

SPECIAL

RESPONSE TO THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

OTHER RELIGIONS: NOT GOD'S WORD

(“ABRAHAM'S MONOTHEISM” pg. 11)

JewishTimes

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LETTERS

A Dolphin-man?
Superstitions
Palm Reading
more...

ESAV

Respect and
Suspect Him

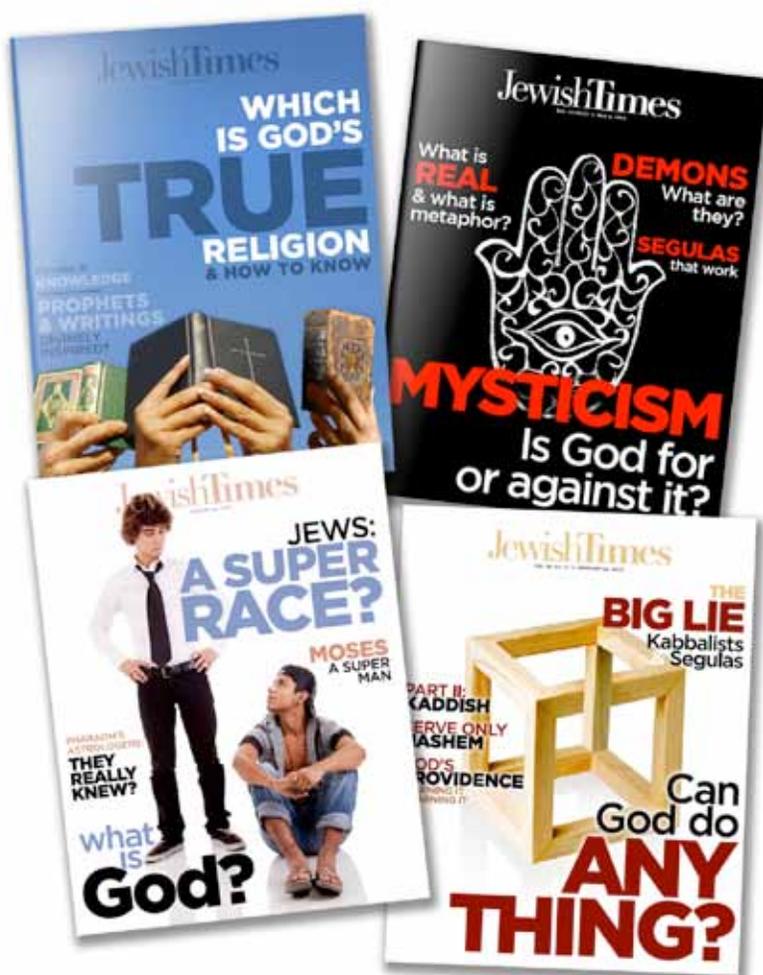
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NOV. 16

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LETTERS

Correction

A few weeks ago the Jewishtimes included a segment of a facebook conversation that gave an incorrect impression. I stated that Torah must be taken literally. However, this did not include the caveat, "when impossible to understand literally, Torah must have another meaning." For example, "cities built to the heavens" is impossible literally; it is an exaggeration. "Circumcise the foreskin of your heart" means to control and minimize instinctual gratification. "God's hand" cannot be literal. And so on.

My intent was to inform the reader that one must not view as metaphor anything he wishes, for this reader I addressed viewed the Flood as metaphor, when there is nothing impossible about such a catastrophe. A wise Rabbi said "We understand the Torah literally, except when it is impossible to do so. Otherwise, what prevents us from saying God is a metaphor?"

To view the Flood as metaphor, means God does not actually punish. As you can see, there are many negative ramifications to misguided Torah interpretations. ■

