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JewishTimes

Dedicated to Scriptural and Rabbinic Verification
of Authentic Jewish Beliefs and Practices

Volume VII, No. 4...Nov. 9, 2007

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Weekly Parsha

Toldot

RABBI BERNIE FOX

“And there was a famine in the land, aside from the first famine that had been in the days of Avraham, and Yitzchak went to Avimelech the king of the Pelishtim, to Gerar.” (Bereshit 26:1)

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CHAINS OF FREEDOM

Irreligious Life: Less Free & Happy

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

“Duties of the Heart” (Chovas HaLevavos) authored by Rabbi Bachya ben Joseph ibn Paquda, is a great work and a mandatory study. From his introduction, we are awakened to our severely overlooked, profound Torah obligations; our grave errors in thought and values; and an acute critique of what we neglect in what we owe God and ourselves. I will quote one part of his introduction, as an introduction to this week’s article on Esav and our base emotions.

“From what I have read of the conduct of our Early Masters and from what has come down to us from their sayings, I have found that they were more enthusiastic – and concentrated their efforts more – in [the fulfillment] of their own [actual] duties than in

(continued pg 4)



(Toldot cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

JewishTimes

Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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This passage introduces a narrative that in some ways is one of the most enigmatic episodes in Sefer Beresheit. The Torah tells us that there was a famine in the Land of Canaan. Yitzchak realizes that he must relocate in order to provide for his family. He travels to Gerar. Gerar is in the portion of the Land of Canaan occupied by the Pelishtim. He considers traveling from Gerar to Egypt. However, Hashem appears to Yitzchak and tells him that he should not leave the Land of Canaan. Yitzchak remains in Gerar. The men of Gerar express interest in Yitzchak's wife, Rivkah. Yitzchak decides that he should respond that Rivkah is his sister. Eventually, Avimelech, the king of the Pelishtim, discovers that Rivkah is Yitzchak's wife. He chastises Yitzchak for concealing Rivkah's identity. He explains to Yitzchak that this subterfuge could have resulted in disaster. One of the men, not realizing that Rivkah was married, might have taken her as a wife. Avimelech commands his nation not to harass Yitzchak and Rivkah.

Yitzchak plants crops. Despite the famine, his efforts yield abundant crops. Yitzchak becomes wealthy and his success evokes the jealousy of the Pelishtim. Avimelech suggests that Yitzchak relocate. Yitzchak follows these instructions and moves to Nachal Gerar.

In Nachal Gerar the conflict between Yitzchak and the Pelishtim continues. They are constantly engaged in disputes over water rights. Eventually, Yitzchak succeeds in developing a well that is not disputed. Again, Hashem appears to Yitzchak and assures him that He will protect him and bless him. Yitzchak builds an altar and offers thanks and praise to Hashem.

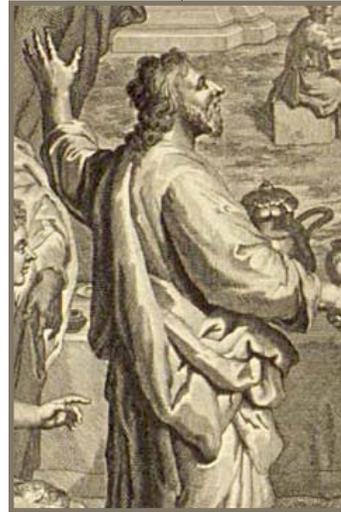
Avimelech comes to Yitzchak with a delegation. Yitzchak expresses his surprise at this visit. Avimelech had sent him away and now he is seeking his friendship! Avimelech responds that it is clear that Yitzchak enjoys a special relationship with Hashem. He denies that he has ever wished or caused Yitzchak any harm. He asks Yitzchak to enter into a treaty of friendship. Yitzchak agrees. The narrative ends with Yitzchak's servants informing him that they have discovered additional water. Yitzchak names the new well Shivah. This name is a derivative of the word she'vuah – oath. It is a memorial to the treaty made with Avimelech.

Every episode of the Torah is designed to

teach a lesson. Sometimes an episode can be understood from various perspectives and at various levels. As a result, one episode can yield a number of lessons. But usually there is some obvious message. In this instance, it is difficult to determine the message of the narrative. What are we to learn from this episode?

Furthermore, the Torah does not deal extensively with Yitzchak. We are told very little of his life. This is the only episode in the entire Torah in which Yitzchak is clearly the main character. It seems that this is the incident in his life that is most essential to the message of the Torah. Why is this episode so important?

Our Sages often comment that the experiences of our forefathers are a sign, or indicator, to their descendants. This comment can be understood in many ways. It can be interpreted as asserting that there is a mystical relationship between the events experienced by our forefathers and the later experiences of their descendants. However, the comments can also be understood in a simpler manner. The experiences of our forefathers often serve as a paradigm, or template, for future events. We can study the experiences of our forefathers, learn from them, and apply these lessons to our own lives. What is the paradigm described in this narrative? What lesson can we learn from this episode that we can apply to our own lives? In order to answer these questions, we must consider some elements of the episode more carefully.



