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The Long View of Jewish History

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

November 16, 2023

Legend has it that, 400 years ago, local native Americans relinquished ownership over the Island of "Manhattes" for the modern equivalent of about \$1000. In the public imagination, that infamous barter of Manhattan for worthless trinkets, ranks as the worst deal in history. Even if this legend is true, this reckless exchange isn't as laughable as Esav's trade with his brother 3700 years ago. To barter your status as the "chosen first-born" for a plate of beans is absurd and embarrassing. What caused his temporary lunacy? What was Esav thinking? Esav's folly stems from the closing of his imagination. Responding to Yaakov's offer of a trade, he announces, "As I will, one day die, the title of first-born is meaningless to me." To Esav, any benefit which does not surface in his own lifetime is worthless. It was already clear that Jewish destiny would take centuries to fully evolve, and that historical prospects for the first born were planted in the distant future. Recognizing the postponement of any historical opportunity, Esav abdicated his title, preferring a hot meal to future glory. His limited vision was too narrow to appreciate the long view. Every sin is a tragic barter of the future for the small but pressing needs of the immediate.

Furthermore, Esav's frantic pace of life obscured his vision. Unlike his more scholarly and sedentary brother, who dwelled in introspective tents, Esav chose an active life of hunting and tracking. His frenetic lifestyle left little time for reflection and little occasion for contemplating the bigger picture. Exhausted,

starving, and too tired for self-examination, he bartered away his future. Esav's tragic mistake is the footprint left behind by a life which races faster than wisdom can keep pace with. In addition to being narrow-minded, Esav's dismissal of historical legacy appears selfish. He didn't deny any value to the title of first born but wondered aloud about the benefits for himself. Though it may possess great value for his descendants, these are people he will never meet. His growling stomach craves a hot plate of beans, and his appetite is more important than any advantage for his offspring. Esav's tragic blunder isn't just a product of myopic vision, but is also, shockingly, self-centered. Life should never be "all about me" or focused solely upon private benefits. Moral personalities sense a larger purpose to life and willingly sacrifice for the long term and for future generations.

Verticality

Franz Kafka, who possessed a sharp but tortured sense of Jewish identity, once remarked that "we Jews are born old." As we are born into a long and ancient legacy of past generations, we live their strengths and their sufferings, while perpetuating their traditions and prayers. Though Kafka was correct, and we are born with one eye upon past generations, our other eye is fixed upon future generations.

One day our own pictures will hang upon a wall and will tell a story. Our portraits will narrate our personal chapter in the great book we call Jewish history. Our lives are but one section of a glorious but sometimes complicated story of Jewish destiny. Jewish identity is pitched within an intergenerational maze of past and present. Selfish life is horizontal, whereas a life of covenant is vertical. By sacrificing foresight for fleeting pleasure, Esav betrayed any sacred covenant with his future and with generations unborn.

Dread and Optimism

Over the past month, we have struggled with a complex range of emotions. We have experienced shock, sorrow, revulsion, mourning, fear, anger and anxiety. Alongside these powerful emotions we are consumed with dread, as our people face a very long and winding road. Eliminating our maniacal and homicidal enemies will be an arduous campaign. Astonishingly, our moral and just war has awakened the ancient monster of antisemitism which will not easily be vanquished. Even after we succeed in our just war, we will continue to face both military and domestic challenges. Many of us struggle to remain optimistic about the future state of Israel and the future state of our people. Dread runs high, while confidence runs low.

Envisioning the long view of Jewish history restores faith and reinforces optimism. We face many uncertainties in the immediate present, but the larger narrative of Jewish future has already been written. We know exactly how this all ends. We just don't know how quickly it ends and how circuitous the

route toward the terminus. Faith in Jewish history affords the confidence to navigate the adversities of Jewish history. Throughout Jewish history we were attuned to the long view, and this vision helped us endure challenges far worse than our current predicament. Though facing irredeemable conditions, we always knew that our lives played a quiet but important role in a larger historical arc. Knowing that our courage didn't always yield immediate dividends, we looked to the long view. Patiently but valiantly, we added bricks to the ever-growing wall of Jewish history.

Life in the modern state of Israel, has made us all a bit impatient. Trained to think in redemptive or triumphant terms, to us everything feels new, fresh, and brimming with potential. Our triumphs have made us impatient and less sensitive to the long view of Jewish history.

Many refer to this war as the second War of Independence. This terminology assumes that the consequences of 1948 can be neatly wrapped into the first 75 years of our state, and that we are currently embarking upon a new chapter. I prefer to call this war a "continuation" of the War of Independence. It may take us several generations to fully achieve the independence, sovereignty and security we so desperately seek. It will certainly take multiple generations to achieve the religious, spiritual, and moral condition we have dreamed of. Taking the long view of Jewish history mustn't distract us from present and immediate challenges, but it should provide optimism even during dark moments.

The Charles Bridge

About 20 years ago I was warned that, when visiting Prague, I should avoid visiting the Charles Bridge which spans the Danube river. Being a curious type and a non-conformist, I made this the first stop of my itinerary.

Arriving at the bridge, I better understood the reason for these warnings. As punishment for Jewish blasphemy against Christianity, a 17th century Jewish leader was forced to adorn a statue of Jesus with golden letters spelling out phrases of Jewish prayer. Though initially offended by this encounter, I quickly overcame my uneasiness. After all, I was a mere three hours away from my glistening homeland.

My thoughts immediately turned to the 17th century Jews of Prague who daily endured this statue without enjoying the horizons of hope which the state of Israel afforded me. Sensing the spiritual stamina and stiff defiance of these generations filled me with moral energy and with Jewish pride. They took the long view of history, and now it is our turn.

Perhaps, one day, our eyes will gaze upon the radiant and golden city of Jerusalem with fully restored Jewish peoplehood. Perhaps we will be that fortunate. Alternatively, we may not be that fortunate and this vision will only emerge long after our eyes have permanently shut. Either way, we will have built a historical platform for the future. We may not personally witness it, but our fingerprints will be all over it.

The writer is a rabbi at Yeshivat Har Etzion/Gush, a hesder yeshiva. He has smicha and a BA in computer science from Yeshiva University as well as a masters degree in English literature from the City University of New York.

https://torahweb.org/torah/special/2023/rtwe_evil.html

Rabbi Mayer Twersky

Evil's Fifth Column

Western Civilization is imploding.

The lifeblood of the victims had not yet cooled. Civilized people of conscience were still reeling from shock at the savage slaughter of babies, beheading, burning people alive, kidnapping, torture, and rape gleefully perpetrated by Hamas. In that very moment the moral turpitude which is destroying Western Civilization was on full display. Various groups, notable amongst them student groups, issued vile, Faustian statements exonerating Hamas for its savagery and brazenly blaming its victim, Israel, for the carnage. Some university presidents immediately responded; reprehensibly, they generically condemned violence, careful not to single out or even reference Hamas. Others, after an initial sickening silence, prevaricated. Upon days of public pressure and contemplation, they decided that, in fact, they were opposed to beheading babies but hastened to "balance" their tepid remarks by expressing profound concern for the suffering of the innocent Palestinians in Gaza, thereby implicitly or explicitly condemning Israel's humanitarian, self-defense response to subhuman, belligerent savagery.

Notably, these "humanitarians" do not comment on the fate of Arab populations outside of Israel as they languish under brutal, dictatorial regimes. Tellingly, these academic "moralists" have been silent throughout the years as Hamas has integrated its terror network into the civilian infrastructure, inter alia, shielding themselves in, behind and beneath hospitals, schools, and residential complexes. When other countries have exercised their inalienable right to self-defense (think of any just, modern war) we have not heard a chorus of voices expressing concern for civilian casualties and invoking the laws of war. And rightly so. Should Hitler or Osama bin Laden or Isis be given carte blanche because of the grim, gruesome, tragic reality that even defensive wars inevitably involve civilian casualties? Should terrorists remain forever free to continue massacring innocents because they cruelly and cynically imbed themselves amongst the civilian population? Civilization cannot and would not survive such a hypocritical policy of "restraint".

Every person of conscience intuitively that outright support for Hamas or camouflaged support in the form of moral equivocation are odious. Nonetheless, it is vital that we translate our pre-cognitive intuition into cognitive categories as that will reveal the existential threat which Hamas' apologists pose to civilization.

"The species of man is unique, there is no other species that resembles him in this respect, that he, of his own accord through his own understanding and contemplation, can discern good and evil", writes Maimonides, the great medieval jurist and philosopher (Code of Jewish Law, Laws of Repentance, ch.5) Humanity is divinely endowed with a capacity for moral clarity. The civilized world can only combat forces of evil such as Nazism, Isis, Al Qaeda, and Hamas with such moral clarity. Moral clarity marshals the necessary resolve to exercise military might and vanquish evil. Without moral clarity and resolve, military firepower will never be directed to vanquish evil. The evil of explicit "moral" support for Hamas, or support camouflaged in equivocation and equivalences, is that it destroys moral clarity. Clearly, this form of evil is not academic; it reeks blood. By destroying moral clarity, it erodes moral resolve and dissipates opposition to evil. It perniciously acts as evil's fifth column. Evil's fifth column - the students, professors, administrators, and their co-conspiratorial ilk beyond academic circles - has and continues to provide moral cover for the atrocities of Hamas, empowering them to continue their savagery and barbarism.

Undoubtedly, rabid antisemitism animates the fifth column. In antisemitic quarters, Jewish blood is of no value and Jewish self-defense is a war crime. Nonetheless, the fifth column poses a universal threat. This is so morally because the beheading of babies, the fiery immolation of entire families, torture, and rape etc. constitute crimes against humanity. And this is so pragmatically because the Hamas beast, if allowed to torture and devour the Jews, will then turn its sadistic, predatory, murderous attention to all Westerners and "infidels".

Hamas, along with all other "pure, unadulterated evil" terrorist organizations, needs to be militarily destroyed. But that can only happen if the hypocrisy and evil of its fifth column is peacefully exposed and defeated. Every Jew and all other people of conscience must participate in this noble, non-violent effort to restore moral clarity. Educators, philanthropists, university board members, college bound students and their parents, heads of corporations, essayists, political pundits and activists, et al., and voters on both sides of the political aisle - each acting within their respective domains with moral clarity - must join forces. (Fortunately, some individuals and corporations have already taken initial steps in that direction.) The future of the Jewish people demands that effort. And the future of civilization depends upon it.

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from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org> to: ravfrand@torah.org date: Nov 16, 2023, 2:26 PM
Rav Frand - A Person Can Get Used to Anything – An Advantage and a Disadvantage

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1269 – The B.T. Dilemma: Can He Trust His Non-Observant Parents That All Will Be Kosher? Good Shabbos!