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REVIEWS



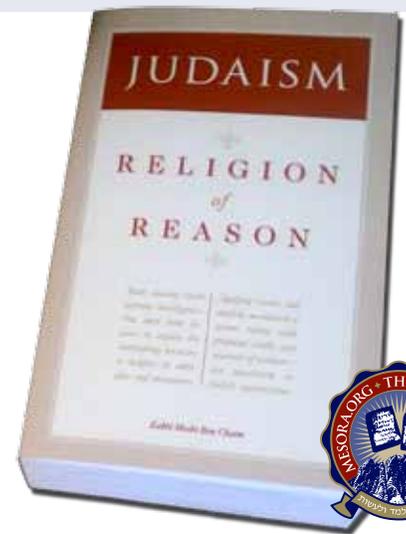
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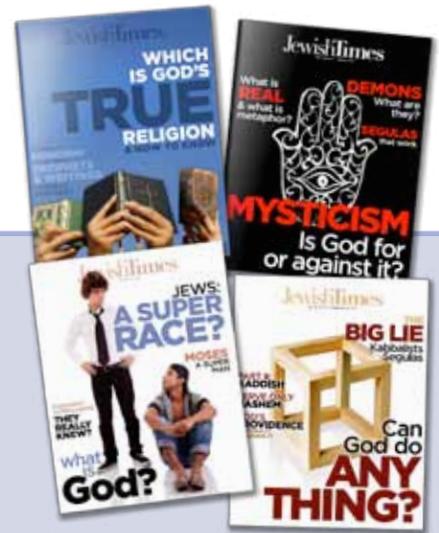
RABBI STEVEN WEIL — *Executive Vice President, The Orthodox Union*

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RELIGION of REASON

by JewishTimes' publisher
Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim



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Superstitions are Idolatrous



Rabbi: Superstition is the violation of Nichush, a form of idolatry. A wise Rabbi defined idolatry as "suggesting a causal relationship between 2 phenomena without evidence." Thus, if I suggest a red bendel protects me from harm, that is Nichush, superstition. Or if opening any book to a random page, and I suggest that page has information pertinent to me, and I act on it...that is Nichush. In such cases, there is no relationship, but I suggest there is. This would apply to the belief in miracles, still perpetrated today by kabbalists, Jews and "Rabbis." There is no causal relationship witnessed between a kabbalist and one's healing or success. Therefore, to suggest the kabbalist "caused" the healing/success, or did so via miracles, is Nichush.

It is crucial to recognize that man cannot perform miracles, and that no man ever did...it was always God. For He alone created natural law. If any man takes credit, boasting he can guarantee his prayer is heard, or that he can perform a wonder, he does not follow Torah, and is a liar. He is also a false prophet, for how can he say a miracle will occur, if God did not tell him?! Thus, by claiming miracles, he claims God communicated with him, a lie about prophecy. Torah states false prophets urging idolatry are worthy of death (Deut. 13:6). But even without urging idolatry, one who falsely claims God spoke to him commit a grave sin. ■

Palm Reading & Ramban

Reader: Ramban believed that "hokhmat hayad" (palm-reading) was a legitimate science.

Rabbi: Palm reading...a truth? That's ridiculous. No intelligent person would suggest such nonsense. And if you see someone attaching Ramban's name to it, don't believe it, like Dana just quoted: "Print does not equal truth."

Accidental skin creases are unrelated to future events.

Freewill exists; we're not bound to fulfill palm-line prophecies.

If people would think - as is God's plan by giving EACH person an intellect - they would see through the haze of name dropping. They would not be able to say things like "Ramban accepted palm reading", since their minds would utterly reject that foolishness.

Maimonides is correct to categorize palm reading and sorcery as idolatrous. He understood that idolatry was fabricated to provide man imaginary protection against other imaginations, or to guarantee a secure future. People are fearful; they want to know that tomorrow will be good. But instead of following the paths our patriarchs lead - the path God instructed us in by recording it - people deny using their intellects to plan their life. They are insecure. Palm reading and sorcery offer people an imagined protection, thereby qualifying as "idolatrous" according to Maimonides. ■

Dolphin-Man?