“And Yitzchak sowed in that land, and he found in that year a hundred fold, and Hashem blessed him. And the man became great, and he grew constantly greater until he had grown very great. And he had possessions of sheep and possessions of cattle and much production, and the Pelishtim envied him. And all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the days of Avraham, his father, the Pelishtim stopped them up and filled them with earth. And Avimelech said to Yitzchak, "Go away from us, for you have become much stronger than we." (Beresheit 26:12-16)

As explained above, Yitzchak planted while in Gerar and his efforts yielded a rich harvest. Yitzchak continued to be successful and his wealth grew. The Pelishtim were jealous. This jealousy had two results: First, the Pelishtim destroyed the wells that Avraham had dug in

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(Toldot continued from page 2)

Weekly Parsha

Gerar. Avraham had also lived in Gerar. During his time in Gerar he was also very successful and Avimelech entered into a treaty with him. Avraham had dug various wells. These are the wells the Pelishtim now destroyed. Second, Avimelech instructed Yitzchak to leave Gerar.

This response is difficult to understand. We can understand the Pelishtim's jealousy. Jealousy is a natural human response. However, the Pelishtim expressed their jealousy in a rather bizarre and self-destructive manner. The wells that Avraham had developed were an important element of the infrastructure that benefited all of the people of the land. Especially in a time a famine, wells are an invaluable resource. It seems that by destroying these wells the Pelishtim harmed themselves at least as much as they harmed Yitzchak!

Avimelech drove Yitzchak from Gerar. But Yitzchak derived his wealth from his successful harvest. It was a time a famine. The Pelishtim needed food. Yitzchak's success in his agricultural endeavors probably saved numerous lives. Why send away the one source of hope at a time of desperation? In other words, both of these responses seem remarkably self-destructive. Why were the Pelishtim determined to strike out at Yitzchak even at their own expense?

Rashi makes an interesting comment regarding the Pelishtim's motivation for destroying the wells. He explains that the Pelishtim offered a reason for their actions. They explained that they were afraid that their land might be attacked. These wells could not be protected. They could be easily captured by their enemies and used to support the attacking armies.[1] Rashi's comments are somewhat ambiguous. He comments that the Pelishtim offered this explanation. This seems to imply that this explanation was not their true motive. They offered this explanation rather than revealing their real reasons for destroying the wells. But Rashi does not indicate the true motivation.

Rav Ovadia Sforno's comments provide an insight that may answer this question. He asks: What was the source of the Pelishtim's jealousy? He explains that the Pelishtim observed that Yitzchak's agricultural efforts were remarkably successful and their own were correspondingly fruitless.[2]

It is not difficult to identify the message that this phenomenon communicated to the Pelishtim: The land responded with abundance to the efforts of Yitzchak and rejected their efforts. This phenomenon communicated an affinity between Yitzchak and the Land of Canaan. It also communicated that the land responded to



them as aliens and usurpers. In other words, not only was it clear to the Pelishtim that Yitzchak enjoyed Hashem's providence, but it was also clear that Yitzchak had a special relationship with the land they regarded as their own!

We can now understand their response of destroying Avraham's wells and chasing Yitzchak away. These wells represented an inter-generational connection to the land. Before Yitzchak, Avraham had also achieved great success in this land. The wells were a reminder of this inter-generational relationship to the land and the special connection that Avraham and Yitzchak had with the land. The Pelishtim wanted to deny this relationship and destroy any memorial of it. The wells had to be destroyed and it was imperative to drive Yitzchak away. In other words, the Pelishtim were willing to sacrifice their own welfare for a cause that they believed was more important than their immediate well-being. They felt that their claim to the land was at stake. They were determined to undermine and erase any claim that Yitzchak had to the land. In order to accomplish this end, they were willing to sacrifice their own well-being.

It seems that these events are a paradigm and template for current events. The Palestinian rejection of the State of Israel reflects exactly the same attitudes and includes the same measures attributed to the Pelishtim in our parasha. Like the Pelishtim, the Palestinians have no reservations against engaging in the most outlandish, self-destructive behaviors. They have ripped up much of the infrastructure left by Israel in its abandonment of Gaza. They needed this infrastructure but they could not tolerate any signs or memorials of Israel's success in developing this arid, barren land. The Palestinians constantly acknowledge that they can only survive through access to Israel's economy: Israel's economy is their only source of jobs and Israel provides a market for any

goods that the Palestinians can produce. But despite these compelling reasons to make peace with Israel, the Palestinians sacrifice their children in futile suicide bombings. They use their children and civilian population as human shields. These actions are clearly self-destructive. But they serve the greater end of attempting to wipe out any sign of a Jewish presence in the land.

Our parasha also offers important advice regarding how to respond to such attitudes. Yitzchak did succeed in forcing Avimelech to accept him. How did he secure this outcome?

Nachmanides explains that there are two factors that brought about this outcome. First, Hashem provided Yitzchak with His continual support. As a result, Avimelech realized that his best hope was to enter into a treaty with Yitzchak. This treaty would acknowledge Yitzchak's right to dwell in the land. However, it would also secure the future of Avimelech's people – Yitzchak would promise not to wage war against them. Second, implicit in Nachmanides' comments is the observation that Avimelech only entered into this treaty because he knew that there was no alternative. He could never succeed in driving out Yitzchak and his descendants.[3]

This provides us with an important lesson: In order to triumph in our conflict with the Palestinians we must not allow them to have any hope of success. As long as they feel that there is a reasonable chance that we can be driven from the Land of Israel, they will never give up their battle. We must be victorious in every confrontation. This will require Hashem's help and our determination. We cannot show weakness or doubt in the veracity of our rights to the land. This will require our own firm, unwavering commitment. Any doubt or defeat only encourages renewed violence.

