotzchim, also coming into the heichal Hashem, to slaughter the meshorsei Hashem. The Mirrer Mashgiach Harav Yeruchim Levovitz, zt"l, said after the massacre that he heard rumblings among the tzibbur asking who is at fault. The first obvious candidate was the mufti and the Arabs. Others blamed the British police who allowed it to happen. Others blamed the Zionists... He was distraught that talmidim in the yeshivah didn't see the bigger picture. The yetzer hara set his eyes on the Batei Hamikdash and destroyed both. And then he set out to destroy his main enemy: talmidei chachamim. On the other side, the Alter of Slabodka, zt"l, set out to build Torah in Eretz Yisrael. And the yetzer hara tried to undermine his efforts. Clearly, over the past years, the efforts of the yetzer hara to destroy Torah is not just economics or politics. If we look at the whole picture, we see that the Eibershter gives this koach to the yetzer, not to allow him to win, but to encourage us to defeat him. The tragedy in Har Nof is part of a war — and not just with the Arabs. Concluded Harav Brudny, to defeat the yetzer, we must understand the zechus of learning and supporting Torah.

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from: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com>  
reply-to: info@jewishdestiny.com  
subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

**Weekly Blog :: Rabbi Berel Wein**

***Jews At Prayer – Some Reflections***

The horrific murders of people at prayer that recently occurred in Jerusalem raises many more questions than answers. The responses to it were varied. CNN saw in it that Israeli police killed two Palestinians. Israeli politicians made their usual vapid comments, promises and revenge statements, all of which in the past have led nowhere. Learned rabbis and savants have attempted the futile task of reading God's mind, so to speak, to explain what cannot be explained. Redoubled efforts at greater acts of charity and more meaningful prayer services are undoubtedly noble goals but are hardly words and actions of comfort, consolation or explanation.

The Torah's response to inexplicable tragedy is recorded for us in the narrative regarding the death of the sons of Aaron. That response is silence — acceptance of God's will. It also teaches us that the holy and innocent, people of goodness and erudition, compassion and service to others, are often singled out to be victims of inexplicable tragedy. I will not attempt to explain the causes of these murders. That mystery should be allowed to be shrouded in silence. Only those of faith have the ability to remain silent as to the causes of tragedy. But silence is a more satisfying response than is false certainty and banality.

What can be assessed is the reaction to this massacre of innocents. In Gaza and the West Bank there were great public celebrations. This is the product of decades of incitement, hatred, mind-washing and calculated strategy. Pious declarations about making peace with enemies or having partners amongst the Palestinian Authority for a legitimate settlement of the struggle ring ever more hollow in light of the violence continually perpetrated against Israelis. The shameful conduct of Europe and the UN, the academic elites, the liberal media and the others who always know what is better for us than we do, all are part of the atmosphere that breeds such violence.

The public and governmental anti-Semitism that permeated Europe in the nineteenth century created the conditions for the Holocaust of the twentieth century. The blind acceptance by the world's intelligentsia of Marxism helped create Stalin's gulag, allowing the murder of millions. Islamic terror can only be stopped by calling it by its correct name, identifying its perpetrators and supporters and by not confusing the victims with the criminals. As long as we search for causes and excuses for murder, violence and unremitted hatred, for moral equivalency and no-fault mindsets, there will be little hope that this tragic incident will be the last one of its kind. Jews have to raise their voices in support of other Jews. Jews have to raise their voices in support of the right of the State of Israel to exist in peace as a Jewish state. Jews have to continue to pray. Jews have to continue to insist on their rights and rites. No circumcision, no ritual slaughter, no public display of Judaism — all of these European parliamentary laws are anti-Semitism at its sugar coated worst and create the climate that eventually kills Jews at prayer. All of Jewish history proves this pattern to be true. We have much to pray for. May the Lord hear our prayers and spare us any further tragedies. Shabbat shalom

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from: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com>  
reply-to: info@jewishdestiny.com  
subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein  
**Weekly Parsha Blog:: Rabbi Berel Wein**  
***Toldot***

Perfect parents do not always produce perfect children. This week's parsha is a perfect illustration of this truism of life and family. There apparently was very little that Yitzchak and Rivka could do to reclaim Eisav to their way of life and level of morality. He was, perhaps, incapable of moral improvement the moment he was born.

There existed, and perhaps still exists, a great debate about whether genetic makeup or social and family environment determine a child's personality and behavior patterns. But no matter how we judge this question, it still is perplexing, if not even unthinkable, that Yitzchak and Rivka parented Eisav and raised him in their holy home.

It is one of the Torah's prime examples of the power of freedom of choice that children and all human beings possess. Parents naturally berate themselves over the bad behavior of their children. Yet, in my admittedly limited experience, these parents are hardly ever to be blamed for the free-will wickedness of their offspring.

We ascribe too much power to parents in raising children. Of course family and environment are important, but a child's choices will trump all other factors and circumstances. And thus we have an Eisav emerging from the house and family of Yitzchak and Rivka.

The Torah's message to us in this matter is direct and blunt - there are no guarantees or perfect successes in raising children. One could say that though Avraham fathered Yishmael, perhaps it was Hagar's influence that formed him. But what can we say about the house of Yitzchak and Rivka that could produce an Eisav?

The Torah poses for us the unanswerable questions of life that we encounter daily. And it never truly provides us with satisfying answers. Such is the nature of life itself — its mystery, uncertainty and unpredictably. The great question as to why the righteous suffer and the evil person apparently prospers lies at the root of the struggle for belief and faith. And as we read in the book of Iyov, the Lord chooses, so to speak, not to answer that question. The Torah does not explain to us how an Eisav can arise from the house of Yitzchak and Rivka. Apparently it is satisfied just to notify us that it occurred and, by inference, to teach us that other inexplicable things will occur throughout Jewish and human history.

Eisav, whether genetically or environmentally influenced, was a free agent — as we all are — to choose between good and evil, peace and violence, compassion and cruelty. These choices were his and his alone to make.

Somehow, Heaven also must have taken into account the heartbreak of Yitzchak and Rivka over the behavior of Eisav. But that is certainly secondary to the judgment regarding Eisav himself.

There is a tendency in our modern world to try and understand and sympathize with the evil one at the expense of the good and decent victims of that evil. The Torah is not a fan of such misplaced compassion. Rivka makes the painful decision to abandon Eisav and save Yaakov. By so doing she ensures the civilization of the human race.

Shabbat shalom

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from: Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu>

to: weekly@ohr.edu

subject: Torah Weekly

**Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Toldos**

**For the week ending 22 November 2014 / 29 Heshvan 5775**

**by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonofthemoon.com**

**Insights**

**Once More With Feeling**

**"...And he prayed to G-d..." (13:17)**

They say that every ba'al teshuva wakes up one day to find that he's "frum-from-birth". The unbridled, headlong enthusiasm of a new commitment to Judaism; the thrill of rising at four in the morning to immerse in the mikveh and don those mystical black boxes and pray with the holy of the holies; the transcendent feeling of Shabbat — waking up on Sunday morning and thinking it's Monday; the thrill of sitting in the succa; of hearing the otherworldly cry of the shofar; of the light of the Chanuka candles "replacing" the Xmas tree...

Would that it last forever! But sooner or later most ba'alei teshuva wake up and find themselves struggling to make the minyan on time and to keep their the latest news out of their thoughts during the Amida silent prayer — the same struggles as I assume exist for many of their brethren FFBs.

"...And he prayed to G-d..."

Rashi comments: "You cannot compare the prayer of a righteous person who had righteous parents to that of a righteous person whose parents were unrighteous."

Ostensibly the reverse should be true — the prayers of someone who manages to overcome his background and the negative effects of his upbringing and cultural milieu should be more powerful than those of someone who did not have such challenges. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 39) makes the point, "Let Ovadia, who dwelt with two evil people (Achav and Izavel) and learned not from their ways, give prophesy about the evil Esav who dwelt with two righteous people (Yitzchak and Rivka) and failed to learn from their ways."

The Talmud teaches, "The Old is more difficult than the New." (Yoma 29a)

When you learn something new, you know you don't know it and thus you exert yourself to delve deeply and thoroughly into the matter until it is completely clear. However, when something is "Old" — when you've already learned it and you think you know it — in reality the rust of forgetfulness has already begun to obscure the fine points and intricacies. Someone who, despite this, exerts himself to re-learn something he has already learned with the attitude of someone who is approaching the subject for the first time is therefore on a higher level.

Despite growing up in the home of Avraham where the service of G-d was a well-trodden path and "Old", Yitzchak spared no effort to find his own way in the service of G-d. He took the Old and he made it New. Rivka, on the other hand, grew up amongst evil and depravity. Her righteousness was a reaction to her background — it was New — and thus her prayers were less powerful than those of Yitzchak.

The real challenge of being a ba'al teshuva is when the gloss starts to wear off the enthusiasm that was fired by a rejection of the hedonism and superficiality of the secular world.