The pasuk says "When Esav was forty years old, he took as a wife Yehudis daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite; and they were a provocation of the spirit to Yitzchak and Rivka." (Bereshis 26:34-35). The Medrash notes the fact that the Torah points out that the daughters-in-law behavior was painful to Yitzchak and to Rivka (l'Yitzchak u'l'Rivka) rather than merely stating that their behavior was painful to Yitzchak and Rivka (l'Yitzchak v'Rivka) – without the second "to". The Medrash states that the nature of the Yitzchak's pain differed from that of Rivka's pain. Rivka, having grown up in the house of idolaters, was better able to handle pagan daughters-in-law than was her husband, who grew up in the house of Avraham and Sora. Rivka was a tzadekes and of course avodah zarah bothered her, but having experienced it at home, she did not have the same visceral reaction to it as did Yitzchak. Dr. Abraham Twerski, zt"l, makes the point that a person who is exposed to negative phenomenon on a daily basis can lose their sensitivity to it. I once saw a statistic that the average child growing up in America has seen 300 murders (on television, movies, etc.). This was in the days BEFORE video games, in which killing people happens ALL THE TIME. Do you think that murder means the same thing that it meant 100 years ago? If you see something day in and day out, you can get used to it. You can get used to anything.

The truth of the matter is that this is the only way people were able to survive in the concentration camps. It was because "they got used to it." You can get used to anything. That can be a tremendous advantage but it can be a horrible disadvantage as well – if someone loses his sensitivity to evil. Giving A Boost to the Efficacy of the Tefilla of a Tzadik ben Rasha

In the beginning of the parsha we read "Yitzchak entreated Hashem opposite his wife, because she was barren. Hashem allowed Himself to be entreated by him and his wife Rivka conceived." (Bereshis 25:21). Rivka was barren. Both she and her husband, Yitzchak, davened that she should have children. The pasuk says that Hashem listened to Yitzchak and Rivka became pregnant.

Rashi points out that the pasuk emphasizes that Hashem listened to him – and not to her! It was Yitzchak's prayers that were answered, not Rivka's. Rashi explains that this was because "The (power of the) prayers of a tzadik (righteous person) who is the child of a rasha (wicked person) is not comparable to the (power of the) prayers of a tzadik son of a tzadik.

Yitzchak and Rivka were both righteous, but he was the son of Avraham and she was the daughter of Besuel. Therefore, his prayers were superior. The Brisker Rav (Rav Yitzchak Ze'ev Soloveitchik) infers from this statement of Rashi that had Rivka been a tzadekes the daughter of a tzadik, the power of her prayers would be equal to that of Yitzchak and the Ribono shel Olam could have listened to either of them or to both of them.

The Brisker Rav is bothered by this inference: Does that mean that aside from their ancestry, Rivka was on the same level of righteousness as Yitzchak? Yitzchak went through the Akeidah. He was moser nefesh. He was an olah temima (an unblemished sacrifice). Rivka was a very fine woman but how can we compare her righteousness to his? He was also much older than Rivka, as he was sixty years old at this time and Rivka was much younger.

The Brisker Rav says that we see from here that a righteous woman who is the daughter of a rasha and the sister of a rasha, who was able to overcome her environmental disadvantages and emerge as a righteous woman is on the same level as a Yitzchak. To remain steadfast in her beliefs as a young girl in a house full of avodah zarah and full of reshaim is a monumental spiritual accomplishment, comparable to that of Yitzchak, who went through the Akeidah.

This brings us to our next subject:

Why in fact does HaKadosh Baruch Hu accept the prayers of a tzadik ben tzadik more than those of a tzadik ben rasha? The tzadik ben rasha has a lot going for him. He has been able to raise himself above his corrupt environment. That is an extraordinary spiritual accomplishment! So why does Hashem favor the prayers of a second generation tzadik over that of a first generation tzadik? The opposite should be the case: "In a place where a baal teshuva stands, completely righteous individuals cannot stand." (Brachos 34b).

I saw an approach to answer this question by a Rabbi Dovid Zucker, a Rosh Kollel in Chicago. He explains that the fact that prayer works is not something logical. It is something spiritual, something that sometimes defies regular logic. Better said, it has its own set of logic. There are laws of nature and there are metaphysical laws. In Hilchos Tefilla there are certain situations and conditions that make a person's prayer more accepted than other situations and conditions.

For example, there is a principle that "The Holy One Blessed be He does not reject the prayers of the masses" (Brachos 8a). In other words, a person has a better chance of having his prayers answered if he davens with a minyan. This is one of the metaphysical-spiritual laws of Tefilla. Not only that, if someone cannot daven with a minyan, he should at least try to daven at the same time that the tzibur is praying. (ibid.) Why does that work? The answer is that there is such a thing as an "eis ratzon" (a time of favor). There are such things as favorable times and favorable places to daven!

Why do you think people go to kivrei tzadikim (the graves of the righteous) to pray? What is behind that? Part of what is behind that is that a kever tzadik is a makom kodosh (holy place). If a person davens in a holier place, it makes his prayer better and more effective. That is why even if someone misses minyan, there is an advantage to daven in a Beis haKenesses (synagogue) or a Beis haMedrash (study hall). Why? It gives the prayer a boost. It takes advantage of the fact that the prayer is recited in a Beis haKnesses or a Beis haMedrash.

What is the logic behind that? In the privacy of my own home, I can have the greatest focus and dedication, while in shul there are more distractions. The answer is that these are parts of the metaphysical laws of Tefilla. There are certain things that make prayer more accepted.

Prayers are accepted during the Ten Days of Repentance between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur better than they are during the whole year. Why? It is an eis ratzon.

Rabbeinu Bechaye writes that it is customary throughout the Jewish world that women recite a prayer that they should be blessed with good children at the time they light Shabbos candles. He explains that this is done because the time of Hadlakas Neiros Shabbos is an eis ratzon. By virtue of the fact that the woman is fulfilling the mitzvah of lighting Shabbos candles, it makes her tefilla then more effective. It becomes a favorable time.

Rabbi Zucker writes that one of these metaphysical laws of prayer is that the prayer of a tzadik ben tzadik is more effective than that of a tzadik ben rasha. The tzadik ben rasha has overcome great odds and has proven his closeness to Hashem by emerging righteous from a house of wickedness, but nevertheless, in the laws of prayer, which have a logic of their own, the prayer of a righteous person who is the son of a righteous person, trumps the prayer of a righteous person who is the son of a wicked person.

This brings us to an interesting question. We have all occasionally davened in a beis avel (a mourner's house). It is a big mitzvah to help the mourner make a minyan during his week of shiva. Yes, but let us ask – why are you forgoing the mitzvah of davening in a shul? The Gemara says that davening in a shul is much more acceptable than davening in a house – so how can someone give that up by going to a beis avel?

The answer is that while davening in a beis avel, you are also doing a chessed for someone. That makes your tefilla more acceptable. That makes it into an eis ratzon because while I am davening, I am doing a chessed for those who are alive and those who are dead. This is also what the Rabbeinu Bachaye meant – when a woman davens at the time of lighting Shabbos candles, it is more acceptable.

If that is the case, the prayer of a "tzadik ben tzadik" is also more effective. That is just the way it works. That is the "law." The Rosh was asked a 'shaylah' (halachic question). The congregation wanted to know who should be appointed as its

shliach tzibbur. One candidate was a tzadik personally but he came from a disgraced family. The other candidate was a tzadik from a distinguished family.

Someone might say “I don’t need a Rosh to answer that question. It is a Rashi in Parshas Toldos!” Rashi says explicitly in our parsha that the prayer of a second generation tzadik is superior to that of a tzadik whose father was wicked. However, the Teshuvos HaRosh ruled otherwise. He pasked that it is preferable to take the tzadik from the disgraced family over the tzadik with a more impressive pedigree.

Why? The Rosh writes that by taking this candidate from the disgraced family, the congregation is “drawing close those who are far” (being me’karev rechokim). The act of kiruv and chessed of the congregation will bring them merit in the Heavenly Court and will help the prayers of their shliach tzibur to be accepted.

This is common. People who are ba’alei teshuva have a certain inferiority complex. “My friend here is a me’yuchas – he can trace his ancestry back to Dovid HaMelech and look where I come from! What am I?” The Rosh quotes the pasuk “...Shalom, Shalom, to the ‘rachok’ and to the ‘karov’ ...” (Yeshaya 57:19), in which the person who is distant (rachok) is given precedence over the person who is near (karov). That is the why the Rosh paskens to take the tzadik from a disgraced family. It gives their prayers the added boost called “kiruv rechokim” just like we can daven in a mourner’s house rather than in a synagogue because of the added mitzvah of Nichum Aveilim. That chessed-boost equates the prayers of the tzadik ben rasha with that of a tzadik ben tzadik.

There is no contradiction between the psak of the Rosh and the Rashi in our parsha because in our parsha, no one is appointing Yitzchak to be the shliach tzibur and no one is appointing Rivka to daven. They each daven to Hashem independently on their own initiative. In that situation, with all other factors being equal, the Ribono shel Olam gives priority to the prayers of a tzadik ben tzadik. That is just the way it is. Those are the laws of tefilla.

The Rosh’s case is not like that. There, the shul comes and asks “Who should we appoint?” There the Rosh says “Tell the shul to appoint the tzadik ben rasha because it will give them the merit of being m’karev this Jew with the inferiority complex.” That equates with the tefilla of a tzadik ben tzadik.

Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem

DavidATwersky@gmail.com

Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD
dhoffman@torah.org

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<https://www.yutorah.org/sidebar/lecturedata/1080614/YUTorah-in-Print:-Parshat-Toldos-5784es> from the First Aliyah in Toldot

Rav Soloveitchik on Toldot: Yitzchak’s Countenance
Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider (Excerpted from Torah United, Teachings on The Weekly Parashah From Rav Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, and The Chassidic Masters (Ktav, 2023)

These are the offspring of Yitzchak, son of Avraham; Avraham begat Yitzchak” (Genesis 25:19). Rashi asks the obvious question: Why does the verse repeat the fact that Yitzchak is Avraham’s son? He answers that the Torah is addressing the generation’s leitzanim, a loose term that can encompass everyone from scoffers to skeptics who debase everything they touch, who insinuated that Avimelech must have been Yitzchak’s father, given the many childless years the couple had endured. In order to refute this calumny, God made Yitzchak an exact duplicate of the image of Avraham, so that skeptics could not but concede that “Avraham begat Yitzchak.”¹ Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik’s namesake and great-grandfather, Rabbi Yosef Dov ha-Levi Soloveitchik, questions this comment in his Beit ha-Levi. If these leitzanim were scandalously and scurrilously spreading the lie that Avraham, tzadik of the generation, was not Yitzchak’s legitimate father, why not brand them what they are—wicked? Moreover, how did their fiction even make sense, since Sarah and not Avraham was clearly the barren one? Although he offers his own answers, his great-grandson the Rav takes a different approach, one which elucidates Yitzchak’s unique place as one of the Patriarchs.