It is unfortunate that we find ourselves in this situation. We all wish to resolve our conflict with the Palestinians through reasoning and mutual understanding. But as long as the paradigm of this week's parasha is the template for our relationship with the Palestinians, we cannot forget the lessons of the parasha. We must appeal to Hashem for His constant support and we must never waiver in our determination and convictions. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 26:15.

[2] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 26:14.

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 26:29.

(Freedom continued from page 1)

Perfection

[developing] new applications of legal rulings or in resolving bizarre and complex hypothetical questions. They would concentrate on the general principles of the law and would clarify what is forbidden and what is permitted; then they would become immersed and absorbed in the refinement of their conduct."

Rabbi Bachya ben Joseph ibn Paquda understood from studying Torah giants, that ethical and intellectual perfection must take priority over the analysis of theoretical areas. We must achieve the true concepts of God as far as man can, and we must study the words of Moses and the prophets for ethical and moral direction, as Rabbi Bachya cites in many instances. We must then enact these lessons. At the conclusion of his Guide for the Perplexed, Maimonides also makes similar remarks:

"...the perfection, in which man can truly glory, is attained by him when he has acquired - as far as this is possible for man - the knowledge of God, the knowledge of His Providence, and of the manner in which it influences His creatures in their production and continued existence. Having acquired this knowledge he will then be determined always to seek loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, and thus to imitate the ways of God."

The problem, is what Maimonides states a few sentences earlier:

"The third kind of perfection is more closely connected with man himself than the second perfection. It includes moral perfection, the highest degree of excellency in man's character. Most of the precepts aim at producing this perfection; but even this kind is only a preparation for another perfection, and is not sought for its own sake. For all moral principles concern the relation of man to his neighbor; the perfection of man's moral principles is, as it were, given to man for the benefit of mankind. Imagine a person being alone, and having no connection whatever with any other person, all his good moral principles are at rest, they are not required, and give man no perfection whatever. These principles are only necessary and useful when man comes in contact with others.

The fourth kind of perfection is the true perfection of man: the possession of the highest, intellectual faculties: the possession of such notions which lead to true metaphysical opinions as regards God."

"...the moral principles which benefit all people in their social intercourse with each other,

do not constitute the ultimate aim of man."

Maimonides states that intellectual perfection surpasses moral perfection. How then can he say the reverse in his first quote above? Read it again:

"...the perfection, in which man can truly glory, is attained by him when he has acquired - as far as this is possible for man - the knowledge of God, the knowledge of His Providence, and of the manner in which it influences His creatures in their production and continued existence. Having acquired this knowledge he will then be determined always to seek loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness, and thus to imitate the ways of God."

Maimonides remains true to his highest evaluation of intellectual perfection: it is supreme over moral perfection. The knowledge of God and how He relates to His creatures is our objective. Yet, true human "conviction" in the value of God's attributes comes only when we express these values in actions. Theoretical agreement with God's attributes of kindness, justice, charity and righteousness is insufficient, if we do not "live" by these values. Thus, Maimonides derives from the verse's conclusion[1] that we must enact the intellectual truths, in our moral lives. This enactment is the barometer of our convictions in intellectual truths. So although truths about God reign supreme over our perfection of character, our character is still essential for measuring our conviction in those truths. Maimonides makes it clear: "Having acquired this knowledge he will then be determined always to seek loving-kindness". Knowledge is supreme. Man's expression must then follow.

Application to Toldot

Part of this study includes this week's Torah portion and central personality, Esav the wicked. A friend directed me to this Talmudic portion addressing Esav:

"Rabbi Yochanan said, 'Five sins did that wicked one [Esav] transgress on that day [of Abraham's death]: he [Esav] had intercourse with a betrothed woman, he murdered a soul, he denied God, he denied Resurrection of the Dead, and he despised the birthright.'" (Tal. Baba Basra 16b)

We wonder what lessons Rabbi Yochanan teaches, but we have many points that will lead us along. He tells us these sins were performed when Abraham died. What is the connection? Why did Esav have intercourse with a "betrothed

woman? Why not a married woman? And what propelled him to sin in these other areas? Is there a common denominator among all five sins?

Corrupt Ideas: Corrupt Actions

Why didn't Esav sin until this day? Well, we know it is because Abraham had not yet died. But what effect did Abraham's death have on Esav? Why was 'his' death different than Isaac's death? Or, did it merely preempt Isaac's death, and both deaths would have caused similar violations by Esav?

When studying Esav, we see his great need for authoritative approval. He shrieked bitterly when he learned that his father Isaac blessed Jacob his twin, his rival, forfeiting his own blessing. That blessing was a stamp of approval, for which he so desperately longed. We also learn from Rashi that Esav used to ask his father how to tithe: he sought approval for his ethical activities.

Now, the patriarch Abraham was an image of righteousness. To obtain his approval, Esav had to follow his example. But the motivation to adhere to this lifestyle in Esav's mind was not only approval, but also the thought of some good Esav would obtain. Most important, is that we recognize that this 'good' was in Esav's terms...