That's the moment that separates the men from the boys. Are you going to be satisfied to coast along for the rest of your life and just "phone it in"? Or are you going to take that Old sugya and make it new and vibrant?

Are you going to sit back on your laurels and watch them wilt?

Or are you going to become a ba'al teshuva all over again?

Sources: Based on Rabbi Simcha Zissel of Kelm in Michtav M'Eliahu (Vol III, page 124) as seen in Lekach Tov

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from: Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemaisrael.com>

to: Peninim <peninim@shemaisrael.com>

subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

**Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum**

**Parshas Toldos**

***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)***

Hashem allowed Himself to be entreated by him - by Yitzchak Avinu. Lavan had given Rivkah Imeinu a blessing, Achoseinu, at hayi l'alfei revavah, "Our sister, may you come to be the thousands of myriads" (Bereishis 24:60). It seems like a "reasonable" blessing. The fact that Hashem allowed Himself to be entreated by Yitzchak is a clear indication that Lavan's blessing was unacceptable. Why? A blessing is a blessing - regardless of its source - or is this not true? The Melitzer Rebbe, Shlita, contends that a bircas rasha einah ela kelalah, "The blessing bestowed by a wicked person is nothing more than a curse." In order to explain this idea, he relates the following analogy, which I feel not only gives meaning to this issue, but opens up for us a new vista in understanding why the blessings/ efforts/deeds of some individuals lack efficacy.

A man, by vocation a silversmith, moved from a small hamlet to the capital city. In the hamlet, he was well known as an artist without peer, a reputation which resulted in his ability to earn a steady living. Expenses were nominal, as rent and utilities for his small shop did not make a great dent in his living expenses. In the big city, it was a totally different story. Storefronts went for a premium. He was, therefore, forced to rent a tiny shop in a small alleyway. He was not concerned, because he felt that his beautiful work spoke for itself. He would eventually attract customers through word of mouth. The man was in his shop for only one day when a man appeared at his door. At first glance, he had an unsavory appearance. He was a sharp dresser, with pasted down hair, sporting a fedora on the tip of his head and wearing a white tie over a black shirt. He could have passed as a goon or a permanent fixture at a casino. He certainly was not the type of customer that frequented his shop in the hamlet. Perhaps the big city was a different scene.

"Good morning, my friend," the man began in a loud voice. "I see that you have recently moved to the big city. Well, I have come to help you, because you have selected a spot to do business that has not seen a customer in years. How do you expect people to become aware of your presence? You are stuck deep in a corner of a small alley hardly visited by anyone of substance. Who will purchase your crafts - if no one hears of you? This is why I am here. Today is your lucky day.

"First, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Sammy, and I am a financial advisor. I will help you to earn a good living. You just have to adhere to my advice. It does not come cheap, but, trust me, it is well worth the expense."

The silversmith at first demurred to Sammy's offer of "assistance." "You do not seem to understand," Sammy continued. "The big city is different from the hamlet in which you lived. The city is run by "movers and shakers," and, if one is not well-connected, he stands no chance of earning a living. Let me help you, and you will see how quickly your success shall be realized.

"Here is what you should do. Gather together various rings, necklaces and bracelets; take along armbands and brooches for good measure. All in all, you should have one hundred pieces of jewelry. Meet me on Monday at 9:00 a.m. by the palace gates and I will show you how to make your sale. The queen will be so impressed with your wares that she will purchase them all."

The simple silversmith took Sammy's advice and waited by the palace gates.

Immediately, two burly guards approached and asked what he was doing there. He explained that he was working with Sammy, and he was waiting for the queen. Need we say more? "Sammy! He is a con man, a thief, a fraud. What are you doing with him? You are probably a lowlife like he is." They began to beat him within an inch of his life. Luckily, he was able to escape, all bloodied, beaten and torn, but alive. Surprise of surprises: Sammy never showed up.

Two weeks elapsed with no customers, no money and no food left in the cupboard. The silversmith was going through a severe bout of depression when, one day, a well-to-do man, very smartly dressed, entered the store. The man was clearly a distinguished person. He was dressed in a long black frock, top hat, white shirt and morning trousers. Regrettably, the silversmith had lost his patience with people. "Can I help you? Are you interested in purchasing jewelry, or are you going to waste my time by just looking around?" This was certainly not the way to greet a potential customer, but the silversmith was simply not in the mood to put up with anyone. He had taken a serious hit.

The man removed a one-hundred ruble note from his pocket, gave it to the silversmith and said, "Here, you look like you have gone through a bad situation. I imagine that you have had no business since you moved here. It is no wonder. No one comes here to shop. I see your jewelry and, indeed, it is fit for a king. Come with me, and I will see to it that you are given a chance to earn some money."

He took the silversmith to the king, who was so impressed with the jewelry that he purchased it all and even instructed the silversmith to return with more of the same. The man had done very well for himself.

As expected, when someone is the beneficiary of good fortune, the "Sammys" of the world climb out of their holes in the ground and expect to receive a cut of the profits. After all... when Sammy appeared the next day (after the man had made the sale to the king) to congratulate the silversmith and demand his cut of the take, the silversmith immediately chased him from the store.

The lesson is quite simple. Rivkah Imeinu is that simple silversmith. Lavan's blessing is the work of the yetzer hora, evil-inclination, whose advice is never in our favor. Rivkah did not have children, because this would have meant that Lavan's blessing had been fulfilled. That evil person would have shared in all of Rivkah's success, her children's success and, indeed, that of all of her descendants. The true tzaddik need not piggy back his prayers on the prayers of Lavan; nor does the truly righteous person require assistance from the likes of Lavan. This is why Hashem listened to Yitzchak's prayer, so that he would give neither credit nor reward to Lavan.

Not everyone is suited to be Hashem's emissary - and not everyone is worthy of being the medium for conveying Hashem's blessing. One could be the greatest, most successful doctor, but, if he is not worthy of blessing, he will not be the conveyance for effecting blessing. Sometimes, we must maintain our patience - and continue to pray.

### *Yitzchak entreated Hashem opposite his wife, because she was barren. (25:21)*

Rashi interprets the word *va'yeetar* to mean that Yitzchak Avinu prayed abundantly for Rivkah. He never felt "I prayed enough." He finished one prayer; he immediately began to pray again. The first prayer was not accepted; perhaps the next one would be accepted. The fact that, according to the laws of nature, it was biologically impossible for Rivkah Imeinu to conceive, he, nonetheless, understood that his function was to daven, the rest was up to Hashem to decide.

The ratzon HaBorei, will of the Almighty, is that we daven. If we care enough about an issue, then we cannot give up hope of seeing it achieve fruition. Indeed, Chazal teach that the cause and effect of Yitzchak's prayer can be different from what we might believe. Rivkah was barren, so that she and Yitzchak would pray! We never halt our prayers. We never stop praying, because we do not know which prayer will make the difference.

In his Shaarim b'Tefillah, Horav Shimshon Pincus, zl, proves that *pegia*, which is a form of prayer, actually means *rebuvi bakasho*, in which one continually prays for something until he is answered. One does not give up; one does not throw in the towel. We finish one tefillah; we immediately begin to pray again. If we pray long and hard enough, Hashem will ultimately listen.

Moshe Rabbeinu prayed for Klal Yisrael, entreating Hashem to forgive them for perpetrating the sin of the Golden Calf. He prayed 515 times for Hashem to rescind the decree preventing him from entering Eretz Yisrael. Concerning the Golden Calf, Hashem made him stop. *V'Atah hanichah Li*, "And now leave Me (alone)." The Talmud in Berachos 32b explains that Moshe "took hold of Hashem and would not let go, as if to say, I will not let go until You forgive the nation."

The Talmud Yerushalmi Berachos 4:1 states, *Kol ha'marbeh b'Tefillah ne'eneh*, "Whoever is firm and offers abundant prayer (who simply does not stop, but continues praying and praying) will be answered. It is very similar to a child who keeps on pleading with his father. At some point, the father will give in. If we do not give up, Hashem will listen to us, despite our unworthiness.

In every generation, there have been Jews who have known this wonderful secret of prayer. They understood that the *kunst*, trick (so to speak), to prayer is to never stop praying. Rav Shimshon relates that he came to understand this avenue of efficacy in prayer from a woman's prayer on behalf of her husband. A young couple became inspired with a zeal for Jewish observance and decided to return, to embrace a life of Torah and mitzvos. They sent their young children to a Torah school, where they received an exemplary Torah-oriented education. The boys went on to yeshivah gedolah, where they were eminently successful, becoming talmidei chachamim, Torah scholars, of note. Likewise, their daughters married fine young men who were yeshivah graduates, committed to continued growth in Kollel following their marriage.

Now that the children were doing well, it was time for the parents to join in and participate - rather than to lead and delegate. The father began to learn, and slowly he went from reading *aleph-bais* to learning Chumash, Rashi, followed by Mishnayos - and now he was involved in in-depth study of Gemorah. He gave up his job and devoted himself to full-time Torah study in a Kollel. Wonder of wonders! The man was fifty years old when he began to learn and, in the space of five years, he went from being a semi-literate novice to a budding Torah scholar. How did this transpire? Apparently, this man's wife was adamant in her resolve that her husband become a talmid chacham. Although she realized that this was an unrealistic dream, she began to pray day and night, reciting reams and reams of Tehillim every spare moment. She prayed that her husband become a talmid chacham. She kept it up - and Hashem listened.