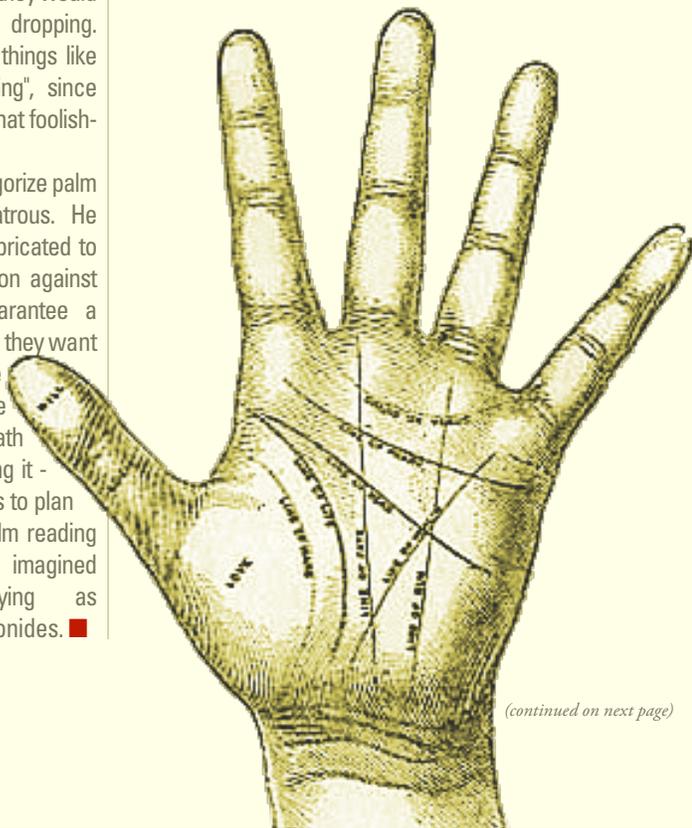
Chani: I saw a gemara this shabbos about humans and dolphins mating and producing creatures which are half man half dolphin. How is this possible? Has such a being ever been found?

Rabbi: Rashi and Tosfos comment on the Talmud (Bechoros 8a) that says dolphins mate "like" humans. Some texts have it as dolphins mate "from" humans.

The first version is true, as dolphins mate "like" humans: face-to-face, unlike other species.

Regarding the second version, dolphins mate "from" humans, Rashi simply says dolphins can become impregnated by humans, and Tosfos says dolphin offspring can be generated this way. However, neither one says the reproduced life form is a "mixed species", i.e., a "dolphin-man".

Seems that chazal held that human sperm is similar enough to dolphin sperm to produce a dolphin offspring, not much different than two dolphins mating. But that a life form could a be half-human/half-animal, or b) possess intellect, is not suggested here. Nor does that second notion comply with God's plan of placing a soul in man alone. ■



(continued on next page)

Rabbis as Marriage Counselors?

Dana: What qualifications does a rabbi have to "meet with couples" and "advise couples" without a Masters, PhD, or therapy license. Did they think sticking their noses in their gemara for a decade got them this credential?

Rabbi: While credentials indicate a level of knowledge, they are not indispensable. Each Rabbi/person must be judged independently. If they have good insight, degrees are irrelevant. I'm sure there's plenty of degreed Dr.s who are equally inept. Rambam says if one has emotional issues, to seek out psychologists (paraphrased). But I would add that psychology courses don't necessarily teach the analytical training obtained by studying Gemara for years under a great Rabbi. This is necessary for identifying facts, proper categorization, and analyzing how those facts relate and generate causes. This applies to all problem solving. ■

True Torah Ideas are Astonishing

God created the universe. Even average people are enamored by its vastness, complexity and precision that harmoniously sustain life and embody math and physics to subatomic levels that are astonishing. God also created Torah. If you hear a Torah idea that does not offer you this same level of astonishment, the idea is probably false.

Don't ever be satisfied with mediocre, since God isn't.

Give credit when due, like to our Rishonim and Talmudic Rabbis. Patiently analyze their words and expect nothing less than rationally pleasing marvels. This is how I study, and I am always amazed how some people can simplify and misread with an infantile take, while patient study yields new exciting insights that ring true, and make you want to share them with others like a treasure: "Hey, did you see THIS?!" ■

Proof Overrules All Else

Eddie: I wish to ask you a question. What do you do if rational thought or logic contradicts your own beliefs, or if there is a contradiction between what the Rabbis teach and what logic or empirical knowledge, or even the Torah, teach.

Rabbi: If rational thought or logic contradicts your own beliefs, this means your beliefs are not rational or logical...and thus, wrong. One must abandon that belief.

If there is a contradiction between what the Rabbis teach, and what logic or empirical knowledge teaches, again we must abandon the Rabbis in place of what the absolute arbiter (truth) dictates. Ibn Ezra(1) agrees saying if we cannot interpret a mitzvah, we must abandon it. Rambam also agrees(2), saying that we only accept as truth that which is either 1) sensed, 2) rationally proven, or 3) received as part of God's Torah. Rambam agrees, stating that had Aristotle proved the eternity of the universe, we would be forced to reinterpret Torah verses indicating creation.