Esav valued his Earthly existence. He saw Abraham as an old man still walking the Earth. Perhaps, Abraham's death shattered Esav's value of a righteous life: "If Abraham dies, of what good is all his righteous acts?" Esav thought. Immediately, Esav committed these five sins. He saw no further value in Abraham's example.

But Abraham's death was not a 'cause' per se for all of Esav's sins on that day. No, his death was a removal of a "lid" that kept Esav's powerful urges at bay all these years.

Esav possessed his tremendous urges from the womb, as did Jacob. The Rabbis teach the two sons of Isaac were identical until Abraham's death. But once Abraham died, Esav deviated. Jacob continued to channel his strengths to pondering God and internal perfection, while Esav satisfied his lusts. Upon Abraham's death, those urges – seen even when in the womb as he struggled with Jacob – now had justification: "Abraham lived so perfectly, and he dies at the end? Then it's all worthless!" This was Esav's thinking. Perhaps also, Abraham was someone Esav attached to more than Isaac, as a grandfather does not carry the disciplinarian role. Esav's attachment to Abraham was pure, without the negative, parental associations.

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(Freedom continued from page 4)

Sin Begets Sin

Due to his corrupt ethics and philosophy, Abraham's death presented Esav with a corrupt conclusion: there is no reward. He denied resurrection. That metaphysical reward is not the reward that registers on a lustful personality. Esav's denial of that true reward means that he denied God, the exclusive granter of reward. Esav then threw himself unrestrained into satisfying his earthly desires. He destroyed himself.

His other base drives then gushed forward; he then killed a soul. Why? This is because that soul as opposed to others must have impeded his desires. Esav saw himself as the center of the universe, where he must not be restricted, or controlled by another. He then murdered that soul to obtain his wishes. The ego is quite strong, but it was much stronger with Esav, as rabbi Yochanan said, "Five sins did THAT wicked one sin on that day". Esav possessed unique qualities. Murder is an act of resolving a competitive struggle. And at the root of all competition is the ego. This was one base drive he satisfied that day.

Esav also had intercourse with a betrothed woman. I believe he sought this type of woman for a psychological motive, similar to murder. One who is betrothed represented to Esav a woman "off limits". "Someone else has rights to her, and not I?" Esav thought. Again, his ego could not tolerate any restriction, and certainly not being second to another human personality...therefore he took her "first". Had she been married, his sexual act would not be as impacting as being the first to lie with her, and in essence, ruining it for the other man. He beat out the groom.

He also despised the birthright, as this was the entitlement to serve God. Again, the ego in full form does not accept any subservience. Service to any being is not accepted, even to God. Perhaps this too contributed to his denial of God.

One error caused Esav to outpour all his base emotions; sexual drives, competition, aggression, rebellion, and denial of God. These are man's base drives, and this explains why Esav committed all of these sins at once: these sins embody man's dominant instincts. So once the lid was lifted from his emotions, the most dominant drives expressed themselves. And at the root, is ego. Man's most primary instinctual forces cause these five sins.

"The beginning of wisdom is the fear of God". We must come away with newfound humility, and the deep recognition that the Torah's restraints are for our good. If we combat our rebelliousness of certain Torah laws with new knowledge behind what we initially found restraining, we have just made a fantastic, first step.

Esav sells his birthright for a bowl of beans

**Chains of Freedom**

We learn that the unchained lifestyle leads to our destruction. In fact, the Rabbis refer to the Torah as "Ole malchus shamayim", "The yoke of the kingdom of heaven". The yoke is a restraint on our urges and actions. Following this restrained lifestyle where Torah study is first and foremost, we arrive at truths concerning what the happiest and best life is. We study human nature and see where different paths lead, before we embark on a course. We decide all moves based on reason. With a restrained and well-charted plan, we live tranquil lives. We control when and where our energies are spent. Less friction is created with others, as we do not value petty matters, and we think before we talk. With a governing system, we are led to greater knowledge, and it is this knowledge that truly frees us: freed to make more decisions, because we know more choices. And these decisions are more informed, so we benefit, having thought through all possible scenarios that might result from any number of choices.

It is the ignorant one who feels that restraint

limits him. The irreligious person 'feels' free, as nothing impedes his actions. But freedom to "do", does not equate to the ability to select "any" possibility...or doing what is "best". Yes, the irreligious person can do and say anything, at anytime. But with little knowledge, he or she has few choices. For man cannot choose, that which he is unaware of. Conversely, the truly free person is the one who has the greatest knowledge, enabling greater choices, and wiser options. And the greatest knowledge must come from the Creator of all knowledge.

Rabbi Bachya ben Joseph ibn Paquda directs us to reflect on many profound realizations. I truly feel fortunate to have read his words. I urge all to purchase a copy of Duties of the Heart. Read it, including his amazing introduction. You will feel as fortunate as I that you did. His lessons will free you to select from increased options, and make more informed choices. ■

[1] "That I am the Lord which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth." (Jeremiah 9:23)

RABBI REUVEN MANN



Isaac & the Wells

In Gen. 26:1-33, the Torah recounts the story of Isaac, and the famine as the reason why he journeyed to Avimelech in Garar. God then commanded Isaac not to descend to Egypt, for despite the famine, He assured Isaac that he would provide. The Torah notes that this famine was not the same as the one in Abraham's days. Rashi states, the first famine of Abraham was a test for him. Abraham did not base his service of God on whether he enjoyed the fortunes of life. Ramban says Abraham was wrong, and should have had faith that God would provide, despite the famine. But Ramban is silent on Isaac's very same decision. Therefore, leaving a land when it suffers a drought is not inherently wrong. Had God not revealed Himself to Isaac, it would appear correct for Isaac to travel towards Egypt, away from the stricken lands.