Everyone has his own *pekel*, package of needs. For some it is simple, while for others the needs are life altering. They pray and pray - and, at one point, say, "Shoin genuk, it

is enough. I tried. How much more can I pray?" We see from this *pasuk* that there is no end to prayer. It will be effective - at a point. When? Only Hashem knows. Regrettably, after a certain point, our passion diminishes and our entreaty loses some of its urgency, as we become almost complacent. This is why I cite the following story:

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, asked his father-in-law, Horav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, zl, for some sort of *eitzah*, advice, on how to address the *shidduch* crisis. Many wonderful young men and women are encountering great difficulty in finding their *bashert*, predestined mate. Rav Elyashiv replied, "There is one (and only one) *eitzah*, piece of advice: Daven." "They have been davening for quite some time already; to the point that their lips are dried out," Rav Zilberstein countered. "Let them continue davening, and they will see *yeshuos*, salvation, from Hashem."

Rav Zilberstein took this question and answer to Horav Aharon Leib Shteinman, Shlita, and asked his same question: "They claim that they have not stopped davening - and, yet, they have not seen any sign of salvation." Rav Shteinman rose from his chair, went over to the bookcase and removed a Navi, Melachim II, and turned the pages to Perek 4, which relates the story of Ovadyah HaNavi's wife who cried out to Elisha HaNavi, "Your servant, my husband, died, and you know that he was a G-d-fearing man. The creditor (to whom we owe much money) seized my two sons to become his slaves (as reimbursement for the debt)."

The Radak writes that Ovadyah's wife offered up 265 entreaties, and only then (after she had prayed this amount of times) did Heaven answer her. This means that had she prayed only 264 times, she would not have received a Heavenly response. This teaches us that one can cry with fiery passion, entreating the Almighty 264 times, and still remain unsuccessful. Why? Because it is that next prayer, the 265th prayer, which would be the *coupe de grace*, the finishing touch, for which Hashem was waiting. The only recourse is to continue praying with the same level of feeling and emotion. At a certain point, it will happen.

Regrettably, we do not take davening seriously enough. While everybody daven, how many understand the uncompromising obligation to attend *tefillah b'tzibur*, daven with a *minyán*? It is not that one does not care, it is just that we have so many responsibilities which we have convinced ourselves take precedence over *minyán*. It could not be further from the truth. Rather than go into a long discourse on the overriding importance of *tefillah b'tzibur*, I share with the reading public an inspirational story related by Horav Baruch Mordechai Ezrachi, Shlita, concerning Horav Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg, zl, author of the *Seridei Eish*, Rosh Yeshivah of the Hildesheimer Seminary in Berlin, and later Rav in Montreux, Switzerland.

Rav Weinberg was one of the preeminent students in Slabodka when the Yeshivah was home to the greatest and most brilliant scholars of the time, among them: Rav Reuven Grozovsky; Rav Aharon Kotler; and Rav Yaakov Kaminetzky. Rav Weinberg related that he was very diligent in his studies, hardly leaving the *bais hamedrash* to catch a few hours of sleep, only to return immediately to his place and continue studying. One day, not realizing that the *shkiah*, sunset, had changed before he knew it, he had missed davening *Minchah*. He was distraught over this. How could he have missed *Minchah*? What should he do? He made an appointment to speak with the Rosh Yeshivah, the Alter of Slobodka, Horav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, zl.

"What is the problem?" the Alter asked his prize student. "Rebbe, I am very fortunate to learn in such a *makom Torah*, with such outstanding friends and colleagues. Hashem has blessed me with the ability to remain diligent in my studies and to grow exponentially in Torah." "So, what is the problem?" asked the Alter - once again. "It is specifically because of my diligence that I overlooked the time, and I did not pay attention to the sun setting at an earlier time. Suddenly, I found myself ready to daven *Maariv*, the evening service, while not yet having prayed the *Minchah*, afternoon service. I am terribly troubled by this. I do not know what to do."

The Alter listened to his story and responded, "Return to your *shtender*, lectern" (in other words, "Go back to your studies"). Rav Weinberg was troubled. He had a problem. He had missed *Minchah*, and he had related his problem to the Rosh HaYeshivah, whom, he was sure, would offer a solution. Instead, he just told him to return to his *shtender*. He was baffled, but one did not question the Rosh Yeshivah. He was one of the most perceptive people of that generation. Surely, he had a reason for his seemingly strange response.

Two weeks passed. Rav Weinberg was learning in the *bais hamedrash* when the Alter walked in and motioned to him with his finger. He quickly jumped up and approached his revered Rebbe. "Yes," he said. "Today, Horav Naftali Amsterdam (preeminent disciple of Horav Yisrael Salanter) is arriving in Slobodka. He will select you as his *chavrusa*, study partner. You will probably study with him in the *shul* that is near to the river. As you are walking together with him, present to him the question that you presented to me two weeks ago."

A few hours passed, and, indeed, Rav Naftali called for the student. Rav Weinberg was profuse in his gratitude to the venerable sage for choosing him as a study partner. This was an unparalleled *z'chus*, merit. As they walked to the *shul* where they would learn,

Rav Weinberg asked if he could present a question to the sage. "I already shared this query with my Rosh Yeshivah; however, he suggested that I present it to the Rav and seek his counsel."

"What is the problem?" Rav Naftali asked. Rav Weinberg began with his litany: "I am a student in Slabodka where the learning is exhilarating. As a result, I spend my every waking moment engrossed in the study of Torah, mussar, ethics, and seeking ways to improve my yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven. Everything was going well, except that, one day, I became so involved in my learning that I missed davening Minchah." As soon as Rav Weinberg uttered these words, Rav Naftali repeated them, "Oy, you missed Minchah!"

The second these words left his mouth, Rav Naftali fell to the ground in a dead faint. Rav Weinberg concluded the story: "I went through many terrible ordeals in my life, years of misery and pain, but I never once missed Minchah - after I saw Rav Naftali's reaction."

Veritably, the Alter could have made the same statement, "Oy, you missed Minchah," but it would never have had the same impact as seeing Rav Naftali faint to the ground upon hearing that a yeshivah student had not davened Minchah. This was the Alter's greatness. He was acutely aware what made an impact and how to maximize the experience to achieve its ultimate potential.

### ***The children agitated within her. (25:22)***

Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the word Vayisrotzetzu, "And they (the children) agitated" is derived from the word rotz, to run. When Rivkah Imeinu passed the Yeshivah of Shem and Eivar, Yaakov "ran" and struggled to go forth; and when she passed a house of idol worship, Eisav "ran" to go out. Each child had a certain proclivity representative of the cosmic forces within Creation - forces that are not connected to normal personality development, but transcend it. Yaakov Avinu gravitated towards the bais hamedrash, while Eisav was more comfortable in the house of idol worship. As they grew into adulthood, their personal inclinations were developed; Eisav was attracted to the base and ignominious, while Yaakov was drawn to the spirit and good. The various commentators wonder why Eisav did not just "leave." As the biological firstborn, he was first in line to emerge from the birth canal. Nothing stood in his way. Yaakov, however, could not leave, because Eisav blocked his exit. Horav Yechezkel, zl, m'Kozmir, explains that Eisav "parked" himself at the entrance to the birth canal in order to block Yaakov's exit. Why would he want to stay in the womb with the righteous Yaakov, when he could have left and begun a life of worshipping his idols? He explains that it was worth it for Eisav to forgo his pleasure as long as he had the satisfaction of preventing Yaakov from achieving greater spiritual perfection.

I think this is a powerful truth and a sad commentary concerning those who purport to adhere to other religions. Any rational person with a modicum of intelligence understands that the major world religions are confronted with serious questions concerning their validity. This is not the forum for discussing comparative religions, but any scholar-- or even a knowledgeable layperson-- must have serious questions concerning how and when his religion began, and how to reconcile a religion of love with two thousand years of brutal murder, pogroms, holocausts and jihads. Apparently, they really have no idea or do not care. They just want to see to it that we, representing the only true religion of the world, are not able to exist. Yes, Eisav was willing to forgo his spiritual service, to even live the life of a lie, as long as he could prevent Yaakov from serving Hashem.

In an alternative exposition, the commentators state that Eisav's greatest source of satisfaction was to be in Yaakov's proximity and make his life miserable. It is not even an issue of preventing him from serving Hashem. Eisav simply derived his greatest enjoyment from seeing Yaakov suffer - and what greater source of misery was there to Yaakov than his inability to serve Hashem?

The Maggid, zl, m'Dubno was going through a difficult time financially. It reached the point that he was relegated to packing his bag to travel from city to city, delivering inspirational lectures for which he received a paltry recompense. It was hardly sufficient, and certainly unbecoming a man of his stature, but it paid the bills.