Finding Yitzchak The Torah scants the biography of Yitzchak. While Avraham has three parashiyot and Yaakov many more, there is not a single parashah, with the possible exception of Toledot, in which Yitzchak is the dominant figure. This signals to us that we should pay close attention to whatever the Torah does tell us, such as the episode of contentious well-digging, in which the Philistines filled Avraham’s wells with dirt and Yitzchak dug them out again. A key verse reads: “Yitzchak dug again the wells of water that they had dug in the days of

his father Avraham, and which the Philistines had stopped up after Avraham's death, and called them names like those his father had given them" (Genesis 26:18). The Rav points out that if we pay close attention, we will see that much more than fresh water was at stake. The very next verse refers to digging a "well of mayim chayim" (Genesis 26:19). While usually mayim chayim, literally "living water," is translated as fresh or running water, drawing on rabbinic exegesis the Rav understands it as "life-giving water," that is, the Torah. In the era of the Bible, the well was a place where people would congregate to relate and receive information, so this means that Yitzchak succeeded in disseminating the life-giving Torah of his father. The leitzanim of the generation had dismissed Yitzchak as a capable successor of Avraham's legacy. They laughed at the notion that this man, a full century younger than his father, could continue to articulate, disseminate, and implement Avraham's vision. Word around the well was that Avraham's entire philosophy had died with him.² Yitzchak's very name is emblematic of this doubting world into which he was born. The Rav quotes Yonatan ben Uziel's Aramaic rendering of the name Yitzhak to mean laughter. When he came into the world, people jeered and sneered. It was this tyke's lot to be the target of stares and loud whispers, an object of ridicule.³ People contended that instead of following in Avraham's footsteps, Yitzchak would be drawn to other influential personalities of his day. The leitzanim did not mean Yitzchak was the offspring of Avimelech biologically but culturally. They expected him to be molded by prevailing societal norms and mores. When Rashi writes that "Avraham begat Yitzchak" means the son had his father's visage, we should not envision Yitzchak as a physical clone of his father, but as a worthy spiritual heir who courageously defied the naysayers to tread his path.

Exemplar of Strength Yitzchak was given the upbringing necessary to successfully carry on his father's legacy. Rabbi Avraham b. Meir Ibn Ezra posits that holid, the Hebrew term translated as "begat" in "Avraham begat (holid) Yitzchak," in fact refers to the raising and nurturing of a child. Avraham instilled his and the Torah's values in his son.⁴ But it took a Yitzchak to devotedly embrace and actualize these lessons of his upbringing. The Rav cites the classic kabbalistic hierarchy of divine attributes in which Yitzchak is identified with the divine attribute of gevurah, usually translated as "strength." Yitzchak demonstrated immense inner strength and determination in internalizing his father's teachings and carrying the torch of Torah forward. Avraham was the inspiring revolutionary, and Yitzchak ensured that the fervor did not fizzle out by preserving his father's life's work. In this sense, Yitzchak's strength was not only manifest in steeling himself against the barbs of others and pressing doggedly forward under a heavy legacy, but in his distinctive capacity to retreat and withdraw. Yitzchak held his own self in check, so

to speak, to maintain the trails his father had blazed.⁵ If not for Yitzchak, Avraham's contribution to the world would have been utterly lost. Yitzchak dug again the wells of his father and even called them the same names. This episode is meant to teach that Yitzchak never sought his own fame, and that he succeeded in concretizing his father's legacy.

Exploring the Insight of the Rav Two parashiyot later, in Vayetze, we find Yaakov declaring in his ultimate confrontation with Lavan: "If I had not had the God of my father, the God of Avraham and the fear of Yitzchak, you would have sent me away empty-handed" (Genesis 31:42). The commentators are instinctively drawn to the curious phrase "fear of Yitzchak." Rashi understands it as an epithet of God, "the Fear of Yitzchak." Ibn Ezra reads it as Yitzchak's fear of God, evidenced on the day of the Akedah, the merit of which came to Yaakov's aid.⁷

Characterizing Yitzchak in this way fits our description of Yitzchak as a man of inner strength, who was prepared to be slaughtered in order to carry out his father's mission and the will of the Almighty. The Sages refer to this event as the Akedah, the Binding of Yitzchak, because it encapsulates his personality. In a word, Yitzchak resolutely bound himself to his father's mission and to the will of the Almighty. The Rav shared the following personal episode which sheds light on his perspective regarding the personality of Yitzchak. The Rav recalled that when he was a youth in Khaslavich, the secretary of the bet din, who was a very old man, recounted to the young Yosef Dov that he recalled as a boy having seen a very old cantor, who when he was a child, had been a member of an itinerant choir that would go from town to town. The cantor had himself recalled that once, when this choir was in Vilna to perform, he had seen a very imposing man, tall and handsome, walking in the street surrounded by his disciples in a semi-circle. When he inquired who the man was, he was told that he was the Chassid of Vilna. [In his lifetime, the Gaon of Vilna, because of his pious ways, was called "the Chassid"] Hearing this made a powerful impression on the Rav. He had met another man who had met another man who had seen the Gaon. "I felt the link between the generations, the confluence of the mighty streams of the mesorah, not only the immediacy but the intimacy of the relationship between the generations of the tradition, the dialogue that transcends time."⁸ Meeting someone who met someone else who beheld the visage of the Vilna Gaon is emblematic of an unbroken chain. Yitzchak teaches us that to be a Jew means to steadfastly safeguard the teachings received from the previous generation, to carry on the transcendent dialogue. The tradition of our people, our masorah, transmitted from parents to children and teachers to disciples, lives on in those who possess Yitzchak's deep devotion to our faith's glorious past, ensuring our celebrated future.

[1] Rashi on Genesis 25:19, s.v. קחצי תא דילוה מהרבא. [2] Chumash Mesoras HaRav, 1:195. [3] Ibid., 1:194. [4] Ibid., 1:184. [5] Ibid., 1:193. [6] Rashi on Genesis 31:42. [7] Ibn Ezra on Genesis 31:42 and 31:53. [8] Rakeffet-Rothkoff, The Rav, 1:141–142.

from: Esplanade Capital <jeisenstadt@esplanadecap.com>
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Rabbi Yisroel Reisman's Chumash Shiur
The Understanding of Eisav and Edom

Eisav in this week's Parsha has a special place. There is a Yishmael, there is an Amaleik and there is an Eisav. Eisav is a people that say, we are the chosen people. We are the people who HKB"H really wants. That is the Middah of Eisav. That is the Middah of the western world today. The whole religion of Catholicism is to say we are the chosen people. The Middah of Eisav is this Behala, make a Behala against Klal Yisrael to build themselves up.

The Gemara says in Maseches Yoma 20b (5 lines from the bottom) Tannu Rabbanan, של המונה קול המונה של (אלמלא גלגל חמה נשמע קול המונה של) (קול המונה של רומי) means Eisav's Tumult, the noise that Rome makes. If not for the orbit of the sun, we would go crazy from the noise that Eisav makes. The Maharsha says, it doesn't mean that the sun makes noise that drowns out the noise of Eisav. There is a Bi'ur. What is the Bi'ur? The (המונה של רומי), the Tumult of Edom is what you see when you turn on the news. It is Eisav belittling Klal Yisrael, putting down Klal Yisrael and claiming the higher moral ground than Klal Yisrael. It is one thing with Amaleik. Amaleik is a Rasha. But the Middah of Edom is to say we are morally right, you are morally wrong. We have a higher standing, we have a better position than you. That is (קול המונה של רומי). That takes over the world. The Tumuling of Edom takes over the world.

So what is the antidote? (אלמלא גלגל חמה). What is (גלגל חמה)? The Iyun Yaakov on Bava Basra Daf Tes Zayin says the following. The Gemara says 16b (19 lines from the bottom) אבן טובה היתה תלויה בצוארו של אברהם אבינו שכל חולה הרואה אותו (מיד מתרפא). That Avraham Avinu had a special stone and someone who would see it would be healed and when he was Niftar HKB"H placed it onto the sun. HKB"H put it into the (גלגל חמה) the rotation of the sun.

All of the Baalei Machshava, the Baal Akeida, the Alshich on Tehillim 113, Rabbeinu Bachya in the beginning of Yisro, and really before them the Rashba in his Pirush which is brought here in the Ain Yaakov, they all say that this refers to Cholei Hanefesh. It doesn't mean a stone that heals sick people. The Gemara actually says that until Yaakov Avinu nobody got sick. It means Cholei Hanefesh. People who are Fartumult in their Ehrlichkeit, Fartumult in their Frumkeit, Fartumult in their Emunah. Avraham Avinu, the glow of Avraham Avinu, the Even Tovah of Avraham Avinu is Zagt the Ain Yaakov, the Even Hama'ir, the seeing, the attitude of a Gadol B'yisrael,

that is the Refuah. It doesn't mean the speeches of Avraham Avinu, it doesn't mean that he made a Drasha and it inspired people. It means the Etzem Metzios. Being in the Daled Amos of an Adam Gadol, when a person sees that the Hevlei Olam Hazeh become Batul. When you see the calmness of an Adam Gadol, it calms a person down, it makes the person understand everything around him is just a Tumult.

Today we live in a time where we are worried about Acheinu Bnei Yisrael that are in Eretz Yisrael. We almost can't hold ourselves but to listen to the news and to find out the news, and it is a Tumult because most of the news certainly from secular sources is about those who are belittling Klal Yisrael and blaming Klal Yisrael. It is a Tumult. It comes from a good place that we are worried but it is (המונה של רומי). The Refuah is the (גלגל חמה), the brightness of Gedolei Yisrael. If you don't have the Zechus to be in the Daled Amos of Gedolei Yisrael but at least to look at Toraso Shel Gedolei Yisrael. You could look at what they write about Shas Tzarah, to understand what they write about Shas Tzarah. It is a different dimension. It is a dimension of calmness, whatever is going on in the world. A dimension of a person who says I have something that needs to get done.

We saw Rav Pam, the most incredible thing is that whatever he was in middle of, he had a calm demeanor. Even if it was a time of challenge, he did it in a very calm way. Unbelievably Os'gecheshboned.

Let me share with you an episode I once had with Rav Pam. When he was ill and he had to go for radiation treatment to the hospital in Manhattan, I wanted very much to have an opportunity to be Meshameish him, to drive him. He didn't let me. He said there is Seder in Yeshiva, you can't. When it came to Bein Haz'manim, I said okay Rabbi there is no Seder today. He let me drive him. I went with him to the hospital and I accompanied him in to the room that he had to be in. Then we went home. When we got home, I walked into the door. He was in middle of an illness so you would think that he would be all Tzutumult. We got to the door and he said Reb Yisroel I want to tell you something. I know you wanted very badly to drive me. So I let you drive me once. But from now on, you sit and learn and I will have one of the bus drivers will drive me and you stay and sit and learn. The calmness, the Os'gecheshboned'keit, picked him up, drove there and back and when I walk into his door he stopped. He made a Cheshbon. The whole Tzutumul of everything he was going through, at that moment everything became clear and calm. (אלמלא גלגל חמה) we would all drown in the (המונה של רומי) in the Tumult of Rome all around.

We have to look in this time of tremendous worry, we have to channel the worry towards our Davening and Maisim Tovim. But Behala you need (גלגל חמה), you need the sun. The radiance of Gedolei Yisrael. We should be Zoche to be in the Daled Amos of Gedolei Yisroel who have calmness in difficult

times. If we are not Zoche to be with them, at least to see it B'divraiheim Hakedoshim. May HKB"Y take us (מְצַרֶה לְרוֹחָה, (ומאֲפִלֶה לְאוֹרָה, ומשֶׁבוּד לְנֶאֱלָה, הַשָּׁמַיִם בְּעֵלְא וּבְזֶמֶן קָרִיב). A Gutten Shabbos to all!