We see that God's continued providence for Isaac was dependent on Abraham's guard of God's word. Regardless, each patriarch was worthy to have God's name connected with him. Isaac was not simply perpetuating his studies received from his father Abraham: he added a new dimension, and derived his convictions from his own thinking. God promises His oath to Isaac, as Isaac deserved this providence due to his own merit.

When Isaac entered Garar, he did as Abraham his father, and claimed his wife Rebecca was his sister, to protect his own life. After time had passed, we read that the king, Avimelech, had looked from his window, witnessing Isaac engaged in some activity with Rebecca which clearly conveyed that their relationship was in fact not siblings, but husband and wife. Avimelech rebuked Isaac for endangering his people, one of whom might have taken Rebecca, bringing sin to them. Avimelech then commanded his people that no one should harm Isaac and Rebecca.

We then read that Isaac reaped a hundredfold, and grew very successful. His successes did not cease. The Philistines envied Isaac for this. There is an interesting Rashi on this section. He writes, "Better the dung of the mules of Isaac, than the silver and gold of Avimelech." This is a strange idea: why would people prefer the former? The Torah goes on, "All the wells that his

(Isaac's) father's servants had dug in the days of Abraham his father, the Philistines had and stopped up and filled with dirt." For what reason does the Torah inform us of this obscure fact?

Ramban states there is no honor to Isaac in this whole story. So why was it recorded? He answers that the point of this section is to allude to something hidden: these three wells allude to the three Temples. The first well was named Esek, meaning contention. The first Temple was amidst much contention. The second well Isaac dug was named Sitna, for the hatred displayed by the Philistines towards Isaac. Similarly, during the second Temple, there was much hatred. Rechovos was the name of the third well, over which the philistines did not quarrel. Rechovos means breadth, as in the breadth of mind now afforded to Isaac. And in the third Temple, there will be peace. Rabbi Israel Chait commented that although there may be some future correlations, there must also be something in each Torah account, to which we may relate to in the here and now.

Emergence of the Second Patriarch

In what sense were Abraham and his son Isaac patriarchs? Isaac differed from Abraham. Abraham made his mark through his ability to interact with the world. He debated with many, and although eventually exiled, he resumed his teachings. However, there is another element responsible for their success at spreading knowledge of God: Divine providence. God miraculously saved Abraham on many occasions, paving the way for his continued teachings, while also creating his unparalleled reputation. Isaac was different. He was an "Oleh Temima", a "wholly burnt offering" of sorts. His energies were not directed to the world of the social, but exclusively towards knowledge. Coming so close to death when he was bound to the altar had a profound effect on the personality of Isaac. Thus, God told Isaac not to descend to Egypt; he was a different personality. So how did Isaac play a role as a patriarch?

Both famines were a result of providence. But in Isaac's case, it did not have the purpose as a test, as was the case with regards to Abraham. During the famine in Isaac's era, God instructed him to remain in the land. Why was this necessary?

The Wells

The wells were essential for Isaac's emergence in his role as an independent patriarch. We are told that Isaac became very wealthy. But he does not cease in his monetary growth, as was the case with Avimelech. Avimelech was stagnant in his wealth. Therefore, the Philistines said they preferred Isaac's mule dung to Avimelech's riches. This means they respected Isaac who could take dung (famine) and make successes from it. This wealth created a great respect for Isaac. Avimelech then asked Isaac to leave Garar, as his continued dwelling in Garar made Avimelech, the king, look bad by comparison.

But the Philistines became envious. We learn that they filled up Abraham's well. This demonstrated their denouncing of Abraham's philosophy. Why didn't the Philistines fill Abraham's wells earlier? It is because when they saw the greatness of Isaac, they now learned that Abraham's ideology was not a "flash in the pan", a one-time movement. Isaac's continuation of Abraham's philosophy now created friction in Garar, as they could no longer view Abraham's era as eclipsed by time. His philosophy was sustained through Isaac; there is a dynasty. The Philistines' realization that Abraham's philosophy was continuing was intolerable to their corrupt lifestyle. Had Abraham passed, along with his monotheistic views, they could let matters go. But this was not the case any longer. Thus, they desired to rebel against Abraham's sustained philosophy. But the Philistines could not harm Isaac. They respected his wealth. So they attacked Abraham through stopping up his wells.