The Maggid's first stop was Berditchev, where he gathered his friends and asked them to put together a venue for him to deliver a lecture. Hopefully, he would draw a sizable audience that would appreciate his efforts and, in turn, express gratitude with some financial support. This was the way many of Europe's greatest rabbinic scholars earned their meager livelihood. No one became wealthy, but it definitely delayed the hunger. One of his close friends asked him, "You are well known for your brilliance. How is it that you left your home, your city where you surely had a multitude of supporters, to come here to 'knock on the door' of our wealthy citizens? Certainly, had you remained at home, your supporters would have put together a communal fund to assist you in your present financial challenge."

The Maggid replied, "Our Torah describes the agitation that took place within Rivkah Imeinu's womb. Every time she passed by a house of idol worship, Eisav "ran";

likewise, when she passed a bais hamedrash, Yaakov "ran." She could have solved her problem by staying at home! Who asked her to take a stroll? Obviously, she realized that at home the pain would be greatly exacerbated. Likewise, for me to remain at home and have people collect for me would increase my pain."

### ***Yitzchak loved Eisav for game was in his mouth, but Rivkah loved Yaakov. (25:28)***

People see what they want to see and are impressed by what they have never seen before. Someone growing up in an all American community, accustomed to the sports hype on Sunday, will be impressed upon walking into a yeshivah bais hamedrash and observing hundreds of students studying Torah, completely oblivious to the excitement and intrigue that grips the secular world. Likewise, one whose lifestyle begins with early morning davening, followed by a seder and then either participating in the workforce or in the bais hamedrash, will have difficulty contemplating the secular culture which encourages one to engage in as much leisure time as possible. When one lives life without a purpose, it is no wonder that he has so much free time.

The Chasam Sofer posits that their contrasting backgrounds catalyzed within Yitzchak Avinu and Rivkah Imeinu disparate perspectives, which led them to be impressed by the contrasting behaviors of their two sons. After all, how is it that Yitzchak was so enamored with Eisav, while Rivkah's fondness was directed at Yaakov? He explains that Yitzchak observed Yaakov learning all of the time. He learned; his father had learned. On the other hand, to see a son who spent the majority of his day in the field hunting game, yet remain committed and observant; this was something that impressed him. Rivkah grew up in a home where learning was an anathema, and wasting time was a way of life. Thus, Eisav hardly impressed her. Her son Yaakov's behavior gave her much nachas. This was something she had never before seen. So, what was there not to love?

*Sponsored l'ilui nishmas Harabanit Esther Bluma bas Harav Shaga Moshe Davis a"n niftara 4 Kislev 5770 In loving memory of Rebbetzin Bluma Davis, A"H "From the very inception of the Telshe Yeshiva and the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, she was a pillar of support and an active member of their respective communities. She is sorely missed by her many friends and students.*

*Rabbi Avrohom and Devorah Shoshana, Yosef and Edie Davis and their families*

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from: Shabbat Shalom shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org

reply-to: shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org

subject: Parsha - Shabbat Shalom from the OU

### **Orthodox Union / www.ou.org Britain's Former Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks Was Jacob Right To Take Esau's Blessing?**

Was Jacob right to take Esau's blessing in disguise? Was he right to deceive his father and to take from his brother the blessing Isaac sought to give him? Was Rivka right in conceiving the plan in the first place and encouraging Jacob to carry it out? These are fundamental questions. What is at stake is not just biblical interpretation but the moral life itself. How we read a text shapes the kind of person we become.

Here is one way of interpreting the narrative. Rivka was right to propose what she did and Jacob was right to do it. Rivka knew that it would be Jacob, not Esau, who would continue the covenant and carry the mission of Abraham into the future. She knew this on two separate grounds. First, she had heard it from God himself, in the oracle she received before the twins were born:

‘Two nations are in your womb,  
and two peoples from within you will be separated;  
one people will be stronger than the other,  
and the elder will serve the younger.’ (Gen. 25: 23)

Esau was the elder, Jacob the younger. Therefore it was Jacob who would emerge with greater strength, Jacob who was chosen by God.

Second, she had watched the twins grow up. She knew that Esau was a hunter, a man of violence. She had seen that he was impetuous, mercurial, a man of impulse, not calm reflection. She had seen him sell his birthright for a bowl of soup. She had watched while he “ate, drank, rose and left. So Esau

despised his birthright” (Gen. 25: 34). No one who despises his birthright can be the trusted guardian of a covenant intended for eternity.

Third, just before the episode of the blessing we read: “When Esau was forty years old, he married Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and also Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite. They were a source of grief to Isaac and Rivka”(Gen. 26: 34). This too was evidence of Esau’s failure to understand what the covenant requires. By marrying Hittite women he proved himself indifferent both to the feelings of his parents and to the self-restraint in the choice of marriage partner that was essential to being Abraham’s heir.

The blessing had to go to Jacob. If you had two sons, one indifferent to art, the other an art-lover and aesthete, to whom would you leave the Rembrandt that has been part of the family heritage for generations? And if Isaac did not understand the true nature of his sons, if he was “blind” not only physically but also psychologically, might it not be necessary to deceive him? He was by now old, and if Rivka had failed in the early years to get him to see the true nature of their children, was it likely that she could do so now?

This was, after all, not just a matter of relationships within the family. It was about God and destiny and spiritual vocation. It was about the future of an entire people since God had repeatedly told Abraham that he would be the ancestor of a great nation who would be a blessing to humanity as a whole. And if Rivka was right, then Jacob was right to follow her instructions.

This was the woman whom Abraham’s servant had chosen to be the wife of his master’s son, because she was kind, because at the well she had given water to a stranger and to his camels also. Rivka was not Lady Macbeth. She was the embodiment of loving-kindness. She was not acting out of favouritism or ambition. And if she had no other way of ensuring that the blessing went to one who would cherish it and live it, then in this case the end justified the means. This is one way of reading the story and it is taken by many of the commentators.

However it is not the only way.[1] Consider, for example, the scene that transpired immediately after Jacob left his father. Esau returned from hunting and brought Isaac the food he had requested. We then read this:

Isaac trembled violently and said, ‘Who was it, then, that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came and I blessed him – and indeed he will be blessed!’

When Esau heard his father’s words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father, ‘Bless me – me too, my father!’

But he said, ‘Your brother came deceitfully [be-mirra] and took your blessing.’

Esau said, ‘Isn’t he rightly named Jacob? This is the second time he has taken advantage of me: he took my birthright, and now he’s taken my blessing!’ Then he asked, ‘Haven’t you reserved any blessing for me?’ (Gen. 27: 33-36)

It is impossible to read Genesis 27 – the text as it stands without commentary – and not to feel sympathy for Isaac and Esau rather than Rivka and Jacob. The Torah is sparing in its use of emotion. It is completely silent, for example, on the feelings of Abraham and Isaac as they journeyed together toward the trial of the binding. Phrases like “trembled violently” and “burst out with a loud and bitter cry” cannot but affect us deeply. Here is an old man who has been deceived by his younger son, and a young man, Esau, who feels cheated out of what was rightfully his. The emotions triggered by this scene stay with us long in the memory.

Then consider the consequences. Jacob had to leave home for more than twenty years in fear of his life. He then suffered an almost identical deceit practised against him by Laban when he substituted Leah for Rachel. When Jacob cried out “Why did you deceive me [rimitani]” Laban replied: “It is not done in our place to place the younger before the elder” (Gen. 29: 25-26). Not only the act but even the words imply a punishment, measure for measure. “Deceit,” of which Jacob accuses Laban, is the very word Isaac used about Jacob. Laban’s reply sounds like a virtually explicit reference to what Jacob had done, as if to say, “We do not do in our place what you have just done in yours.”

The result of Laban’s deception brought grief to the rest of Jacob’s life.

There was tension between Leah and Rachel. There was hatred between their children. Jacob was deceived yet again, this time by his sons, when they brought him Joseph’s bloodstained robe: another deception of a father by his children involving the use of clothes. The result was that Jacob was deprived of the company of his most beloved son for twenty-two years just as Isaac was of Jacob.

Asked by Pharaoh how old he was, Jacob replied, “Few and evil have been the years of my life” (Gen. 47: 9). He is the only figure in the Torah to make a remark like this. It is hard not to read the text as a precise statement of the principle of measure for measure: as you have done to others, so will others do to you. The deception brought all concerned great grief, and this persisted into the next generation.

My reading of the text is therefore this.[2] The phrase in Rivka’s oracle, *Verav yaavod tsair* (Gen. 25: 23), is in fact ambiguous. It may mean, “The elder will serve the younger,” but it may also mean, “The younger will serve the elder.” It was what the Torah calls a *chidah* (Numbers 12: 8), that is, an opaque, deliberately ambiguous communication. It suggested an ongoing conflict between the two sons and their descendants, but not who would win. Isaac fully understood the nature of his two sons. He loved Esau but this did not blind him to the fact that Jacob would be the heir of the covenant.