<https://theyeshiva.net/jewish/6052/hamas-israel-war-essay-parshas-toldos-we-fed-the-crocodile-for-too-long-israels-mission-today?print=1>

Hamas-Israel War/Essay Parshas Toldos

We Fed the Crocodile for Too Long: Israel's Mission Today -- Maybe Rivkah Didn't Want to Deceive Her Husband, She Just Wanted Jacob to Display Another Side
Rabbi YY Jacobson

November 16, 2023 | 3 Kislev 5784

Dedicated In loving memory of Sara bas Mordechai Deitsch by her daughter Rochel Leah Sandman; Dedicated with love from the Diamonds, Am Yisroel Chai! Dedicated by Daniel Brenkler, in loving memory of all the Jews killed in Pittsburgh, Shabbos, October 27, 2018

Touched to the Core

The bloodbath orchestrated by Hamas and Iran on Saturday, Simchat Torah (October 7, 2023) in Southern Israel has woken up a part in every single Jew that was dormant. The glee of the enemy in slaughtering Jewish babies reminded us that this has nothing to do with occupation, colonization, apartheid, or any other myth. This was a manifestation of visceral evil which craves to destroy every single Jew. Had Hamas had its way, it would joyfully perform this mini-Holocaust daily, until all 6.6 million Jews in Israel lay lifeless.

Every Jew living today feels the need to respond. Of course, we must defend ourselves in every possible way; we must support Israel and our soldiers with every fiber of our being—encouraging them to fulfill their moral historic duty of eliminating every vestige of bloodthirsty evil. Of course, we must lift the morale of our brothers and sisters in Israel and the world over through an unprecedented outpouring of support, love and oneness, like never before.

But there is something more.

Taking the Blessings

The twin brothers Jacob and Esau (Yaakov & Eisav) occupy the leitmotif of this week's Torah portion, Toldos.

Rebecca (Rivkah) loves Jacob (Yaakov), the child dwelling in the tents; while Isaac (Yitzchak) loved Esau (Eisav), the "skilled hunter, the man of the field." As the story progresses, Isaac grows old and his eyes become dim. He expresses his desire to bless his beloved son Esau before he dies. While Esau goes off to hunt for his father's favorite food, Rebecca summons her son Jacob and instructs him to go take his father's blessings. She dresses Jacob in Esau's clothes, covers his arms and neck with goatskins to simulate the feel of his hairier brother, prepares a similar dish, and sends Jacob to his father with the food. The Torah quotes her saying:[1]

And now my son, listen to my voice, to what I am commanding you.

Go now to the flock, and take for me from there two choice kids, and I will make them tasty foods for your father, as he likes.

So Jacob drew near to Isaac his father, and he felt him, and he said, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau."

Jacob receives his father's blessings for "the dew of the heaven and the fat of the land" and mastery over his brother. Once Esau returns with the food, it is too late. Jacob has already obtained the blessings.

The Mysteries

This is a deeply complex narrative, or to paraphrase Winston Churchill who said of Russia, "a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma."

Here are five of the most thundering questions. How did Isaac and Rebecca allow themselves to grow so far apart in their perception of their children, to the point that Isaac favored Esau, and Rebecca insisted that Jacob receive the blessings?

Why would she deceive her husband rather than speak to him?

Why did Jacob employ cunning and stealth to deceive an unsuspecting brother? When Isaac discovers the trick, he seems shocked and bewildered. Why did he never chastise his wife or son?

Finally, when Jacob entered Isaac's chamber, and his father felt him, Isaac declared: "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau." Clearly, Isaac identified this man as having Jacob's voice. So why did he give him the blessings? Why did he not investigate who is the person standing before him?

Dozens of interpretations have been offered. Today I wish to present one perspective (of many possible ones)—it is an extraordinary insight presented by the late Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (1903-1993).[2]

The Ashes of Isaac

Isaac was the first person to be born a Jew. At the most defining moment of his life, he lay on the altar, bound up, about to be sacrificed. He was moments away from death. Only in the eleventh hour did the angel command Abraham: "Do not lay your hand on the lad."

It was, at that moment when he lay on the altar, that Isaac understood the magnitude of sacrifice that Jewish existence would require.[3] He knew that to be a Jew would be far from a simple feat. His people will endure fire and water. "Fire will not burn us; water will not drown us," goes a famous Russian Chassidic song. But fire and water it is! Jewish survival ought never to be taken for granted. "In each generation they rise up against us to annihilate us," we say in the Passover Haggadah, "and G-d saves us from their hands."

The Mission

That may be one reason Isaac had a special affinity for Esau: “And Isaac loved Esau because [his] game was in his mouth,” the Torah states.[4] “Esau was a man who understood hunting, a man of the field, whereas Jacob was an innocent man, dwelling in tents,” the Torah tells us.[5] Isaac understood that for the Jew to survive he will need to “dwell in the tents” of study and prayer,[6] to reside in the citadels of the spirit, in the mansions of moral contemplation and ethical explorations, aligned with G-d, the source of life, but he will also need to learn how to hunt in the field, how to take a weapon in his hand and battle with viscous aggressors in the killings fields of a harsh terrain. In the worlds of the Talmud: “He who comes to kill you, kill him first.”[7]

It’s not only about security. The mission of the Jew is to transform the physical and material world into a divine abode. To achieve this, he must enter into the real world and impact it. He must enter the open fields of society and live proudly as a Jew, to bring sanctity and holiness into the mundane, to integrate heaven and earth.

A Perfect Partnership

In Isaac’s mind, a partnership between the twins Esau and Jacob will guarantee an eternal people. Jacob will grant the people its soul, spirit, conscience, and moral GPS, its Divine core, but Esau will be in charge of the “field,” he will become the facilitator of Jacob’s spiritual light and love in our physical world, standing guard against the enemy that craves to destroy goodness, morality and holiness in our world.[8]

The tragedy, of course, was that Esau did not see himself as a partner of Jacob. His material prowess, hunting skills, and field-maneuvers have become divorced from his spiritual, soulful core. His body was severed from his soul. “And Esau came from the field, and he was exhausted.” His soul was exhausted because it felt empty. He craved to conquer the entire “field,” to own the world, but he did not own himself; he remained internally worn out, emotionally exhausted, detached from his own spiritual roots. His internal universe was chaotic, distraught, and frenzied. Isaac yearned that Esau’s enormous strength be harnessed to facilitate his soul, becoming a partner with Jacob. He wants to bless, empower and sublimiate Esau.

Rebecca’s Vision

It is Rebecca, the Jewish mother, who understands the calling of the moment—and the calling of history. “Now my son, listen to my voice, to what I am commanding you. Go now to the flock, and take for me from there two choice kids, and I will make them tasty foods for your father, as he likes.” My dear Jacob! It is time to leave your tents of study and go out to the field (where the goats are).[9] It is time for you to learn how to garb yourself in Esau’s cloaks and gear—to confront the enemy that might come to kill you. Sure, your tents of study and prayer will remain your eternal compass; they will guide your direction in the field and navigate your movements in the outside world; your faith and spiritual authenticity will be the

bedrock of your success. But to be anchored in G-d means that at times you must go out and protect your children, standing up to your enemies with unwavering resolve. You must never apologize for your moral duty to crush your enemy, and you must never allow your hyper sense of fake morality and ethics to turn you into the punching bag of the world. If there is even the slightest chance that one of your children is in danger, you must go on the offensive and let your enemy be frightened for his life.

My dear Jacob! You despise violence, loathe conflict, and never give up on the dream of peace. We are the people of the book, not of the sword. But Jacob, there is a time in history when you must wage war, so that your children live. David will need to stand up to a Goliath; in the Persia of old, during the edicts of Haman, Jews will need to engage in moral violence to fight off their blood thirsty foes. In the days of Chanukah, the Jews will once again need to take up arms to save their people and faith. Time and time again, Jews will need to learn how to fight back. In June of 1967, and numerous times before and after, Israel will need to wage war to save a beleaguered people from the enemy’s quest for our annihilation. After Simchas Torah 5784 it is clear that the restrain Israel demonstrated over the last decades, and all the compromises it made, have invited only war and violence. The words of Churchill in 1940 about the Nazis are applicable to Israel’s terrible lack of vision in regard to its neighbors: “Each one hopes that if he feeds the crocodile enough, the crocodile will eat him last. All of them hope that the storm will pass before their turn comes to be devoured. But I fear greatly that the storm will not pass. It will rage and it will roar ever more loudly, ever more widely.”

Do we want dead Jews who are seen as ethical, or living Jews whom the UN and other clueless Jew haters will forever condemn?

My dear Jacob—said his mother—one day, Esau and Yishmael will become your partner. One day, the Moshiah will come—and may it be speedily in our days—and you will return to your tents of spiritual ecstasy, as the “spirit of impurity will be removed from the world,” and the entire “earth will be filled with Divine consciousness as the waters covers the sea.” There will be a time when, in the words of Isaiah (2:4), “He [G-d] shall judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples, and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift the sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”

But till that glorious day, my dear Jacob, you -- a prince of G-d, a man of wisdom, integrity and faith -- must dress like Esau, you must don his gear. For your enemy is brutal, ruthless, and bloodthirsty. As long as you duck, the international community empathizes with his murderous plans. The world respects Jews who respect themselves, their faith, their history and their

Torah; the world admires Jews who are not afraid of doing everything it takes to stop immoral violence and bloodshed. The world wants a strong Israel who demonstrates unwavering moral clarity to eliminate every last vestige of evil and terror.

A Radiant Field

Jacob obeys. He learns to enter the field. He learns to don the clothes of Esau. And when he enters the chambers of his father, something remarkable happens.

And he [Isaac] said, "Serve [it] to me that I may eat of the game of my son, so that my soul will bless you." And he served him, and he ate, and he brought him wine, and he drank.

And his father Isaac said to him, "Please come closer and kiss me, my son."

And he came closer, and he kissed him, and he smelled the fragrance of his garments, and he blessed him, and he said, "Behold, the fragrance of my son is like the fragrance of a field, which the Lord has blessed!"

Isaac tells his son that his fragrance is one of a field blessed by G-d. Esau was a man of the field. Jacob was not. But when Jacob was forced to enter the field—to enter into the material, physical and earthy reality where Esau lives and succeeds; when Jacob is forced to learn how to use a rifle and drive a jeep; when Jacob is compelled to battle a war for survival; when Jacob is compelled to live and function in the larger world—it has “the fragrance of a field, which the Lord has blessed!” It is not a field which causes exhaustion and loneliness; it is a field that mirrors the radiance of the Divine. Jacob’s field is filled with sanctity, harmony, and spiritual depth. Jacob imbues Esau’s cloaks and vocation with holiness. Jacob’s field is not a place of vulgarity and brutality; it is a garden of G-d. Jacob holds his book in one hand, and his plow in the other; his book in one hand and his sword in the other—realizing that the material too belongs to the oneness of the Divine. As Moses tells his people:[10] “For the Lord, your G-d, goes along in the midst of your camp, to rescue you and to deliver your enemies before you. Therefore, your camp shall be holy...”