Isaac left, but then returned. Why? He did so for the express purpose of reopening Abraham's wells. He made a separate journey back after having left, precisely to demonstrate why he came back: to resuscitate Abraham's fame and teachings. What was the response of the Philistines? They strove with Isaac over his new wells. The Philistines attempted to negate the greatness of Isaac. The Philistines did not say, "ours is the water" as in the first well, demonstrating that the water was not the issue. Rather, Isaac's fame was what they deplored. After a certain amount of time, they saw they could not bring down Isaac. The Philistines eventually succumbed to another emotion: their underlying respect for Isaac's success. The adage, "If you can't beat them, join them" enunciates this very change in the Philistines. Thus, the final well, which Isaac's servants dug, was named "breadth." Isaac was no longer attacked, as the emotion of adulation replaced the Philistines' prior repulsion. This point is when Avimelech desired to secure a truce. Wealth draws people. This was the method through which Isaac became renown.

God orchestrated a famine, as the perfect backdrop to emphasize Isaac's wealth. No one else prospered during this famine. Ultimately, Isaac returns to Abraham's teaching ground, Beer Sheva. Isaac arrived physically at this location, and philosophically at his goal to be engaged in study. Thus we read, "He called out in God's name", meaning, he resumed teaching about God, his primary goal. We also learn that God's plan was successful, as we read that Avimelech traveled to Isaac, recognizing his greatness. Isaac's fame was now positive. Avimelech did not desire any truce with Isaac while he dwelled in Garar. It was only after his successes. Subsequent to his exile, Isaac became very wealthy, and this wealth was the groundwork necessary for others to recognize Isaac's philosophy.

The Philistines realized that by applying Isaac's philosophy, one could achieve success. This was exceptionally profound, while they endured a famine. ■

Drasha



Judaism

*More than
Just a Religion*

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Written by student

In Sidras Chayei Sarah, we read about the death of Sarah, wife of Avraham and first Matriarch of the Jewish people. Contrary to our expectations, the story does not focus very much on the mourning and eulogies. Instead, it goes into a detailed (given the general brevity of the Torah) description of the nego-

tiations between Avraham and Ephron over the purchase of burial plot. At first glance the matter is difficult to comprehend. We would, naturally, like to learn about the personality of Sarah as described by those who knew and mourned her. The dialogue between Avraham and the people of Heth does not seem to be so important. What is the reason for this unusual treatment of the death of one of our greatest personalities?

I believe the answer lies in a deeper appreciation of the historical significance of the Mearat Hamachpelah. This was not an ordinary burial place. It was purchased not so much for the sake of the dead as for the living. "The righteous, even in death, are called living." The objective of Avraham was to see to it that all of mankind would be able benefit from the life of Sarah. Indeed, all the Avot and Imahot (except Rachel) are buried there in order to proclaim the eternal connection between HaShem, the Jewish people and the Land of Israel. The Pasuk in Devarim states, "Only your forefathers did Hashem cherish to love them and he chose their offspring after them—you—from among all the peoples, as this day." Every time a Jew visits the Mearat Hamachpelah he affirms that HaShem gave us the Land of Israel because we perpetuate the special religious way of the Avot, which alone finds favor in His eyes. We can now understand why the Torah does not record the eulogies that were said for Sarah. The real honor Avraham bestowed on her was in the purchase and establishment of the Mearat Hamachpelah which eternalized her deeds and rendered her a role model for "all who would come into existence".

One must take the stories of the Torah very seriously. Every Jew must strive to incorporate the Emunah and virtues of the great personalities who HaShem chose to be the founders of his nation. Our goal is not just to be "religious", but to find the proper path and perform deeds of righteousness which find favor with HaShem. Thus, we approach the study of Torah and performance of Mitzvot with a certain passion and intensity: "It is Torah and I need to learn". The lifestyle of Avraham, Sarah and all the great Torah personalities of Jewish history is not a thing of the past but a living reality. We should strive to the best of our abilities, to emulate their way of serving HaShem by studying Torah, incorporating its lessons and applying them to the challenges of contemporary life. ■

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MESORA



the Blessings of Isaac

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by student

Upon analyzing the events surrounding the blessings of Isaac to his children it seems that certain inferences can be made. When Isaac discovered that Jacob fooled him, his response is recorded at Genesis Chapter 27 verse 33 “And Isaac trembled very exceedingly...” It would appear that Isaac was truly amazed upon discovering Esau’s true personality. However this reaction raises a very poignant question. When Jacob brought Isaac the venison he requested of Esau, Isaac remarked that his quest for the venison was successful rather quickly. Jacob answered that God facilitated the promptness of the mission. Rashi on this verse 21 states, “Isaac thought in his heart, it is not the custom of Esau that the name of God should be fluent in his mouth...” It would thus seem that Isaac was aware of Esau’s true nature.

We must also understand the significance of the blessings. Chazal, the Rabbis, teach us that the blessings although couched in physical terms are blessings of the spiritual. In this regard, Maimonides in the ninth chapter of the Laws of Repentance states that the reason for blessings and curses is merely to reflect God’s providence in this world. Therefore, they are written in terms of worldly good and evil, although the true benefit is the world to come.

Why was Esau so interested in spiritual blessings? Furthermore, after Isaac discovered he blessed Jacob, Esau pleads with his father three times, “don’t you have a blessing for me?” At first Isaac responded that the blessings were already

given to Jacob, but finally he seems to relent and blesses Esau as well. What was this blessing if in fact Jacob had usurped the blessings beforehand? Furthermore, an analysis of the blessing of Jacob and Esau seems strikingly similar. Both seem to contain the blessing that each shall be fortunate to attain the dew of the heavens and the fat of the earth.