Therefore Isaac prepared two sets of blessings, one for Esau, the other for Jacob. He blessed Esau (Gen. 27: 28-29) with the gifts he felt he would appreciate: wealth and power: “May God give you heaven’s dew and earth’s richness – an abundance of grain and new wine” – that is, wealth. “May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you” – that is, power. These are not the covenantal blessings.

The covenantal blessings that God had given Abraham and Isaac were completely different. They were about children and a land. It is this blessing that Isaac later gave Jacob before he left home (Gen. 28: 3-4): “May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples” – that is, children. “May He give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now reside as a foreigner, the land God gave to Abraham” – that is, land. This was the blessing Isaac had intended for Jacob all along. There was no need for deceit and disguise.

Jacob eventually came to understand all this, perhaps during his wrestling match with the angel during the night before his meeting with Esau after their long estrangement. What happened at that meeting is incomprehensible unless we understand that Jacob was giving back to Esau the blessings he had wrongly taken from him. The massive gift of sheep, cattle and other livestock represented “heaven’s dew and earth’s richness,” that is, wealth.

The fact that Jacob bowed down seven times to Esau was his way of fulfilling the words, “May the sons of your mother bow down to you,” that is, power.

Jacob gave the blessing back. Indeed he said so explicitly. He said to Esau: “Please accept the blessing [birkati] that was brought to you, for God has been gracious to me and I have all I need” (Gen. 33: 11). On this reading of the story, Rivka and Jacob made a mistake, a forgivable one, an understandable one, but a mistake nonetheless. The blessing Isaac was about to give Esau was not the blessing of Abraham. He intended to give Esau a blessing appropriate to him. In so doing, he was acting on the basis of precedent. God had blessed Ishmael, with the words “I will make him into a great nation” (Gen. 21: 18). This was the fulfilment of a promise God had given Abraham many years before when He told him that it would be Isaac, not Ishmael, who would continue the covenant:

Abraham said to God, “If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!”

Then God said, “Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. As for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his



numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation." (Gen. 17: 18-21)

Isaac surely knew this because, according to midrashic tradition, he and Ishmael were reconciled later in life. We see them standing together at Abraham's grave (Gen. 25: 9). It may be that this was a fact that Rivka did not know. She associated blessing with covenant. She may have been unaware that Abraham wanted Ishmael blessed even though he would not inherit the covenant, and that God had acceded to the request. If so then it is possible all four people acted rightly as they understood the situation, yet still tragedy occurred. Isaac was right to wish Esau blessed as Abraham sought for Ishmael. Esau acted honourably toward his father. Rivka sought to safeguard the future of the covenant. Jacob felt qualms but did what his mother said, knowing she would not have proposed deceit without a strong moral reason for doing so.

Do we have here one story with two possible interpretations? Perhaps, but that is not the best way of describing it. What we have here, and there are other examples in Genesis, is a story we understand one way the first time we hear it, and a different way once we have discovered and reflected on all that happened later. It is only after we have read about the fate of Jacob in Laban's house, the tension between Leah and Rachel, and the animosity between Joseph and his brothers that we can go back and read Genesis 27, the chapter of the blessing, in a new light and with greater depth.

There is such a thing as an honest mistake, and it is a mark of Jacob's greatness that he recognized it and made amends to Esau. In the great encounter twenty-two years later the estranged brothers meet, embrace, part as friends and go their separate ways. But first, Jacob had to wrestle with an angel.

That is how the moral life is. We learn by making mistakes. We live life forward, but we understand it only looking back. Only then do we see the wrong turns we inadvertently made. This discovery is sometimes our greatest moment of moral truth.

For each of us there is a blessing that is ours. That was true not just of Isaac but also Ishmael, not just Jacob but also Esau. The moral could not be more powerful. Never seek your brother's blessing. Be content with your own.[3]

[1] Critical readings of Rivka's or Jacob's conduct appear in several midrashic works: Bereishit Rabbah, Tanhuma (Buber), Yalkut Reuveni, Midrash ha-Neelam and Midrash Socher Tov (to Psalm 80: 6). Among critical commentators are R. Eliezer Ashkenzi, Tzeda le-derekh, and R. Yaakov Zvi Mecklenberg, Ha-Ktav v'ha-Kabbalah. All these interpretations are based on the textual clues cited in what follows.

[2] For a more detailed explanation, see *Covenant and Conversation Genesis: The Book of Beginnings*, Maggid Books, 2009, 153-158, 219-228.

[3] This later became the tenth of the ten commandments.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 25 books, and moral voice for our time. Until 1st September 2013 he served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, having held the position for 22 years. To read more from Rabbi Sacks or to subscribe to his mailing list, please visit [www.rabbisacks.org](http://www.rabbisacks.org).

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from: Rabbi Yissocher Frand <[ryfrand@torah.org](mailto:ryfrand@torah.org)>  
reply-to: [ryfrand@torah.org](mailto:ryfrand@torah.org),  
to: [ravfrand@torah.org](mailto:ravfrand@torah.org)  
subject: Rabbi Frand on Parsha  
**Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Toldos**

### *Using the Attribute of Being Stiff-Necked In A Positive Way*

The pasuk in this week's parsha says: "And the children agitated within her, and she said 'If so, why is it that I am?' (Im ken, lamah zeh anochi?)" [Bereshis 25:22].

Rivka, having finally become pregnant, did not realize that she was having twins and was confused by the turmoil she was feeling within her womb. She went to seek Divine counsel. However, many commentaries are bothered by her expression "Im ken, lamah zeh anochi?" (If so, why is it that I am?) Any woman will testify that when she is pregnant, she feels movement inside her and sometimes it is quite uncomfortable. That is the expectation with pregnancy. What prompted Rivka to sense that something out of the ordinary was going on within her to the extent that she needed to seek Divine counsel and to question "If so, why is it that I am?"?

The Ibn Ezra explains that Rivka compared notes with other women about their experiences while being pregnant and came to the conclusion that what she was experiencing was indeed not normal. This prompted her to ask: "Why is this pregnancy different from all other pregnancies?"

The Ramban rejects this interpretation. According to the Ramban, Rivka is questioning why she should remain alive if she was going through so much physical pain with this pregnancy. She was so disturbed by what she was feeling that she said, "If so, I would rather die!"

A third -- very unique and interesting -- interpretation was given by Rav Avrohom Vinefield, z"l:

When Avraham Avinu gave Eliezer the mission of finding a wife for Yitzchak, he made one stipulation: "Do not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanite, among whom I dwell. Rather, to my land and to my kindred shall you go and take a wife for my son, for Yitzchak." [Bereshis 24:3-4]. If we think about it, from where should Avraham have been more comfortable having a daughter-in-law -- from the Land of Canaan or from Ur Kasdim?

Avraham had been run out of town on a rail from Ur Kasdim. He was an iconoclast there proclaiming One G-d and was totally out of synch with the society of his birth place! No one accepted him there. They tried to kill him! He came to the Land of Canaan. He set up his "Kiruv Organization" (to draw people towards the idea of monotheism) in Canaan and was wildly successful. Based on personal experience, he should have certainly decided that Canaan was the better place from which to pick a mechtan and a daughter-in-law! Why did he insist, on the contrary, that Eliezer must only go back to Ur Kasdim and NOT take a girl from the Land of Canaan for Yitzchak?

A famous "Droshos HaRan" teaches that a person's philosophy of life is not genetic. It does not pass from father to son. What passes from generation to generation, genetically so to speak, are embodied personality traits (techunos haNefesh). Avraham Avinu, for some reason, wanted his offspring to have the personality traits of his family. His family -- who were still living in Ur Kasdim -- had the 'middos' he felt which contained within them the future building blocks of the nation he wanted to found. Canaan did not have, he felt, people with the type of character traits that were necessary to build Klal Yisrael.

The difference between the character traits of Avraham's family in Ur Kasdim and those of the population of Eretz Canaan can best be understood in light of an incident with the Kotzker Rebbe, Rav Menachem Mendel of Kotzk:

When the Kotzker Rebbe was searching for a location to set up base and spread his brand of Chassidus, he went from a town called Tomishav with several of his followers and started looking for the right place to build his Chassidic Court. He came to one town and they accepted him with great honor and respect. The Rebbe dismissed that town as inappropriate. He went to another city and again he received the royal treatment. They rolled out the red carpet for him. Again, he dismissed that town. Finally, he came to a new town named Kotzk. The people in Kotzk said, "We do not want this fellow. We do not want his Chassidim. We do not want his brand of Chaasidus. We need to get this guy out of town; he will make nothing but trouble for us." The Kotzker Rebbe told his followers: "This is the place for us!" Why? The Kotzker Rebbe wanted REAL chassidim -- people who were committed. He could not tolerate wishy-washy people. The other towns were

too welcoming. They would accept one kind of Chassidus today, another kind of Chassidus tomorrow, Misnagdus a third day. They were not critical and demanding enough in their search for true spirituality! People who are not easily swayed can become committed to something they are convinced is true. Once they make a decision – that is it! "This is the type of people I want to have for my Chassidim", the Kotzker Rebbe said.