An Integrated Jacob

Isaac, at last, acknowledges the possibility of Jacob fulfilling his mission, even while Esau is not yet ready to serve as a partner. “So Jacob drew near to Isaac his father, and he felt him, and he said, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau." At this moment, Isaac experienced that wondrous synthesis in his child. His voice is the voice of Jacob—a voice of Torah, of wisdom, of spiritual truth, of justice, compassion, ethics, sacred nobility, and moral values. It is the “Yiddishe Shtime,” the voice of Yiddishkeit. “But the hands are the hands of Esau”—this same boy is capable of standing up to a cruel enemy with unapologetic resolve, unwavering moral clarity, unrestrained determination, and undeterred strength to preserve its life. His mind, heart and

soul will be defined by Torah, and when the moment calls for it, he will know how to go out and change the world.

Of course, when the Jewish country has enough manpower to fight the enemy on the battlefield, it is an awesome and Divine merit for the army and the community to allow Jews to be dedicated completely to Torah study—the lifeline of our people. Those Jews who sit and study Torah day and night grant spiritual protection and Divine blessing to the army, the people, and the land. But if more manpower is needed, it is a grand mitzvah for every single capable Jew to don arms and go fight when the enemy attacks. And concerning war, the Torah states, “Your camp shall be holy,” as your rifle is part and parcel of your spiritual holiness.[11]

Indeed, the opening of Isaac’s blessings to Jacob is: “And may the Lord give you of the dew of the heavens and [of] the fatness of the earth and an abundance of grain and wine.” He blesses him not only with the heavenly dew but also with the fatness of the earth. He empowers him not only to be holy in heaven, but also to bring holiness to the earth. Not to shy away from his power to conquer the earth and bring G-d into the earth.[12]

Wake Up!

The relevance to our times is clear. The Jewish people are facing yet again a sworn enemy. What Hamas and its supporters targeted was not just a piece of land, but an entire people. We have once again been confronted by the force of evil and diabolical hatred that craves to destroy G-d’s eternal people.

At such a time, our response must be: Let’s be Jewish like never before in history, and let’s be united like never before! The voice of Jacob remains our greatest power—the voice of Torah study, the voice of prayer, the voice of celebrating Mitzvos and Judaism. This is why we are here today, 3300 years after our inception and 3300 years after almost every Empire tried to get rid of us.

Let us become the greatest Jews ever, by studying what it means to be a Jew and living it. 16 million Jews are waiting for marching orders. Each of us ought to use his or her influence to inspire our brothers and sisters to start living Judaism in their daily life, beginning with one mitzvah.

And at this moment let us not forget our moral duty to use the “hands of Esau.” Israel’s moral obligation is to eliminate terror with unwavering might, without endangering our soldiers. We must protect ourselves. Every synagogue, every school, every Jewish center, and every Jewish community must guarantee the highest level of physical and spiritual security. Not minimal security, but the maximum level of safety.

While we do not look for wars, we are a nation which loves peace, searches for peace, and respects and loves all people, if someone attacks us, we ought to respond with all our might. “One who is merciful to the cruel becomes cruel to those who deserve mercy,” say our sages.[13]

Meir Uziel, an Israeli comedian (and grandson of former Sephardic Chief Rabbi Ben Tzion Uziel), once quipped: In the competition for Ms. Ethical among the 200 nations of the world, we always come in last place, since we are the only ones who show up!

Lessons from the Holocaust

The late Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin once wrote: "I believe the lessons of the Holocaust are these. First, if an enemy of our people says he seeks to destroy us, believe him. Don't doubt him for a moment. Don't make light of it. Do all in your power to deny him the means of carrying out his satanic intent. (Note: one month later, Begin dispatched Israel's Air Force to destroy the Iraqi nuclear facility at Osirak.)

"Second, when a Jew anywhere in the world is threatened or under attack, do all in your power to come to his aid. Never pause to wonder what the world will think or say. The world will never pity slaughtered Jews. The world may not necessarily like the fighting Jew, but the world will have to take account of him.

"Third, a Jew must learn to defend himself. He must forever be prepared for whenever threat looms.

"Fourth, Jewish dignity and honor must be protected in all circumstances. The seeds of Jewish destruction lie in passively enabling the enemy to humiliate us. Only when the enemy succeeds in turning the spirit of the Jew into dust and ashes in life, can he turn the Jew into dust and ashes in death. During the Holocaust it was after the enemy had humiliated the Jews, trampled them underfoot, divided them, deceived them, afflicted them, drove brother against brother, only then could he lead them, almost without resistance, to the gates of Auschwitz. Therefore, at all times and whatever the cost, safeguard the dignity and honor of the Jewish people.

Begin missed one point, which sadly proved to cause such weakness in Israel. For Israel to retain its deterrence power, it must be convinced of its moral right, of its spiritual mission in this world, of its destiny as G-d's people. Every Jew must know the truth that the entire land of Israel is our eternal home, G-d's gift to the Jewish people. Only when the voice is the voice of Jacob, will his hands be able to deliver the punch it needs to. Without it, Jacob become apologetic, weak, frail and perceived as someone who can be defeated with enough pressure, lies, and terror.

Today Jacob must increase his voice and must don the gloves of Esau to eliminate through absolute strength and deterrence every vestige of terror in its midst.

May G-d bless Israel and the entire Jewish nation; may G-d protect and free our hostages; may G-d protect our holy soldiers; may G-d give us the resolve we need to stop ducking and start demonstrating authentic strength. And may G-d bring redemption to our people, our land, and our world, now, Amen!

[1] Genesis 27:8-18: [2] The Rav shared this at a convention of the Mizrahi movement, in Atlantic City, in 1961. You can read the original insight here: <http://hebrewbooks.org/2813>. Go to pp. 12-14. I included some other ideas to clarify some details. [3] The end of Vayikra (26:42) reads: "V'Zocharti es brisi Yaakov, v'af es brisi Yitzchok, v'af es brisi Avraham ezkor. I will remember My covenant with Yaakov; also my covenant with Yitzchak, and also My covenant with Abraham will I remember." The term Zechirah, the word for Remembering is mentioned in connection with Yaakov, and it is mentioned again with Abraham, but it is not mentioned with Yitzchak. Why? The great Biblical commentator, Rashi, offers the midrashic insight (Rashi to Lev. 26: 2): "Why does Hashem use the term 'Remembering' for Abraham and Yaakov but not when he speaks of Yitzchak? Because in the case of Yitzchak, 'Remembering' is not necessary. The ashes of Yitzchak always appear before Me, gathered up and placed on the Altar!" Yitzchak remains the symbol of Jewish sacrifice, the readiness of the Jewish people to dedicate their lives as an offering for G-d. Yitzchak's symbolic ashes stand before my eyes every single day, says G-d. The sages define Yitzchak as an "olah temimah"—a wholesome offering, whose sanctity required he never leave the borders of the Holy Land. [4] Genesis 25:28 [5] Ibid. 25:27 [6] See Rashi to Genesis 25:27 [7] Sanhedrin 72a [8] See at length the commentary of Netziv to the story. [9] Esau is represented by the goat, "saeir," while Jacob by the sheep, "hakvasim hifrid Yaakov." (Or HaTorah Vayishlach vol. 1). [10] Deut. 23:15 [11] See the address by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, 6 Tishrei 5728 (1967), a few months after the Six Day War.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fsADqkXyALk> [12] What is fascinating is that Jacob beloved's son Joseph, will dream up, years later, a storm. "And Joseph dreamed a dream and told his brothers... 'Listen now to this dream, which I have dreamed: Behold we were binding sheaves in the middle of the field, when, behold! -- my sheaf arose and also remained standing; then behold! -- your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf.' "So his brothers said to him, 'Will you reign over us? Will you dominate us?'. And he again dreamed another dream, and he related it to his brothers, and he said: 'Behold! I have dreamed another dream, and behold, the sun, the moon and eleven stars were prostrating themselves to me'... His brothers envied him, but his father awaited the matter." Joseph's double dreams take him from the plane of agriculture to the realm of the celestial. First, he dreams of himself—and his brothers—embodied as sheaves of a field where their sheaves bow to his. Yet as his dreams progress, he views himself and his family as heavenly lights: the son, the moon and the stars. Joseph defines here two roles for himself and his family: He will be the great economist, leading a nation to a prosperous agricultural future, sustaining the land with earthly food. But simultaneously he sees himself guiding

the sun, moon and stars—granting vision, light, and direction to the planet. The two are not contradictory in his world—as Jacob was given both the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth. The voice must be the voice of Jacob, and the hands must employ the skills of Esau. [13] Tanchuma, Parashat Metzora 1. Yalkut Shimoni Shmuel 1 #121.

<https://jewishaction.com/jewish-world/the-hidden-blessings-of-anti-semitism/>

The Hidden Blessings of Anti-Semitism

RABBI YITZCHAK BREITOWITZ

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The topic I want to address today is a bit provocative. And I hope I will not offend anyone's sensitivities by describing the constructive role of the anti-Semite in the formation of a Jewish identity.

All of us understand, of course, that Hakadosh Baruch Hu created a world of bechirah (free will) and individuals are held accountable for their sins and for the evil they perpetrate. Hitler cannot go to God and say, "If You didn't want the Jews to die, You wouldn't have let me do it." At the same time, Hakadosh Baruch Hu uses the billions of autonomous decisions that people make to advance His own aims in the world. This can be likened to a chess grandmaster who turns all the moves of the opponent to his advantage. Thus, even the destructive evil that people perpetrate can be co-opted by the Ribbono Shel Olam to bring about a necessary, or even positive, outcome. There are lessons to be learned from those who oppress and denigrate us. The lessons may be painful and even devastating, but they are lessons nonetheless. Hence, the hidden blessings of anti-Semitism!

"Be Like the Nations"

At the beginning of the twentieth century, well before the Nazis rose to power, Rabbi Meir Simcha HaKohen of Dvinsk, in his classic work *Meshech Chochmah*, described a tragic pattern in our history. In every generation, he said, there are Jews who seek to "be like the nations" and embrace foreign cultures. But the more Jews strive to become like the nations of the world, the more Hashem allows the nations of the world to remind us that we are different. And in what are frighteningly prophetic words, Rabbi Meir Simcha wrote: "Those people who think Berlin is the new Jerusalem will discover that from Berlin will come a churban that will tell Klal Yisrael 'You are a Jew; you cannot be one of them.'" Indeed, the Lubavitcher Rebbe used to say that it was easier to be Jewish in Siberia than in suburbia. The Russians didn't let the Jews forget who they were. In suburbia, Jews can easily abandon their identity and assimilate.

The Chatam Sofer makes the same observation. In the Haggadah we read, "Arami oved avi, vayered Mitzraymah—the Aramean [Lavan] tried to destroy my father Yaakov and [therefore] he [Yaakov] went down to Egypt." The Chatam

Sofer questions this seeming non sequitur: Yaakov Avinu did not descend to Egypt upon leaving Lavan's house. He actually returned to Eretz Yisrael, where he lived for many years. Why does the Haggadah link these two episodes?