Isaac essentially had two blessings. One blessing was for the physical goodness of this world. This was a blessing for the material benefits of this world, which is not the ultimate good. However, Isaac also bestowed the essential blessing of the truly spiritual, which he obtained from his father Abraham. This was the blessing, which he gave Jacob and is recited at the commencement of Chapter 28. Chapter 28 verses 3 and 4 state, “And God almighty shall bless thee and make thee fruitful and multiply thee, and thou may become a congregation of people. And I give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee and to thy seed with you, so thou may inherit the land of thou sojournings which God gave unto Abraham.”

These blessings were inherently spiritual. This was the blessing of Abraham that the nation of Israel, a nation based upon the laws of the Torah, will come forth from Jacob.

Isaac was not fully ignorant of Esau’s character. He was aware of Esau’s instinctual needs and desires. In the same fashion, he appreciated that Jacob was a simple man, whose nature was more in line with perfection derived from the learning of Torah. Accordingly, the blessings in Chapter 28, which were inherently spiritual, Isaac had always intended to bestow upon Jacob. As the man of Torah, he had to be recognized as the one who would bring forth the will of God. However, because of Esau’s nature, Isaac felt that Esau needed the blessing of the physical as a means for Esau to reach his perfection. He didn’t perceive Esau as a wicked person but rather as an instinctual being who required the physical in order to assist him to elevate himself to a higher level of perfection. He felt that Esau would utilize the blessing of the physical to help Jacob perpetuate the teachings of the Torah. Isaac’s miscalculation of Esau’s true character resulted because of Isaac’s nature. Isaac was the consummate tzaddik. He was unable to leave Israel because of said status. Abraham was compelled to send Eliezer to choose Isaac a wife because Isaac was incapable of judging an individual’s true character. As the purely righteous individual, Isaac was naive and incapable of perceiving evil. He was unable to appreciate the nuances of the average man’s actions. Thus he wrongly perceived Esau’s character. However, it wasn’t a total misconception. He intended to bless Esau with the blessings of the

physical as a means for his perfection. He was oblivious to the fact that Esau sought the physical as an end, in and of itself. Thereafter, upon realizing that Jacob had received the blessings of the physical, which he intended to bestow upon Esau, a fear gripped him. He suddenly became aware that God’s providence had determined that Jacob receive these blessings. He thus realized that he misjudged Esau and that Esau was truly an instinctual being whose only value was the life of the physical. He thus realized and feared that he had raised a wicked person in his house. Rebecca was aware of her son Esau’s true personality and realized that if Esau obtained the blessing of the physical he would utilize it to destroy Jacob. Rebecca was raised in the house of wicked people and was a capable judge of human character.

Thereafter, Isaac informed Esau, that he had no remaining blessings for him. The blessing of the physical, which were originally intended for him, were already bestowed upon Jacob. The truly spiritual blessings, Isaac had always intended to give Jacob, and would still do so. However, Esau persisted and Isaac relented and blessed Esau. The blessing of Esau was not a true blessing. It was a conditional blessing. In verse 40 Isaac states, “And it shall come to pass, when you (Esau) shall break loose and you shall shake his (Jacob) yoke from off thy neck.” Rashi comments that when Israel will violate the precepts of the Torah then Esau will achieve the blessings of the physical. Thus Isaac did not bestow upon Esau any new blessings but rather he limited the blessing of the physical, which he had previously given to Jacob. If Jacob uses the physical as a means to achieve intellectual perfection then he will truly merit the blessings of the physical. However, if he violates the Torah and seeks the physical as an end, in and of itself, then Esau will have the upper hand and merit the blessings of the physical.

Upon reflection of the history of our people we can appreciate the authenticity and veracity of the blessings of Isaac as their ramifications have been manifested throughout the experiences of our nation. ■

the Personality of Esau

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by student

Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife who was barren. God listened to Isaac’s prayer, and Rebecca became pregnant. Rebecca noticed that her pregnancy was unusual. She was pregnant with twins and there seemed to be an internal

(continued on next page)

struggle within her. When she passed the Beth Midrash (study hall) Jacob sought to get out. Upon passing a place of idol worship, Esau wanted to go forth. God thereby informed Rebecca that the children she was carrying would be the forerunners of two great nations. These two children were going to be two great warriors. One child would devote his energies to the conquest of the external world. The second child would concentrate his abilities on the conquest of the internal world. The two children were not ordinary people, but possessed excessive energies and the abundant talent and ability to mold the external world.

Isaac admired Esau's abundant energies. He respected his abilities as a conqueror. He was an individual whose countenance demanded respect. However Isaac made one miscalculation. He thought that Esau would exploit his abilities as a conqueror and assist Jacob in spreading the teachings of the Torah. The Torah likewise, in its description of Esau, recognizes and respects Esau's unique abilities. The Torah appreciates the greatness embodied in the personality of the conqueror. There is a Midrash (allegory) that compares the personalities of the Grand Rabbi Judah the Prince, and the wicked Antiochos. They both reflect man's ability of conquest. One excelled in the world of the ideational and one in the world of the physical.