Proof overrules all else. ■

(1)"...The second category (of commandments) are commands which are hidden, and there is not explained why they were commanded. And God forbid, God forbid that there should be any one of these commands which goes against human intelligence. Rather, we are obligated to perform all that God commands, be it revealed to us the underlying "Sode" (principle), be it hidden from us. And if we find any of them which contradict human intelligence, it isn't proper that we should understand it as implied. But we should consult the books of the wise men of blessed memory, to determine if such a command is a metaphor. And if we find nothing written (by them) we (must) search out and seek with all our ability, perhaps we can fix it (determine the command). If we can't, then we abandon that mitzvah as it is, and admit we are ignorant of it (Exod. 20.1)."

(2) Letter to the Community of Marseille

Holding Our Leaders in Higher Esteem

Misha: Please clarify what the Ramban believed regarding magic, demons, science, physicians, medicine, superstition, etc. This is what I mean by apologizing for the Ashkenazi Rishonim's anti-Maimonidean ways, by trying to twist their words to mean something else.

Rabbi: I never studied Ramban on these points. But let's talk fundamentals here...

God granted each person intelligence. And I won't debate whether the Letter to Marseilles is authentic or not, since the content is 100% reasonable. That is, we accept as truth only one of three matters: 1) what we sense (see, hear, etc); 2) what reason demands (2+2=4); 3) what is transmitted via Torah, Neveim and Kasuvim, as these are divinely inspired and 100% truths.

So should we believe that rational persons, intellectual giants, like Ramban or Rashi actually accepted that palm lines foretell future events, or that there are little monsters called demons? Or, do we know that they, like King Solomon spoke cryptically and gave us generous clues? No intelligent person would accept as true, that which is unproven.

I feel this must be the understanding we have for our sages, based on all they wrote. And when we found Rashi saying "demons entered the ark", or Ramban saying something similar, we need to understand, or dismiss saying "I don't know what he meant". But we must not suggest they were superstitious and accepted anything without 1) evidence, 2) reason, or 3) Mesora. ■

LETTERS:

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TOLDOT

The Torah's Vision of the Eschatological Age

RABBI BERNIE FOX

And Hashem appeared to him and said: Do not descend to Egypt. Dwell in the land that I tell you. Dwell in this land and I will be with you and I will bless you because to you and to your descendants I will give all of these lands. And I will fulfill the promise that I made to your father Avraham. (Sefer Beresheit 26:2-3)

1. Yitzchak relocation to Gerar

Virtually the Torah's entire discussion of Yitzchak is contained in Parshat Toldot. Even in Parshat Toldot, Yitzchak often shares the central role in the narrative with Rivkah. Only in one incident is Yitzchak the sole central character of the narrative. This is the account of his experiences in the Land of the Pelishtim.

The Land of Cana'an is stricken by famine. Yitzchak decides to follow the example of his father, Avraham, and lead his family to Egypt for the duration of the famine. For both Avraham and Yitzchak, this was a logical decision. The Land of Cana'an – Israel – depends primarily upon precipitation for irrigation. Draught inevitably produces famine. Egypt's agriculture is supported by the Nile River. Therefore, Egypt was often spared from regional droughts and famines. As Yitzchak prepares to descend to Egypt, Hashem appears to him and directs him to not travel to Egypt but to remain in the Land of Cana'an. Then, Hashem explains the reason He requires that Yitzchak remain in the Land of Cana'an. Hashem promised to give the Land of Cana'an to Avraham's descendants. The fulfillment of this promise will begin with Yitzchak's uninterrupted residence in the Land and continue with his descendants' possession of the Land.

The reasoning of the passages is not completely clear. Yitzchak was told to remain in the Land of Cana'an because it



had been given to him and his descendants. Yet, Yaakov left the Land of Cana'an with Hashem's blessings in order to flee from the wrath of his brother Esav. Later, he and his children abandoned the Land of Cana'an and descended to Egypt in order to escape a famine that ravaged the region. Again, Yaakov's descent to Egypt took place with Hashem's blessing. Why was it inappropriate to Yitzchak to leave the land but acceptable for Yaakov to do so?