The Chatam Sofer explains that during the brit bein habetarim, Hashem told Avraham, "Ki ger yihyeh zaracha b'erezt lo lahem—Your children will be strangers in a land that is not theirs." He did not explicitly state that the exile would take place in Egypt. Theoretically, the period of exile could have taken place in any country. That being the case, since Yaakov was already in a state of exile in Lavan's house, why didn't he just remain there and allow the decree to be fulfilled in that way?

The answer is that Lavan would have destroyed us in a way that would have been far more devastating than what Pharaoh did. When it says, "Lavan bikesh la'akor et hakol—Lavan sought to destroy the whole," according to the Chatam Sofer it doesn't mean that Lavan wanted to physically destroy Yaakov. Lavan came to Yaakov and said, "Achim anachnu—we're brothers. Be like us, let's work together, let's collaborate," as opposed to Pharaoh, who basically said, "You're slaves and we're going to kill your children." Being with Lavan would have destroyed Yaakov spiritually, would have destroyed Am Yisrael. Therefore, Hashem had to fulfill the decree of galut in a hostile environment in order for the Jews to preserve their identity. Indeed, it was precisely because of the slavery and oppression that the Jews in Egypt remained separate, keeping their distinctive language and clothing.

And thus, within the darkness of anti-Semitism lies a hidden berachah—the hatred of the nations toward us serves as the ultimate reminder that the Jewish people must remain distinct and apart.

Throughout galut, Jews have been faithful citizens of every country in which they have lived. "Ger v'toshav anochi imachem—I am a stranger and a resident among you," said Avraham Avinu millennia ago. Rabbi Joseph Ber Soloveitchik derives from those words a dictum for the Jewish people: "I am a stranger and a citizen among you." Dina d'malchuta dina. We respect the laws. We contribute to the welfare of every society in which we live. Religious or not, Jews bring berachah in the realms of economics, art, science, et cetera. We're loyal, we're supportive, we're law-abiding. But at the same time, we must be a ger. We must know we are strangers and that the foreign society in which we find ourselves is not truly ours. A Jew must remember—I am different, I have a different mission.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, after Napoleon conquered Europe and turned his sights on Russia, a controversy arose among the Chassidic rebbes: Should the Jews pray that Napoleon should win or that the Czar should win? The Jews living under the Czar endured extreme poverty and terrible suffering. They were only permitted to live in the

Pale of Settlement, were required to pay exorbitant taxes and were often evicted from their places of residence. Most tragically, Jewish boys were forcibly taken at a young age and drafted into the Russian army.

Napoleon promised emancipation, the collapse of the ghetto and political and civil rights. He assured the Jews that they would be able to own property and enter various professions that had been closed to them. Not surprisingly, many Jews, including prominent rabbinic figures, felt the lives of the Jews would be vastly improved were Napoleon to triumph. The lone voice of opposition, the da'at yachid, was the Baal HaTanya, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, who preferred the Czar over Napoleon. The Czar, he explained, seeks to destroy our bodies, leaving our neshamot intact. With emancipation, he predicted, Jews would ultimately abandon the Torah.

The Baal HaTanya's foresight proved true. The Haskalah, the Reform movement and the myriad other secular Jewish movements that rejected Yiddishkeit were essentially the result of the newfound freedoms following the French Revolution and Napoleon's rise to power a little later on.

While freedom is, of course, a great blessing, and we should be exceedingly grateful for the opportunities we are afforded by living in a free society—be it the United Kingdom, the United States or Eretz Hakodesh—we must recognize that sometimes we need the anti-Semites of the world to remind us of that which we are in danger of forgetting.

The prophet Balaam was one of the earliest anti-Semites. God turned Balaam's curse into a blessing. "Hen am levadad yishkon—the Jewish people are a nation that dwells alone." In order for Klal Yisrael to flourish, we must retain our sense of aloneness.

In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, a young journalist in Vienna, Theodor Herzl, covered the notorious Dreyfus trial. He was astounded to discover the depth of the anti-Semitism that permeated European culture. A cultured man, but one who lacked a Jewish education and upbringing, he could not understand how Jew-hatred could persist in modern progressive society. As a result of his experiences, he developed a theory: Jews were hated because they were not like the other nations; if they were to have their own land and their own army, like Germany, France and England, the nations of the world would respect them. Normalization, claimed Herzl, is the key to eradicating anti-Semitism.

History, however, has shown us that the opposite is the case; as the Meshech Chochmah famously predicted, the more we try to "normalize," the more anti-Semitism grows. And as grateful as we are for the State of Israel, if we ask ourselves honestly whether the creation of the Jewish State eradicated anti-Semitism in the world, the sad answer is: It did not. It did not at all. That is because when we strive to be k'chol hagoyim, like the nations of the world, there will be those who will remind us that we cannot and should not. And we must remain

cognizant of the fact that in reminding us, they are, unquestionably, messengers of God. True, these anti-Semites will be punished for their actions since their intentions are evil. Guided by their own free will, they hate us because of their own sinful, immoral inclinations. Yet, God employs even the rasha to teach us what we need to learn.

Approaching Modern Secular Culture

Our forefather Yaakov's encounter with Esav is the prototype for how we should relate to the nations of the world. Rashi explains that Yaakov Avinu employed three steps in preparation for his encounter with Esav: 1. He sent gifts. 2. He prepared for war. 3. He prayed to Hakadosh Baruch Hu for siyata d'Shmaya. Indeed, Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi, head of the Sanhedrin and political leader of the Jewish community during the Roman occupation of Eretz Yisrael, would study Parashat Vayishlach before meeting with the Romans. These strategies encapsulate how we should approach the non-Jewish culture. Gift-giving is a form of embrace. Chazal state, chochmah bagoyim ta'amin—there is wisdom and insight among the nations of the world from which we can benefit. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch was a proponent of Torah im derech eretz, engaging with secular wisdom and culture while maintaining strict adherence to Jewish law.

Milchamah, war, represents the opposite approach—namely, that there is much in modern society that is degenerate, corrupt and corrosive, which we must reject.

Taking an extreme all-or-nothing position is wrong, irrespective of which side one chooses. Totally embracing secular modern culture is a colossal mistake. Yet, total rejection is not the answer. If one had to choose between total acceptance and total rejection, the latter is certainly preferable. However, the ideal derech is a path of balance and harmony, where one discerns what to embrace and what to oppose, what to be mekarev and what to be merachek, what to permit into one's home and what to keep out, et cetera. This approach is certainly the more challenging one, and when choosing this derech, one needs to know that the essential ingredients for success are tefillah and siyata d'Shmaya.

In Maariv on Motzaei Shabbat, to mark the separation between Shabbat and weekdays we add the paragraph "Atah chonantanu . . . vatavdeil Hashem Elokeinu bein kodesh l'chol . . . bein Yisrael la'amim—You have graced us . . . and You have distinguished, Lord, our God, between the sacred and the secular . . . between Yisrael and the nations." The Gemara in Berachot asks: Why is Havdalah placed in the berachah of Atah Chonein where we ask God for wisdom? The Gemara answers: "Im ein da'at, havdalah minayin?" Havdalah, the ability to distinguish, is not a mechanical, automatic process. One needs wisdom, understanding and discernment in order to determine what is good, what is bad, how to separate between the two and how to distinguish between kodesh l'chol—the holy and the profane. We pray for wisdom in the berachah of

“Atah chonein l’adam da’at.” And it is through tefillah that we are granted the ability to discern. Choosing what to embrace and what to reject is a lifelong challenge.

There is more we can learn from the story of Yaakov and Esav. The night before Yaakov is to meet Esav of the flesh, he encounters Esav of the spirit. He fights with this mysterious man, the Sar shel Esav, an angelic figure, and they struggle all night. At times Yaakov is on top and at times the mysterious figure is on top. In the morning Yaakov is finally victorious, but he is limping.

The Sefer HaChinuch interprets this episode beautifully. The night alludes to the long galut that the Jewish people will have to endure, during which enemies will try to destroy us physically and spiritually. Yet Hashem promises that after that long night, dawn will come and the very enemies who tried to destroy us will be forced to bless us, just as the Sar shel Esav was compelled to do. While the Jewish people will survive the long, dark exile, it will not be without sacrifices. Just as Yaakov emerged from the battle limping, we will not emerge from the battle unscathed. The galut is going to take a terrible toll—the segment of Klal Yisrael that will survive to experience the geulah will be decimated and demoralized. But the overriding message of this episode in the parashah is that despite the darkness of the night, dawn will come. Every time we refrain from eating the gid hanasheh, we remember the battle between Yaakov and the angel, and we remind ourselves that despite the current state of despair and darkness, the geulah will come.

The Chofetz Chaim derives two additional teachings from this parashah. Firstly, he asks, why does the angel of Esav—the koach hatumah—only attack Yaakov? Why didn’t Avraham and Yitzchak experience a similar struggle? Pirkei Avot tells us, “Al sheloshah devarim ha’olam omed—the world stands on three pillars”: “Al haTorah, v’al ha’avodah, v’al gemilut chasadim—on Torah, service of God [worship] and acts of kindness.” Avraham Avinu represents gemilut chasadim; Yitzchak, who was ready to be a korban, represents avodah; and Yaakov, who spent fourteen years in Yeshivat Shem V’Ever without sleeping, represents the power of Torah learning.

The koach hatumah, explains the Chofetz Chaim, is perfectly willing to let us perform mitzvot if our success will only be short-term and will eventually dissipate. The yetzer hara takes the long view! The Sar shel Esav is not concerned when Jews perform gemilut chasadim without Torah; let them create social welfare institutions, hospitals, cemeteries and Landsmannschaften. After a few generations, their descendants won’t be Jewish anyway. Let them perform avodah, let them build magnificent shuls. The Sar shel Esav did not attack Avraham or Yitzchak because chesed and avodah without Torah cannot sustain the Jewish people. Yaakov, however,

who embedded within us the power of Torah, did possess nitzchiyut, eternity.

As a society, we need all three pillars—Torah, avodah and gemilut chasadim. Studying Torah properly will bring one to the other two pillars as well. Gemilut chasadim or avodah alone, on the other hand, will not necessarily bring one to Torah. Simply put, without Torah there is no continuity. Orthodox communities in this country did not begin flourishing until Torah chinuch became widely available. Even if parents are religious and keep mitzvot, they will not succeed in transmitting Yiddishkeit to their children unless they give them a solid Torah education.

The second teaching of the Chofetz Chaim based on the episode of Yaakov and Esav is that although the yetzer hara, the Sar shel Esav, wanted to destroy Torah, he was not successful. There will always be Jews who will study Torah despite the hardships and deprivations. On that level, Esav could not win. He did, unfortunately, succeed on another level—the fact that Yaakov emerged limping represents the damage that the Sar shel Esav was able to inflict upon the support of Torah. According to the Zohar Hakadosh, the thigh represents the concept of support, just as the thigh supports the body. The victory of Esav was in weakening the tomchei d’Orayta, the support of Torah. As a result, support for Torah, whether financial or emotional, will always be precarious and weak. In fact, the Chofetz Chaim used to say that if a Torah institution doesn’t have financial problems, one must question whether it is an authentically religious institution!