In the Land of Canaan, the people were great people. They were people who were easily influenced and so Avraham was able to assemble great masses who were won over to his new religion. However, they did not have a deep committed belief.

Tosfos in Sotah explains how Avraham Avinu drew people to his religion. Avraham basically ran an inn and a restaurant. He gave people free food and he convinced them to "make a Bracha" – to thank Hashem for the food He provided them. That is easy enough. Give me another doughnut and I will be happy to join your religion!

In Ur Kasdim, Avraham was dealing with hard core stubborn atheists. There was no way they would sell their principles for a piece of cake and a little drink. They witnessed Avraham emerge from the fiery furnace and it did not phase them. These were hard people to convince, but when they believed something, they believed in it with their hearts and souls.

To build Klal Yisrael, Avraham was looking for special character traits. Chazal say that there are certain character traits that define the Jewish people. In fact, there are four specific traits mentioned. One of these four traits is the attribute of being "Kshei Oref" – stubborn, hard people. Without that internal stubbornness inherent within us, we would have been out of business centuries ago. People do not suffer what Klal Yisrael has suffered and remain a people unless they are extremely stubborn. "Am Keshei Oref", like any other attribute, has its advantages and disadvantages, its pluses and its minuses. But, that is what has preserved us.

When Avraham Avinu said, "I need to build a Klal Yisrael and I need the right help-mate for my son Yitzchak to build a Klal Yisrael" he specifically charged Eliezer to go back to Ur Kasdim. He insisted that Eliezer go back to the stubborn hard-core people who caused him so much grief and aggravation earlier in his lifetime because he knew that descendants of such people, once they are committed to something, are committed to the death. The philosophy of the people of Canaan was here today gone tomorrow, whatever was easier suited them fine.

With this background, we now can understand what was bothering Rivka. Chazal say that when she passed the Beis Medrash (of Shem and Ever), the child was fighting to emerge. Likewise, when she passed the House of Idolatry, the child was fighting to emerge. She asked herself, "What is with this child? He is wishy-washy!" Today Avodah Zarah, tomorrow Beis Medrash. Such a child does not fit the mold of the future Jewish nation. We need to be committed and firmly committed with singular purpose! Rivka therefore asks, "If so, LAMAH ZEH ANOCHI – why was it I that Eliezer needed to choose for Yitzchak?" The whole reason I was picked, felt Rivkah, was because of the strength of commitment of the people of my family. If Yitzchak was going to father a wishy-washy child to build his nation, he could have just as easily done it with one of the daughters of Canaan!

To resolve this dilemma she went to the House of G-d and was told that she was not carrying a wishy-washy child. She was carrying two children, each of whom had the family trait of firm commitment to their beliefs and values. The one who is fighting to emerge when you pass the Beis HaMedrash will persist in that urge tomorrow and the next day as well! This news comforted her. The specter of carrying a child that could go either way, one day one way and the next day the other way – this frightened her to the extent of asking "If so, why me?"

This is a lesson we must all learn. We should not be swayed by convenience. We should be people of principle. Obviously, we need to develop the right principles. A person can be principled but be dead wrong in those beliefs. However, if we have a Torah that tells us what is right and what is wrong,

then a person should follow those right principles and not run his life based on convenience.

Klal Yisrael has been made up of people who run their lives based on what they firmly believe in. We need to become people who believe in something that will not change from day to day and from week to week and from year to year. We need to be committed to something, to stand by it, and to use our national attribute of "Kshei Oref", not for the bad but for the good.

Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD

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from: TorahWeb <torahweb@torahweb.org>

to: weeklydt@torahweb2.org

subject: TorahWeb

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**Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky**

**The Centrality of Eretz Yisroel**

**The TorahWeb Foundation**

Avraham is described in Parshas Toldos (26:5) as one who observed the Torah of Hashem. Chazal (Kiddushin 82a) explains that this passuk is teaching us that Avraham observed the entire Torah even before it was given. The Ramban in his commentary on this passuk elaborates on this statement of Chazal. Yaakov also observed the mitzvos prior to them being given but only did so in Eretz Yisroel. This was the justification for Yaakov marrying two sisters, and as such Rachel actually died as he returned to Eretz Yisroel. The Ramban adds that although mitzvos are binding outside of Eretz Yisroel, the primary place for mitzvah observance is in Eretz Yisroel. Thus, the voluntary observance of the heavens was limited to when they were present in Eretz Yisroel.

This premise of the Ramban, that there is a fundamental distinction between mitzvos performed in Eretz Yisroel and those performed outside of Eretz Yisroel, appears difficult to understand. Agricultural mitzvos such as terumah, ma'asros, and shemitah are linked to the land and do not apply in Chutz La'aretz. Mitzvos which are chovas haguf, those performed with one's body, have to be observed outside of Eretz Yisroel and yet the Ramban understands them to be on a higher level if done in Eretz Yisroel. Why should mitzvos which are not connected to the agriculture of Eretz Yisroel still take on an additional dimension when done in Eretz Yisroel?

Chazal (Keilim, chapter 1) delineate the ten levels of geographic kedusha that exists in the world. The place with the most intense kedusha is the Kodesh haKodoshim. Different areas of the Beis Hamikdash and Yerushalayim are each endowed with various degrees of kedusha. The tenth and final area mentioned is Eretz Yisroel. Each area has its own halachos that differentiate it from the other areas. The kedusha of Eretz Yisroel which separates it from the rest of the world is the fact that the korbanos of the omer and the shteihalechem offered on Pesach and Shavuot can only be brought from grain that was grown in Eretz Yisroel. Rather than the obvious halachik distinctions between Eretz Yisroel and Chutz La'aretz such as terumah, ma'asros, and shemitah, why do Chazal highlight the halachos that are related to korbanos?

The mefarshim explain that the theme of these mishnayos which differentiates between different levels of kedusha is the gradations of kedusha emanating from the Beis Hamikdash. Beginning with the Kodesh haKodoshim and ending with Eretz Yisroel, there are ten levels of kedushas ha'aretz. It would be irrelevant for the mishna to highlight the agricultural mitzvos that apply only in Eretz Yisroel as the mishna is not focusing on those distinctions.

The omer and the shteihalechem are korbanos that must come from an area endowed to some degree with kedushas ha'aretz. Eretz Yisroel has sufficient kedushas ha'aretz to enable these korbanos to be brought from grain grown in its borders.

Eretz Yisroel is distinct from Chutz La'aretz in two ways. It is agriculturally different which results in a practical difference concerning mitzvos pertaining to the land and it is also different in that it has kedushas ha'aretz which Chutz La'aretz does not. It is this second dimension of Eretz Yisroel that results in its unique status concerning all mitzvos. The primary location for the performance of all mitzvos is in the Beis Hamikdash, the place dedicated for avodas Hashem. The outermost precincts of the Beis Hamikdash end at the borders of Eretz Yisroel. Thus, the entire land is the primary location for mitzvah observance. Although the Torah clearly obligates us to fulfill mitzvos even in Chutz La'aretz, the Ramban understands this to mean that these mitzvos are still not at the level of mitzvos performed in Eretz Yisroel.

The avos who volunteered mitzvah observance only did so in Eretz Yisroel where the highest level of fulfillment of the mitzvos could be achieved. This aspect of Eretz Yisroel as an extension of kedushas ha'aretz explains another halacha that does not apply in Chutz La'aretz. Chazal teach us that the declaration of Rosh Chodesh must be done by a beis din in Eretz Yisroel. The Rambam elaborates upon this theme by applying this even to our observance of Rosh Chodesh today. In the absence of the process of witnesses testifying that they saw the new moon and the subsequent declaration of Rosh Chodesh by beis din, Rosh Chodesh today is "declared" by the Jewish people observing it as Rosh Chodesh. The Rambam states that it is this observance-declaration of the Jewish community in Eretz Yisroel that determines the day of Rosh Chodesh which establishes Rosh Chodesh worldwide. Why is Eretz Yisroel so central to the observance of Rosh Chodesh, given that Rosh Chodesh has nothing to do with the agricultural uniqueness of Eretz Yisroel?

The declaration of Rosh Chodesh emanates from the Beis Hamikdash, as all Torah ultimately comes from the Beis Hamikdash which housed the aron and was the seat of the Sanhedrin. From Eretz Yisroel, the outermost area endowed with kedushas ha'aretz, goes forth the declaration of Rosh Chodesh. Whether by the formal announcement of beis din or the observance of the people, the new moon is sanctified in Eretz Yisroel. As we are about to observe Rosh Chodesh this coming week, we turn to Eretz Yisroel and realize its centrality in our lives. From the days of the avos until today, Eretz Yisroel remains the primary location for mitzvah observance. Even as we follow the commandment of the Torah to continue performing mitzvos in Chutz La'aretz, we look forward to the day when mitzvos will be performed in their complete glory in Eretz Yisroel blessed with the Beis Hamikdash rebuilt in its midst.