2. Two views on Hashem's instruction to Yitzchak to remain in Cana'an

Netziv suggests that Hashem commanded Yitzchak to remain in order to demonstrate his love for the Land of Israel. In other words, Yitzchak's remaining in a time of famine would demonstrate that he was willing to endure hardship in order to remain within the Land.

Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno offers an alternative interpretation of the passages. He explains that Yitzchak was destined to

be acknowledged by the people of the Land as a prince of Hashem. His occupation of the Land as Hashem's prince would establish his presence and rightful title to the Land. Therefore, his descendants would return to a Land that was their legacy from their forefather Yitzchak. However, Yitzchak's title to the Land was dependant upon his treating it as his own. Therefore, he could not abandon it in this time of famine. According to Sforno's interpretation, the commandment to remain in the Land applied to Yitzchak. He was responsible to establish title over the Land. This mission did not apply to Yaakov. Therefore, when circumstances required that he leave the Land, he did so.

And Yitzchak dwelled in Gerar. (Sefer Beresheit 26:6)

3. Yitzchak's conflict with the Pelishtim

Yitzchak remains in the Land of Israel, and following the example of his father, he settles in Gerar. The Torah describes Yitzchak's experiences in Gerar in some detail. Yitzchak arrives and – like Avraham – he conceals that Rivkah is his wife. He is discovered by the king – Avimelech – who commands the people to not harm Yitzchak or Rivkah. Despite the famine, Yitzchak is successful in harvesting a bumper crop, and while in Gerar, becomes increasingly wealthy.

Yitzchak's success is followed by a number of unpleasant events. First, the Pelishtim destroy the wells that Avraham had developed in their land. Then, Avimelech, responding to jealousy evoked by Yitzchak's success, ask Yitzchak to leave Gerar and settle elsewhere.

Yitzchak re-digs the wells developed by Avraham and restores to them the names that had been given to them by his father. He digs additional wells. Ownership of the first two wells is contested by the Pelishtim. The first he names Eysek – meaning quarrel. The second he names Sitnah – meaning conflict or hostility. Yitzchak again relocates. Finally, he develops a new well and it is not contested. The Torah provides additional details of Yitzchak's experiences. The account ends with Avimelech coming to Yitzchak and asking that they renew the covenant originally established between Avraham and the Pelishtim.

(continued on next page)

4. The symbolic meaning of Yitzchak's wells

Nachmanides comments that this account is included in the Torah as an allusion to the future. The three wells developed by Yitzchak refer to the three Batai Mikdash – Holy Temples. The first and second were opposed by the nations of the world and eventually destroyed by the enemies of Bnai Yisrael. The final well represents the future and final Bait HaMikdash – Holy Temple. It will be accepted by all nations as Hashem's sacred temple and will be a place for universal worship of Hashem. Nachmanides' comments and his interpretation of these passages require careful consideration. Is his conclusion that these passages are an allusion to future events based upon a tradition or is there some element within the passages that suggests this interpretation?

And all of the wells that the servants of his father dug during the days of Avraham his father the Pelishtim sealed and filled with dirt. (Sefer Beresheit 26:15)

And Yitzchak again dug the wells of water that they dug in the days of Avraham his father and that the Pelishtim had sealed after the death of Avraham and he called them by names corresponding with the names his father called them. (Sefer Beresheit 26:18)

5. The significance of the names Avraham assigned to his wells

As explained above, one of the conflicts between Yitzchak and the Pelishtim was over the wells that Avraham had developed in their land. The Pelishtim destroyed these wells and Yitzchak not only re-dug them, but he also reestablished the names given to the wells by his father. Why were these wells the source of such vigorous contention?

HaKetav VeHaKabalah offers a compelling response. He explains that Avraham chose the name for each of his wells very carefully. Each was assigned a name that communicated that Hashem is the only true G-d and only He should

be worshiped. In other words, Avraham used each well as an educational tool. People would come to the well to draw its water. They would learn its name. The unusual name would provoke discussion and consideration of the message communicated by the name. During Avraham's lifetime, the Pelishtim preserved the wells and their names. In part, this reflected an acceptance of the ideas communicated by the names and in part, the wells and their names were preserved out of respect to Avraham. With his passing, the Pelishtim reverted to their idolatry and they chose to forget Avraham. The wells, that were reminders of Avraham and his message, were destroyed. Yitzchak reestablished the wells and restored their names. This reflected his commitment to the mission of his father.