(Now that doesn’t mean if someone comes to you for tzedakah, you say, “I’m sorry but you were cursed, I’m not supposed to give you.” A number of Christian theologians in the nineteenth century were opposed to women taking anesthesia for childbirth because they believed the curse of Chava necessitated that she give birth in pain; Judaism on the other hand, differentiates between a curse and a commandment. The curse may be the natural condition of the world, but we are certainly permitted and indeed obligated to mitigate the negative consequences. The imperative of supporting Torah is very much the same way. It is our duty to overpower and transcend the curse of Esav. The curse becomes a challenge and a responsibility, rather than an excuse.)

Rabbi Yehuda Leib Chasman, the great mashgiach of the Hebron Yeshiva, presents another insight into the episode with Yaakov and the Sar shel Esav. Before the angel left, Yaakov asked the angel, “Haggidah na shemecha—Tell me your name.” The angel responded, “Lamah zeh tishal l’shmi—Why do you ask my name?” Rashi explains the angel’s reply to mean: “I don’t have a regular name; my name depends on my mission, sometimes I’m this, sometimes I’m that.” Rabbi Chasman understands the verse differently. In his reading, the angel’s name is: “Don’t ask my name.” What sort of name is “Don’t ask my name?”

Rabbi Chasman explains with a parable. A Polish farmer was traveling to the big city for the first time. He was told that if he bought a ticket and sat in a dark room (it was a movie theater), he would see people and animals emerging from the wall. He bought a ticket, took a seat in the dark auditorium, and suddenly he saw people walking towards him. Confused, he pulled out his powerful flashlight and shined it on the wall to see if he could locate the door from which the people were emerging. But when he shined the bright light on the dark wall of the movie screen, he could no longer see the picture, and the people coming towards him disappeared. The crowd in the audience began yelling at him to turn off the light; “We can only see the movie when it’s dark,” they explained.

The meaning of the parable is this: When we sit in darkness in This World without pondering the purpose of our lives, all sorts of illusions appear to be real—money, honor, even grudges we harbor against others. We think they are so real because we are sitting in darkness. Conversely, while you’re sitting in the dark, there might be a bag of diamonds on the next seat that you’re not going to notice. Darkness makes you think that certain things that are not real are real, and it obscures your ability to see things that are real. When you turn on the light, you realize that what you thought was so important was an illusion, and you can see the diamonds next to you.

When Yaakov Avinu asked the angel, “What is your name,” he was in essence asking the yetzer hara, “What is your power over people? How do you entice people to sin?” (A name signifies power. The Arizal explains that at a brit, Hashem gives the parents some element of prophecy to name their child, since a name embodies a child’s potential spiritual power.) And the Sar shel Esav replied, “I entice people because nobody bothers to ask my name! Nobody thinks about me; they are living in darkness.” When they are in darkness, they are fooled.

Anti-Semitism is one of the mechanisms that Hakadosh Baruch Hu employs to “turn on the light,” to make us realize that we must be unique, we must be distinct. We have a mission.

“Let Me Learn From My Enemies”

Even the brazen lies of the anti-Semites contain a musar lesson for us. One of the major issues we face is the ridiculous double standard applied against the State of Israel—countries that literally massacre tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of their own citizens sit in judgment if the IDF accidentally kills a Palestinian civilian. When such an accident occurs, it is regrettable and the IDF itself regrets it; it is indeed the most moral army in the world. Clearly this double standard is unfair and unjust. But even in that hypocrisy and injustice, there’s a message. The nations of the world may not have a right to impose a double standard on us, but we have to impose a double standard on ourselves! It’s not enough to say the other

nations are worse. It is not enough to say that we don’t do all the bad things that others do. Hakadosh Baruch Hu says we have to live lives of kedushah, lives of goodness, lives of greatness. So when I hear the double standard hypocrisy of the umot ha’olam, it is a musar for me that I have to strive to be better!

And the same is true for the anti-Semitic canard, “Jews control the world and the banking industry.” That too has a lesson to teach us. We do have the power to change the world for the better—through our mitzvot and ma’asim tovim. The Chofetz Chaim used to say that the fashions of Paris can be affected by the Torah learning in Radin. Just as an atom bomb produces waves of radiation thousands of miles from ground zero, goodness has its own ripple effects. It may be that by the time the learning in Radin gets to Paris, people aren’t going to be learning fifteen hours a day, but at least the dresses [designed by Parisian designers] might be a half inch longer. We can make a difference and we therefore must make a difference. This is essentially the meaning of Dovid Hamelech’s prayer, “me’oyvai techakmeini,” which can be interpreted to mean, “Let me learn from my enemies.” In the hateful, false lies they spread I can find nuggets of musar that challenge me to achieve greatness. May all of us merit b’ezerat Hashem to rise to this challenge.

Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz is a maggid shiur at Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem and rav of Kehillat Ohr Somayach. Prior to his family’s aliyah, he was the rabbi of the Woodside Synagogue in Silver Spring, Maryland. This is an edited transcript of a speech Rabbi Breitowitz delivered to a group in London. The editing preserves the informal tone of the presentation.

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Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Toldos

Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

תשפ"ד תולדות פרשת

ויעתר יצחק לד' לנכח אשתו... ויעתר לו ד'

Yitzchak entreated Hashem opposite his wife... Hashem allowed Himself to be entreated by him. (25:21)

The implication of the masculine singular form is that Hashem responded to Yitzchak’s prayer – rather than to Rivkah’s. Chazal (Yevamos 64a) teach that one cannot compare the prayer offered by a tzaddik ben tzaddik, righteous person, the son of a righteous person, (Yitzchak Avinu) to the prayer entreated by a tzaddik ben rasha (Rivkah Imeinu). Thus, Hashem listened to Yitzchak. This concept is most efficacious when each individual supplicant is praying for himself personally. Yitzchak and Rivkah were both praying for the same thing: offspring. Why would Yitzchak’s prayer find greater acceptance than Rivkah’s?

Horav Meir Shapiro, zl, explains that Yitzchak, having been raised in the home of Avraham Avinu and Sarah Imeinu, lived

in a spiritual environment in which he was not exposed to evil of any sort. His parents were paragons of virtue, his home a sanctuary. Thus, when he prayed for children, he did not add “good” children, because he did not know the meaning of bad. Rivkah, on the other hand, was acutely aware of bad and evil, having grown up with a father like Besuel and a brother like Lavan. When she prayed, she stipulated “good” children. This is why Hashem listened to Yitzchak’s entreaty over hers. Since Yitzchak did not specify the kind of child he wanted, Hashem gave him two sons – Yaakov and Eisav. This is what is meant by the idea that Hashem responded to Yitzchak. Had He listened to Rivkah’s prayer, Eisav would not have existed. Since unfortunately we require Eisav and his descendants to keep us in line, Hashem listened to the tzaddik ben tzaddik.

ויתרצו הבנים בקרבה ותאמר אם כן למה זה אנכי

The children agitated within her, and she said, “If so, why am I thus?” (25:22)

Chazal teach that vayisrotzetzu, “and they agitated,” is derived from rotz, to run. When Rivkah Imeinu passed the yeshivah of Shem and Ever, Yaakov struggled to leave; and when she passed a house of idol worship, Eisav wanted out. The Bais HaLevi asks the well-known question: We are taught that a Heavenly angel teaches the Torah to the growing fetus. If so, why would Yaakov want to escape to the yeshivah? He was learning Torah from an angel; can one ask for more? The Bais HaLevi explains that such learning is not worth it if it means being in the vicinity of Eisav. I would like to take the liberty to expound on this idea. After all, we do not always have the luxury of choosing our child’s learning environment. Depending upon where one lives and what school his children attend, we can always find students from diverse backgrounds, who, due to no fault of their own, might influence the class in a less-than-positive manner. Does this mean we should all homeschool our children?

I think we gloss over a critical aspect of the learning experience: the rebbe/talmid relationship. An angel may be able to expound on any area in the entire corpus of Torah, but the angel does not have a keshar, relationship, with the student. If the student is a perfect learner – great. If the perfect learner is in a classroom with other boys who are not perfect, the rebbe is able to mold his shiur to fit each student individually. The angel, however, gives a one-size-fits-all lecture. The angel has no motivation, no outreach, no sense of joy in learning Torah, no focus on the individual needs of each student in a classroom of boys that might not be on his spiritual, moral plane. Yaakov Avinu could not learn in the presence of Eisav because he had no rebbe to cater to his individual needs, trying to study Torah with a brother who wanted anything but Torah study. An angel’s teaching is robotic; a rebbe teaches with his heart.

Let us delve deeper into this idea. Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, focuses on the benefits of a rebbe-talmid relationship. When a student develops a bond, he becomes connected, not only to

his immediate rebbe, but also, to his rebbe’s rebbe, going back to the mesorah, chain of tradition, heralding back to Har Sinai. A rebbe’s relationship with his student is one predicated upon love and reciprocity.

Horav Meir Chodosh, zl, Mashgiach of Chevron and Ateres Yisrael, was an educator without peer. His love for his students was legendary, treating each and every one like he was his only son. They could come and go to his house whenever they pleased and stay as long as they wanted. After all, they were his sons! He loved each student, regardless of his faults and weaknesses. He would peer into each student’s heart, track his progress, pay attention to the effort he expended and rejoice with his every triumph. Talent and ability were not factors in his abiding love for them. His students were part of his “self.”

The Mashgiach never saw any student in a negative light. He would always find positive aspects about the student and underscore them. When he was compelled to rebuke a student, it was with great pain – a pain that was evident, as a father must rebuke his son. He never raised his voice, threatened or spoke harshly. He spoke softly, with complete calm, patience and respect. Thus, his words penetrated deeply and had a lasting effect.

It was this form of rebbe/talmid relationship that Yaakov could not experience when he was learning from an angel. Furthermore, a rebbe imbues his students with a love for Torah and joy in studying it. Horav Pinchas Sheinberg, zl, was wont to say that a rebbe’s function is to create a feeling of Torasecha shaashuai, “Your Torah is my delight,” in every student. Shaashua also means toy. When a child plays with his toy, he is completely engrossed in it. Nothing disturbs him; no one can distract him and take him away from his toy. Likewise, the rebbe should make the Torah the student’s “toy,” so that he experiences the greatest delight upon studying it. [One caveat: in order for the rebbe to imbue his student with joy, he must feel a sense of joy and excitement about life, and the merit that he has to teach Yiddishe kinder.]

Last, a student must be infused with a sense of confidence. One who is insecure, afraid, anxious, nervous cannot succeed to the fullest, in Torah. He must be calm, relaxed, as well as excited to learn. Horav Chaim Kanievsky, zl, related in the name of Horav Meir Karelitz, zl, brother of the Chazon Ish, the following story – whose veracity has been a tradition in their family.