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from: Rabbi Chanan Morrison <ravkooklist@gmail.com>  
to: Rav Kook List <Rav-Kook-List@googlegroups.com>  
subject: [Rav Kook List]  
mailing list: rav-kook-list.googlegroups.com

#### **Rav Kook List**

#### **Rav Kook on the Torah Portion**

#### **Psalm 82: The Holiness of the Synagogue**

The 82nd chapter of Psalms, which demands a just and righteous society, opens by noting the holiness of the congregation:

"God stands in the congregation of the Almighty." (Psalms 82:1)

According to the Talmud, this holds true not only for the entire people of Israel, but for every gathering of worship:

"From here we learn that the Holy One is to be found in the synagogue" (Berachot 6a).

The essence of prayer is a private matter, as the soul turns inwards. Why did the Sages place such importance on public prayer? Why did they emphasize the synagogue as a holy place where God's presence may be found?

The Constancy of the Collective

The strength of the collective lies in its stability. Once the community has been set on the correct path, it will not veer from it. Individuals, on the other hand, are unpredictable. People undergoing changes of heart and direction. But the community will always remain faithful to its ideals, as it says, "My spirit that is on you... will not leave your mouth or the mouth of your descendants... from now and to eternity" (Isaiah 59:21).

This quality of steadfastness is a Divine attribute. "I, God, have not changed" (Malachi 3:6). The aspect of immutability, of remaining faithful to the good, is the Divine quality of the synagogue, as a designated place where the congregation assembles for holy goals.

Interestingly, the scholar who emphasized this aspect of the community was Hillel. He would admonish:

"Do not separate yourself from the community. Do not trust in yourself until the day of your death." (Avot 2:5)

Hillel's two warnings share a common insight into human nature. Individuals do not always stay in the same state. They can grow and develop, and they can deteriorate. As an extreme example, the Sages recalled the incident of a High Priest who became a heretic after eighty years of devoted service in the holy Temple.

Since we cannot fully rely on ourselves, we should take care not to separate from the community. We need to be part of the community in order to offset our inherent instability.

For this reason, the Hebrew word for a synagogue is not Beit Tefillah, a house of prayer, but Beit Keneset, a house of gathering. (The Greek word 'synagogue' also means 'place of assembly'). The holiness of a synagogue derives from its function as a gathering place for the community.

#### **Standing Firm**

The psalmist used the Hebrew word 'nitzav' in describing the holiness of the community: 'God stands (nitzav) in the congregation of the Almighty.

'Nitzav' portrays a stable, fixed state. The holiness of the congregation is rooted in its steadfast constancy in pursuing its ideals and aspirations.

Similarly, we find the Torah uses 'nitzav' when describing the eternal covenant that God made with the entire Jewish people at the plains of Moab, as they prepared to enter the Land of Israel. The word 'nitzav' indicates their acceptance of this brit for all generations:

"Today, you are all standing (nitzavim) before God... to bring you into God's covenant.... In order to establish you on this day as His nation, and He will be your God." (Deut. 29:9-12)

(Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, pp. 22-23)

Comments and inquiries may be sent to: <mailto:RavKookList@gmail.com>

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By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

#### **Rav Yehudah Hachassid and his Shidduchin**

#### **By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff**

*At the end of our parsha, Yaakov is sent eastward to look for a shidduch.*

*This provides an opportunity to discuss:*

#### **Question #1: A Shidduch Crisis**

"My husband's name is Chayim Shelomoh, and an excellent *shidduch* possibility was just suggested for my daughter. However, the *bachur*'s name was originally Shelomoh, but as a child, he was ill and they added the name Chayim before Shelomoh. May we proceed with this *shidduch*?"

#### **Question #2: Must we turn down this shidduch?**

"My wife's name is Rivkah, and we were just suggested an excellent *shidduch* for my son, but the girl's name is Esther Rivkah. Must we turn down the *shidduch*?"

#### **Answer:**

Both of these questions relate to rules that are not based on Talmudic sources, but on the writings of Rav Yehudah Hachassid,

who prohibited or advised against many potential marriages that are, otherwise, perfectly acceptable according to *halachah*. But before we even discuss the writings of Rav Yehudah Hachassid, let us discover who he was and why his opinion carries so much weight.

### Who was Rav Yehudah Hachassid?

Well, to complicate matters a bit, there were two people in Jewish history who were called *Rav Yehudah Hachassid*. These two individuals lived hundreds of years apart, and, to the best of my knowledge, had no known connection to one another, other than that they were both esteemed *Ashkenazic* leaders in their respective generations. The Rav Yehudah Hachassid of the seventeenth century, famed as the builder of a *shul* in the Old City of Jerusalem, now called the *churva shul*, spearheaded the first “modern” effort to establish an *Ashkenazi* community in the holy city. Although this failed attempt had political and practical ramifications that lasted until the middle of the twentieth century, I have never heard him blamed for the blocking of a potential *shidduch*.

On the other hand, the much earlier Rav Yehudah Hachassid, whose writings and rulings will be discussed in this article, was a great *posek* and *mekubal*, whose *halachic* decisions and advice have been extensively followed by both *Ashkenazim* and *Sefardim*.

Rav Yehudah Hachassid, who was born in approximately 4910 (1150), is quoted several times in the *Tosafos* printed in our *Gemara* (for example, *Tosafos, Bava Metzia* 5b, s.v. *Dechashid* and *Kesuvos* 18b, s.v. *Uvekulei*). Rav Yehudah's students included a number of famous *rishonim* who are themselves *Baalei Tosafos*, such as the *Or Zarua*, the *Rokeach*, the *Semag*, and the *Sefer Haterumah*.

Rav Yehudah Hachassid was the head of a select group of *mekubalim* called the *Chassidei Ashkenaz*. He authored numerous works on *kabbalah* and was the author of the poem *Anim Zemiros*, sung in many *shullen* at the end of *Shabbos davening*. Two works of his are intended for use by the common laymen, the *Sefer Chassidim* and the *Tzavaas* [the ethical will of] *Rav Yehudah Hachassid*, and these mention the subject of today's article.

### The *tzava'ah* of Rav Yehudah Hachassid

In his ethical will, Rav Yehudah Hachassid lists 56 practices that he prohibits and/or advises against. Most of these have no source in the *Gemara*. Why did Rav Yehudah Hachassid prohibit these actions? Although he did not explain his reasons, later authorities assume that these are practices that Rav Yehudah Hachassid realized are dangerous for considerations based on *kabbalah*. It is quoted in the name of Rav Shneur Zalman of Liadi (the first Lubavitcher Rebbe, author of *Shulchan Aruch Harav* and *Tanya*) that to elucidate one of Rav Yehudah Hachassid's statements in his *tzava'ah* would require a work the size of the *Shelah*, a classic of *halachah*, *kabbalah* and *musar*, that is hundreds of pages long. I am not going to list everything in Rav Yehudah Hachassid's *tzava'ah*, but, instead, will simply cite some of the practices that he prohibits.

A man should not marry a woman who has the same name as his mother, nor should he marry a woman whose father has the same name that he has. Rav Yehudah Hachassid closes by saying: if people violated these instructions, one of the parties with the name in common should change his/her name -- perhaps this will provide some hope. He does not specify what the harm is or what the hope is for.

Two *mechutanim* should not have the same name.

Two *mechutanim* should not make two *shidduchim*, a son with a daughter and a daughter with a son.

One should not marry one's niece, either his brother's daughter or his sister's daughter.

A father and son should not marry two sisters.

Two brothers should not marry two sisters, nor should they marry a mother and her daughter.

A stepbrother and a stepsister should not marry.

Two married brothers should not live in the same city.

Before we get everyone disturbed, I will share with you that many of these relationships prohibited (or advised against) by Rav Yehudah Hachassid are not recognized as binding by later authorities. For example, the *Chofetz Chayim*'s first *rebbitzen* was his step-sister: he married the daughter of his step-father, who had already married the *Chofetz Chayim*'s widowed mother. Similarly, I know of numerous instances in which two brothers married two sisters, without anyone being concerned about it. And the *Tzemach Tzedek* of Lubavitch mentions that one need not be concerned about pursuing a *shidduch* in which the fathers of the *chossan* and the *kallah* have the same given name (*Shu't Tzemach Tzedek, Even Ha'ezer* #143).

### Selective service

In most places, the only *shidduchin*-related rule of Rav Yehudah Hachassid that has been accepted is that a man not marry a woman who has the same given name as his mother, nor should a woman marry a man who has the same name as her father. Why is this rule more accepted than any of the others?

Early *poskim* note that the custom of being concerned about this was far more widespread than concern about the other prohibitions of Rav Yehudah Hachassid. They propose several reasons to explain why this is true. One answer is because the *Arizal* was also concerned about a man marrying a woman whose name is the same as his mother. Yet, there is no evidence of the *Ari* or other authorities being concerned regarding the other rules of Rav Yehudah Hachassid (see *Shu't Mizmor Ledavid* of Rav David Pardo, #116, quoted by *Sdei Chemed*, Volume 7, page 17; *Shu't Divrei Chayim, Even Ha'ezer* #8).