6. The strange names that Yitzchak assigned to his wells

It is interesting that Yitzchak was eager to reestablish his father's wells and to restore their names, yet to the first two wells that he developed, he gave rather odd names that do not seem to communicate a message regarding Hashem or monotheism. Instead, these names communicate messages of conflict and strife! Perhaps, it is this odd behavior of Yitzchak that serves as the basis of Nachmanides' comments.

The names that Yitzchak gave to his wells are difficult to understand if considered individually. However, when considered together, these names communicate an important message. Understanding this message requires appreciating the significance of the wells developed by Avraham and Yitzchak. These wells were an important economic resource for Yitzchak and Avraham. However, they were also an enormous contribution to the people of the region. Agriculture, settlement, and animal husbandry all require access to an adequate supply of water. In an arid region, the development of wells is a prerequisite for the settlement and the economic development of the region. Each

well developed by Avraham and Yitzchak benefited all of the people of the area.

The wells are also a fitting representation of the religious message communicated by Avraham and Yitzchak. These ideas elevated humankind from paganism and barbarity and established monotheism and justice. Avraham reinforced the association of the wells with his revolutionary message by assigning each of his wells a name that communicated an important idea.

7. Yitzchak preserved his story through the names he assigned the wells

Taken together, the names that Yitzchak gave to the wells describe Yitzchak's experience among the Pelishtim. The name of the first well reveals, that initially, Yitzchak experienced rejection. He was the scion of Avraham and prosperous in his own right, nonetheless, he was shunned by his neighbors. This well which benefited all of the people in its region was destroyed by those whom it benefited. His continued prosperity and his successful development of a second well did not change matters. As the name of the second well reveals, his neighbors continued to reject him and were eager to forego the benefits of the well rather than accept Yitzchak. Nonetheless, Yitzchak persevered. He did not contend with his neighbors, he merely developed a third well. Suddenly, the neighbors who previously rejected him abandoned their resistance and accepted Yitzchak.

On a superficial level – without any reference of the deeper meaning of the wells – the account teaches an important lesson. Yitzchak did not achieve success and overcome resistance through conquest of his neighbors. He could not claim responsibility for his eventual success. He was powerless to overcome the resistance and hatred of his neighbors, and with the passage of time, this resistance remained intense and showed no sign of abating. However, suddenly

Yitzchak's neighbors concluded that they could no longer deny the evidence that Yitzchak enjoyed a providential relationship with his G-d – Hashem. With this realization, they no longer contended with him and accepted him. The lesson of the experience is that Yitzchak's salvation and even triumph over resistance and antagonism was not the consequence of political maneuvers, military triumph, or shrewd financial plays. He did not achieve acceptance through a gradual, incremental process. Instead, banishment and rejection were suddenly replaced by acceptance and admiration. Without forewarning of change, the people came to accept the reality of Yitzchak's special relationship with Hashem.

The names that Yitzchak selected for his wells demonstrate his confidence in his eventual success. The names he gave to the first two wells recall his conflict and strife with his neighbors. He gave these names to the wells knowing that the tension between him and the Pelishtim would be replaced by acceptance. He wanted the names to recall his emergence from persecution to acceptance and teach a lesson. Hashem's deliverance is sudden and its precise moment is unknown. However, His covenant is eternal and will be fulfilled.

8. The eschatological message of Yitzchak's wells

When the wells are considered as representations of Avraham's and Yitzchak's mission, the message of the passages is even more significant. The passages are no longer merely a biographical account of Yitzchak's experiences. They emerge as an assertion regarding the triumph of truth and justice. The passages describe humanity's encounter with the religious and moral system introduced by Avraham, promoted by Yitzchak, and embodied in the Torah given to Bnai Yisrael. The passages describe a prolong period of self-destructive rejection and denial. The advanced religious ideals and moral principles introduced by the