We must appreciate the personality of the conqueror as one who perfects himself in physical conquest and is deserving of admiration. The Torah recognizes and pays tribute to the unique qualities of such an individual. Most people possess dependent personalities. They are incapable of progress and lack the ability of stepping forward and mastering the universe. Man unconsciously desires to perpetuate the state of infancy, which is essentially a protected state of dependency. An individual who conquers the physical world and is successful in his exploits has shattered this infantile state of dependency. Only such an individual is capable of accomplishment.

Courage is the ability of a person to use his inner strength and to step out into reality. This courage is manifested in an individual's mastery of either the intellectual world or in the sphere of the physical. Most people are content in following societal patterns and live a dependent life, and thus, are not truly successful in their endeavors. They are in trepidation of facing reality, which demands that a person leave the protective life of his early development. A conqueror is an individual who possesses the courage to leave the security that society offers and face the challenges of the external world. A person can utilize his courage and "step out", making progress in two worlds; the world of the intellectual or the world of the physi-

cal. Rebecca's two sons represented two courageous individuals who had the courage to face the external world and the internal world.

The Rabbis respected this personality as evidenced in halacha. An "ashir muflag", an extremely rich person, can be called up to the Torah before a Kohane. Such an individual has utilized his intellect and has displayed the courage to go out into the world and conquer it.

It is important to draw a distinction to the hero. A hero possesses false courage. He simply seeks to go against the norms of society in order to achieve hero status. The hero's drive is not based upon the quest of reality. The hero does not utilize his intellect as a demonstration of courage.

An understanding of the personality of Esau can also help us appreciate the incident concerning the sale of his birthright. The book of Genesis beginning at Chapter 25, verse 29 and through the remainder of the chapter, recites the circumstances of the sale. Esau returned from hunting in the field and was hungry and exhausted. He thereby asks Jacob for some of his red pottage of lentils. Jacob in turn purchases Esau's birthright for the pottage. Esau comments, "behold I am going to die and thus I have no need for the birthright". The Torah thereby concluded Chapter 25 with Verse 34, "And Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentils; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way, so Esau spoiled his birthright."

The Torah says that the day of the sale was the day Abraham died. Esau had displayed a strong affection and respect for Abraham. During Abraham's life Esau did not stray onto the path of the wicked. Abraham was a super-ego figure, a true tzaddik, a righteous person. Esau had strong instinctual proclivities but he saw Abraham as an image of immortality because Abraham was righteous. This image of Abraham prevented him from sinning. Esau projected upon Abraham the image of immortality, because he was a truly righteous individual. Esau was an instinctual being and during Abraham's life he did not succumb to the life of the instinctual. Esau viewed Abraham as being immortal. This fantasy of immortality prevented Esau from living the life of a wicked person. Upon Abraham's death his fantasy of immortality was shattered. Esau wrongfully concluded that there was no concept of reward, since he only viewed reward in terms of the physical. However a chacham, a wise man, appreciates the true reward.

The Midrash says concerning Abraham's death, "al tivku l'mase", do not cry for his death. Abraham had achieved true immortality. The ideational part of man, which is not subject to the constraints of the physical, lives on. However, Esau, the instinctual being could not appreciate

true eternity. Thus the Midrash says one should cry for Esau. The death of a wicked person, one whose existence was solely in the realm of the physical, truly marks his end.

Esau, upon selling his birthright to Jacob, commented that the birthright had no value for him because he was going to die. The death of Abraham made him acutely cognizant of his own mortality. He thereby rejected any concept of reward and punishment. Thus, after the sale, the Torah made a point of reciting that, Esau did "eat, drink, rose up, went his way and despoiled his birthright". This critical juncture represented the commencement of Esau's submission to his instinctual needs and the dedication of his life to the physical. This is attested to as it states that when Esau came from the field he was tired. The Rabbis tell us that Esau had already killed someone this day and had raped an engaged girl. The attraction of the physical is the fantasy. When one commits a sin it is because he is usually overwhelmed by the allurements of the fantasy. However, after one commits the sin he realizes that the satisfaction is fleeting. The energies, which were propelled by the fantasy are diminished. The reality rarely conforms to the anticipation of the fantasy. Thus, Esau was tired because his energies were not fully satisfied. The commission of the sins did not satiate his physical energies.

Normally a wicked person, after committing a sin, does not feel tired because he channels the energies to the ego. The conqueror's sense of accomplishment removes the frustration which otherwise would result when the power of the fantasy is dissipated. However Esau felt tired, he was "ayef". After Abraham's death, he committed the sins because he was overwhelmed by the physical desires. Abraham's death had removed all impediments from sinning. However, he was not satisfied after the performance of the chate, the sin. His ego ideal was still Abraham. He had not yet attached his ego to accomplishment in the realm of physical conquests. Thus, he was exhausted after the sin because all he had was the frustrated energy of the sin. Later on in life, as Esau became the man of physical conquests, he did not feel exhaustion. The frustrated energy was satisfied by the ego ideal of the physical man. He was successful in transferring the physical man - the conqueror - as his ego-ideal in Abraham's stead.

The Torah gives us the insight and opportunity to appreciate the personality of Esau and analyze the events in his life as he developed into the persona of a rasha, a wicked person. Therefore the Torah is unique in recognizing, that although the lifestyle of a rasha is not a value, which we aspire to, the personality of the rasha must be analyzed and recognized as a creature of the Creator. ■

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Kidney Needed *(Reprinted from an email list)*
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