Another possible reason is that the Chida writes that he, himself, saw problems result in the marriages of people who violated this specific prohibition of Rav Yehudah Hachassid.

Rav Chayim Sanzer adds that one should be concerned about this particular practice only because *khal Yisroel* has accepted as custom to pass up these marriages. To quote him: If the children of Israel are not prophets, they are descended from prophets, and there is an innate understanding that these *shidduchin* should not be made.

### The responsum of the *Noda Biyehudah*

No discussion of the instructions of Rav Yehudah Hachassid is complete without mentioning a responsum of the *Noda Biyehudah*, the *rav* of Prague and *posek hador* of the eighteenth century. The *Noda Biyehudah* (*Shu't Even Ha'ezer* II #79) discusses the following case: A *shidduch* was suggested for the sister-in-law of a certain Reb Dovid, a close *talmid* of the *Noda Biyehudah*, in which the proposed *chossan* had once had his name changed, because of illness, to the name of the girl's father. The *Noda Biyehudah* replied to Reb Dovid that generally he does not discuss questions that are not based on sources in Talmud and authorities. Nevertheless, he writes that he will break his usual rules and answer the inquiry.

First, the *Noda Biyehudah* points out a very important *halachic* principle: No *talmid chacham* may dispute any *halachic* conclusion of the *Gemara*, whether he chooses to be lenient or stringent, and anyone who does is not to be considered a *talmid chacham*. Upon this basis, the *Noda Biyehudah* notes that we should question the entire *tzava'ah* of Rav Yehudah Hachassid, since the work forbids numerous practices that run counter to rulings of the *Gemara*. To quote the *Noda Biyehudah*, “We find things in Rav Yehudah Hachassid's *tzava'ah* that are almost forbidden for us to hear.” The examples the *Noda Biyehudah* chooses include:

One should not marry one's sister's daughter. However, the *Gemara* (*Yevamos* 62b) rules that it is a *mitzvah* to do so.

Rav Yehudah Hachassid prohibited a father and son from marrying two sisters, yet we see that the great *amora* Rav Papa arranged the marriage of his son to his wife's younger sister (*Kesubos* 52b).

Another example is that Rav Yehudah Hachassid writes that two brothers should not marry two sisters, yet the *Gemara* (*Berachos* 44a) writes approvingly of these marriages. Furthermore, the *amora*, Rav Chisda,

arranged for his two daughters to marry two brothers, Rami bar Chamma and Ukva bar Chamma (ibid.).

#### **Explaining Rav Yehudah Hachassid's concern**

The *Noda Biyehudah* continues: "However, out of esteem for Rav Yehudah Hachassid, we must explain that in his great holiness, he realized that the *shidduchin* he was discouraging would all be bad for his own descendants.

Therefore, Rav Yehudah Hachassid's comments do not conflict with the *Gemara*, since he was writing a special ruling for individuals that should not be applied to anyone else. Therefore, Reb Dovid does not need to be concerned about his sister-in-law proceeding with this *shidduch*.

The *Noda Biyehudah* presents an additional reason why Reb Dovid does not need to be concerned: Rav Yehudah Hachassid's concerns apply only to birth names or names given to sons at their *bris*, but do not apply to any name changes that take place afterwards. The *Noda Biyehudah* rallies proofs that adding or changing a name because of illness can only help a person and cannot hurt. In addition, the *Noda Biyehudah* reasons that if someone was an appropriate *shidduch* because of his birth name, changing or adding to his name cannot now make this *shidduch* prohibited.

#### **Marry a talmid chacham**

Aside from the other reasons why the *Noda Biyehudah* feels that this *shidduch* can proceed, he adds another rule: It is more important for someone to marry off his daughter to a *talmid chacham*, which the *Gemara* says is the most important thing to look for in a *shidduch*, than to worry oneself about names, a concern that has no source in the *Gemara*.

At this point, let us examine one of our opening questions:

My husband's name is Chayim Shelomoh, and a *shidduch* was just suggested for my daughter of a *bachur* whose name was originally Shelomoh, but as a child, he was ill, and they added the name Chayim before Shelomoh. May we proceed with this *shidduch*?

According to the *Noda Biyehudah*, one may proceed with the *shidduch*, even if the younger Chayim Shelomoh does not qualify as a *talmid chacham* and even if they are descended from Rav Yehudah Hachassid, since the name Chayim was not part of his birth name.

#### **Stricter approaches**

On the other hand, there are other authorities who are more concerned about violating the instructions of Rav Yehudah Hachassid and do not mention any of the above *heterim* (quoted in *Sdei Chemed* Volume 7, pages 17- 20; *Kaf Hachayim*, *Yoreh Deah* 116:125). These authorities supply a variety of reasons why the arguments of the *Noda Biyehudah* do not apply. As far as the *Noda Biyehudah*'s statement that Rav Yehudah Hachassid could not have banned that which is expressly permitted, or even recommended, in the *Gemara* as a *mitzvah*, some respond that, although at the time of the *Gemara* there was no need to be concerned about the *kabbalistic* problems that these concerns may involve, our physical world has changed (*nishtaneh hateva*), and there is therefore, currently, a concern of *ayin hora* (quoted by *Sdei Chemed* page 19).

#### **In conclusion**

I leave it to the individual to discuss with his or her *posek* whether or not to pursue a particular *shidduch* because of an identical name or one of the other concerns raised by Rav Yehudah Hachassid. Of course, we all realize that the most important factor in finding a *shidduch* is to *daven* that *Hashem* provide the appropriate *shidduch* in the right time.

We will return to this discussion about Rav Yehudah Hachassid and the *Shidduchin* crisis in future weeks.

#### **November 18, 2014**

Among the rabbis slaughtered at prayer this morning in Jerusalem was Rabbi Mosheh Twersky, the grandson of the Rav, Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik. Rabbi Menachem Genack, CEO of OU Kosher, was a foremost talmid (student) of Rav Soloveitchik, and has spent decades editing his works and is now having them published by OU Press. Rabbi Genack knew Mosheh Twersky well, even before Rabbi Twersky's Bar Mitzvah. Here are Rabbi Genack's thoughts on Rabbi Twersky and today's tragedy:

I remember Mosheh from his childhood. He was always the apple of the Rav's eye, his oldest grandson. When Rabbi Soloveitchik's wife died, the Rav went to live with their daughter, Dr. Atarah Twersky, Mosheh's mother, in Massachusetts. So Mosheh grew up in the Rav's household.

I remember once in the late sixties when Mosheh was a child and in New York for the weekend staying with his aunt. The Rav asked me to show him around town. I remember we went to the Museum of Natural History together. We had a great time. Mosheh was a tremendous talmid chacham ("wise student" or scholar), and exceptionally humble. He also learned from Rav Dovid Soloveitchik of Brisk and was very close to Rabbi Gershon Zaks, the grandson of the Chofetz Chaim. Rabbi Zaks gave a weekly shiur (seminar), in which Mosheh stood out because of his great intelligence. I was in that shiur as well, and could see his brilliance.

When Mosheh's first son, Meshullam, was born, the Rav was present at the brit (circumcision ceremony), and the Rav's remarks made a lasting impression on me. The Rav noted that Rabbi Akiva Eiger discusses whether a grandfather is obligated in the *mitzvah* (commandment) of *brit milah*. The conclusion is that the primary obligation is on the father, but the grandfather is obligated as well. The Rav related this discussion to the concept of whether the grandfather is obligated in the *mitzvah* of talmud Torah (teaching Torah) to his grandchild just as the father is obligated to teach his child. From the verse in Parashat Va'etchanan, "ve'hoda'tam le'vanecha ve'livnei vanecha, ...and you shall make them known to your children and your children's children" (Deuteronomy 4:9), we see that the grandfather is obligated to teach Torah to his grandchild. When it comes to transmitting the mesorah (tradition), the further back in time that one can reach, the more distant the generation that is the source of the mesorah, the more meaningful is the mesorah. Mosheh Twersky represented that glorious tradition of Torah learning and mesorah embodied by the Rav, and that brit represented the transmission of the mesorah to the next generation, to the grandchildren of the Rav.

Losing Rabbi Twersky breaks a mesorah that led back to the Rav, compounding the tragedy of Rabbi Twersky's death. Now Rabbi Twersky's many students will carry on the glorious transmission of the mesorah. Rabbi Twersky became a rebbe and rosh kollel (dean) at Yeshiva Torat Moshe in Yerushalayim and was extremely devoted to his students, a very caring teacher. He was reserved, but this did not hide his extraordinary and insightful intellect.

I am devastated by his murder as well as the murder of the other victims. These tragedies happen all too often, but when it comes to someone so close to you, with such extraordinary gifts intellectually and spiritually, the tragedy becomes even more devastating.

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from: Shabbat Shalom shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org

reply-to: shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org

subject: Parsha - Shabbat Shalom from the OU

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***Rabbi Genack on Death of Rabbi Mosheh Twersky, ז"ל: 'He Was the Apple of the Rav's Eye'***