The author of the Pischei Teshuvah, commentary on Shulchan Aruch Yore Deah (also, Even Ha’Ezer and Choshen Mishpat, published after his petirah), Horav Avraham Hirsch Eisenstadt, zl, was Rav in Utyan near Kovno. Prior to his passing, he asked that his son be his successor in leading the community. Apparently, this did not sit well with some of the community’s leadership, who felt that, while the son was erudite, he did not come close to the level of his father. They felt that a city of the caliber of Utyan could do better. Thus, they debated the issue

and arrived at a consensus of opinion: The would-be Rav would travel to Kovno, to the gadol hador, preeminent Torah leader of the generation, Horav Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, zl, and submit to a bechinah. Rav Yitzchak Elchanan would then decide if the young man was qualified to lead their community.

Travel was not quick and simple. It was a strenuous, grueling journey to Kovno. Furthermore, taking an examination from Rav Yitzchak Elchanan was not a walk in the park. The trip, the pressure, anxiety, all contributed to a poor showing on the examination. Rav Yitzchak Elchanan was under-impressed – to say the least. While the young man who stood before him might be learned, he certainly did not qualify to fill the shoes of the Pischei Teshuvah.

That night, Rav Yitzchak Elchanan had a dream during which the Pischei Teshuvah appeared and implored him to retest his son. “You should know that my son is a gaon muflag, brilliant scholar, who is eminently capable of assuming the position as Rav of Utyan. When he is given the opportunity to calm down from the pressure, he will demonstrate his uncanny knowledge.” The Kovner Rav acceded to the “request,” and the Pischei Teshuvah’s son proved his father right. He shone in his brilliance, demonstrating to Rav Yitzchak Elchanan that he was familiar and comfortable in all areas of Torah law. When a student is shown warmth, love and understanding, he will produce beyond our and his expectations. So, why would Yaakov remain with Eisav if he could enjoy the benefits of a rebbe?

In memory of Mrs Helen Gelb ע"ה בת יצחק אייזיק ע"ה Ruthie & Sam Salamon and Family
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Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein <ravadlerstein@torah.org> Thu, Nov 16, 12:43 PM

Ksav Sofer

By Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

Parshas Toldos

Smarter Than You Thought

He [Esav] said, “Bless me too, father!” He [Yitzchok] said, “Your brother came with deception and took your blessing.” He [Esav] said, “Is it because his name was called Yaakov that he outwitted me twice?”[1]

This is a difficult dialogue to follow. Esav was well aware that Yaakov had taken the brachah through deception. Yitzchok had told him as much. After his immediate cry of anguish, Esav began to pull himself together. His father seemingly had endless brachos to give. If Esav couldn’t get the brachah that he had hoped for, there was always a Plan B. He asked his father for a different brachah. Yitzchok’s response makes no sense. He simply repeated what he had said before. Yaakov had deceived him, and ran off with the gold medal. How did this address Esav’s request for the bronze?

Esav’s reacts with an exclamation about this not having been the first time. It seems pointless. Was he simply letting off steam? Why doesn’t he engage his father, and pursue his request for a brachah?

A midrash provides an answer. It says, “with deception – this means with wisdom.”[2]

This is what the midrash is telling us: Deception comes in different forms. One kind requires no wisdom at all. Arrogance, perhaps. The ability to lie without compunction and without flinching. You can deceive someone simply by inventing lies or distorting the truth. It does not take rocket science.

Another kind, however, takes brains. It requires planning, strategy. The master of this kind of deception is a chess-player, anticipating the moves of the other players. The traps he sets for the unsuspecting can work for years without anyone discovering them.

Yaakov, the “dweller of tents,”[3] would hardly be expected to exhibit ingenuity any deception. He was too cut off from the rest of the world. He had no experience with true ruthlessness. He was not going to hatch a plot that would astound people for its cleverness. Or so thought Esav. If he found it necessary to lie, Yaakov would do just that – but nothing more. Esav believed that Yaakov had simply presented himself to his father, and said, “It’s me! Esav, your first-born!”

Yitzchok responded, according to our midrash, that Esav had underestimated his brother. No, he had not simply claimed to be Esav. He came with wisdom. He anticipated that Yitzchok would be suspicious, so he dressed in Esav’s clothing, and donned a hairy skin to hide his own smooth features. He got past Yitzchok’s examination. Yitzchok, too, was surprised at this. He could only conclude that Yaakov had been acting with special Divine assistance. Hashem had given Yaakov special wisdom for the moment, so that he would receive the brachah. If that were so, then he, Yitzchok, had been in error about Esav and his suitability to receive the brachah. Therefore, he was not interested in giving him any brachah at all!

Esav persisted. “No, father. That’s not what happened. Yaakov has done this before. He is certainly capable of full deviousness himself. Don’t assume that this required Divine intervention.

Esav apparently was successful, for Yitzchok answered his request positively, and gave Esav a substantial brachah!

1. Bereishis 27:34-36 ↑ 2. Bereishis Rabbah 67:4 ↑ 3. Bereishis 25:27

From: contact@MichalHorowitz.com

Parshas Toldos: The Prayer of the Righteous

By Michal Horowitz on Nov 16, 2023 08:01 am

In the beginning of Parshas Toldos, we learn of the struggles of Yitzchak and Rivka to bear offspring. The Torah tells us that both Yitzchak and Rivka davened that offspring be granted to them.

וַיַּעֲבֹר יִצְחָק לְהָלֵךְ לְנִכְחַ אִשְׁתּוֹ כִּי עֲקָרָהּ הָיָה וַיַּעֲבֹר לֹא הָיָה רִבְקָה אִשְׁתּוֹ – and Yitzchak davened to Hashem opposite his wife, for she was barren, and Hashem accepted his tefillos, and Rivka his wife conceived (Bereishis 25:21). Rashi teaches: לְנִכְחַ אִשְׁתּוֹ. זֶה – opposite his wife: עוֹמֵד בְּקוֹנִית זֶה וּמִתְפַּלֵּל זֶה עוֹמֵד בְּקוֹנִית זֶה וּמִתְפַּלֵּל זֶה – opposite his wife: he stood in one corner and davened and she stood in a different corner and davened; שְׁאִין דּוֹמָה תְּפִלַּת צָדִיק בֶּן וַיַּעֲבֹר לֹא הָיָה רִבְקָה אִשְׁתּוֹ – and Hashem accepted his (Yitzchak’s) tefillos, but not hers, for the prayer of a righteous person, the son of a righteous person, cannot be compared to the prayers of a righteous person, the child of a

wicked person; therefore Hashem was moved by the prayers of Yitzchak (ben Avraham) and not Rivka (bas Besuel).

Why did Hashem accept his tefillos over hers? After all, is it not true that **מִקוֹם שֶׁבַע עָלֵי תְשׁוּבָה עוֹמְדִין — צַדִּיקִים גְּמוּרִים אֵינָם עוֹמְדִין** – in the place where the repentant stand, even the completely righteous cannot stand (Brachos 34b and see Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Teshuva 7:4). Why, then, was Hashem's mercy aroused to answer their pleas through Yitzchak's tefillos, over Rivka's?

Sivan Rahav-Meir, world-renowned Israeli media personality, chozeret b'teshuva, and Torah teacher, relates, "When people ask me to talk about my teshuva story, I always say that there's no great wisdom to learn from it. The story of people who grew up religious is much more exciting to me, precisely because it is not exciting. There is no great wisdom in becoming a ba'al teshuva. You come from outside without any coercion, you simply fall in love with the Torah. No teacher at school ever told me to make a beracha or to daven and no one criticized me when I studied Torah subjects. I came from outside of my own free will and choice – straight to the Torah, to G-d, to the thing itself. It requires real strength to grow up inside the religious community, and to find renewal from within. To continue the legacy of the generations that came before you and to add your own floor to the building you inherited – this takes great strength and fortitude.

"That's why I most admire people who grew up religious and who light the spark within," she explains, and immediately adds that this is not her idea. Rather, it can be found in Torah – specifically in our Parsha, Toldos. "Our Sages explain that Yitzchak's prayer was accepted because he was a 'righteous man who was the son of a righteous man,' as compared to Rebecca, 'a righteous woman who was the daughter of a wicked man.' Why was Yitzchak's prayer answered and not Rebecca's? Wasn't Rebecca on a higher level, specifically because she was a ba'alat teshuva? It seems that being a righteous son of a righteous man is not as easy as we might expect. If your father and grandfather went to Shul, in a world that constantly calls on us to innovate and reinvent ourselves and to rebel and break conventions – yet you still go to the synagogue with enthusiasm, with commitment, and with passion – then you are on a truly high level" (HaMizrachi, v.6, #4. R"H and Y"K 5784, p.57).

To find G-d on one's own, as did our first forefather, Avraham Avinu (see Mishneh Torah, Hilchos A"Z, 1:1-2), takes immense fortitude, willpower, innovation, and determination. To leave one's past, and chart a new course for oneself is heroism of the highest caliber. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt'l teaches, "When the righteous man falls he has the strength to rise up again. However, there are those who do not have the strength and courage to stand up once more. They have no courage to rise. One of the main factors that prevent people from making amends and repenting is a lack of faith in

themselves. They say it is too late. They state: 'I am not capable of performing such a deed, of changing my life, of changing my identity and my personality.' I remember a certain person, a very tragic person, who attended my shiur in Boston. He was very impressed. I am not bragging; I am just telling you the story. He was interested and moved by my teachings. I once asked him: 'Tell me. I see that you wish to cling to Yahadut. why can't you take the final step and make your home kosher? Afterwards, we will begin to think about the Sabbath laws.' So he said to me: 'Rebbe. I would like to, but I can't do it.' 'Why?' I asked. He answered: 'Because my family will declare me insane and I will be locked up. In addition, I do not belong in your society. I am far away. I do not belong in your community. I live a different life. I have no courage. I have to die a sinner'" (The Rav, v.II, by R' A.Rakeffet-Rothkoff, p.19).

Yet we learn from the prayers of Yitzchak that to remain steadfast in one's Torah upbringing, to maintain passion for Torah and Tefillah, to forge a personal relationship with the RS"O, when one's past is cemented in Judaism, this too is heroic and beloved to G-d. In an ever-changing world, when rebellion is condoned, tradition is shunned, and the ways of the past scorned, to remain a Jew – believing, loving, practicing, proud and strong – and to carry on the path forged by our fathers, takes tremendous strength indeed.

While Rivka left a wicked past (see Rashi to 25:20) and became an Em b'Yisrael and a true tzadekes, Yitzchak embraced the path of his past, and continued the legacy that Avraham and Sarah founded.

In our world today – where chaos reigns supreme and the forces of evil desire to destroy our nation and Land – both kinds of heroes are needed. Our nation embraces the tenacity and beauty of each and every Jewish neshama finding their way back to Hashem. And the RS"O hears the prayer of each and every Jew who continues to build on the great foundation bequeathed to him by his fathers.

And together, we will march forward to proclaim the name of Hashem in the world as once again, the enemies that rise against us will be destroyed, and the eternity of Am Yisrael will persevere.

May all of our collective tefilos be answered la'tova and li'vracha, בברכת שבת שלום,