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ABRAHAM'S Monotheism

Response to WSJ article Nov. 8, 2012

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

In his recent article, *“Enlisting the Biblical Abraham as Peace Broker”* (Opinion, WSJ Nov. 8) Jon D. Levenson concludes, *“...and in each religion he [Abraham] is in relationship with a living God who has called a particular community to his service. Instead of attempting to devise some vague pan-Abrahamic religion that elides the actual differences among the three in the name of a bland universalism at odds with their scriptures, we should be wiser to confront the differences honestly and respectfully. The alternative isn't only too easy. It is also false.”*

Mr. Levenson stands for truth, and correctly suggests peaceful confrontation of the differences between Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Lying about one's views will not achieve the intended peace. Mr. Levenson correctly accepts the unequivocal truth of the Hebrew Bible – the Torah – for he identifies questionable ideas as those not found therein. I will proceed to present as religious truth, only those ideas and principles derived from the Hebrew Bible, which equally demand an honest rejection of all conflicting views.

The most primary truth of Judaism, is that Judaism is about truth, i.e., it is not a system of “belief” as are the world's religions. Judaism is a science, demanding the same level of reason, analysis and proof required in unraveling the mysteries of the universe and in understanding the natural world. Both of God's creations – the Hebrew Bible and the universe – equally reflect His wisdom. As it takes scientists and mathematicians decades of intelligent analysis and reason to understand nature, the study of the Hebrew Bible is no less deep and abstract, and requires that same level of intelligence.

Using intelligence, but more precisely, the Hebrew Bible's unique method of exegesis, I wish to correct Mr. Levenson's suggestion below:

“But the familiar image of Abraham as the discoverer of the true God and the uncompromising opponent of idolatry isn't found in Genesis or anywhere

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else in the Hebrew Bible. It is an idea that originated in Judaism after most of the Hebrew Bible had been composed, and from there it spread into the literature of the Talmudic rabbis...

This is not true; both on a literal reading and using the methods of exegesis. Abraham literally says to Sodom's king, "...I raise my hand to God, the supreme power, owner of heaven and Earth (Gen. 14:22)." Not only did Abraham swear by God in this case, and repeatedly teach of monotheism "calling out in God's name", (12:8, 26:25), but he was known as a monotheist, "And it was at that time that Avimelech and Pichol his military officer said to Abraham, 'God is with you in in all that you do (Gen. 21:22).'" Abraham's reference to God, is the "supreme power", the Creator. This is monotheism: the conviction in a singular cause for the universe Who must therefore be a supreme power. The Hebrew Bible teaches that Abraham enunciated his monotheism, and that he was a famed monotheist.

Using the Hebrew Bible's unique methods of decryption, mastered only after decades of devoted tutelage under Rabbis trained by others back to Moses, we can unlock a message that Mr. Levenson has pointed us towards with his question. That message is that Abraham's beliefs are best portrayed, not in mere statements, but in acts of devotion. God's records of Abraham are primarily about his trials, specifically his sacrifice of Isaac. Mr. Levenson's question makes us realize that God's way of teaching us of Abraham's monotheism, is through his trials. Yes, Abraham swore to Sodom's king, but God records his numerous trials and how he succeeded in them all. For it was Abraham's sincere devotion that we learn his truest convictions. It is the literal read of the Hebrew Bible that leaves much to be desired, and therefore cannot be read literally. However, the Talmudic student is trained and can detect the deeper, intended messages.

What about Abraham's platform of rejecting idolatry...was this not equally as vital as Abraham's publication of

monotheism? Where, then, is this found in the text? Again, a literal read does injustice to the Hebrew Bible.

God's message via omission is that Abraham's purest and most fundamental rejection of idolatry, is his conviction in God's absolute and exclusive role as Creator. There is nothing else. Thus, statements like "Abraham rejected idolatry" would actually fall short of the intended lesson: idolatry is rejected based on the truth that there exists a Single Creator. Thus, the finest means to reject idolatry is to highlight the absolute truth of a Creator. This was Abraham's mandate.

Additionally, Abraham's rejection is also derived from God's selection of Abraham and Isaac throughout the Hebrew Bible. God chose Abraham and Isaac...as they chose Him. In other words, God validates Abraham's monotheism, to the exclusion of all other deities.

Mr. Levenson also wrote,

"...we should be wiser to confront the differences honestly and respectfully."

I agree fully. Revelation at Sinai is the event that sets the tone of Judaism: based on the millions of eyewitnesses, it remains the only event offering proof that God ever revealed Himself. It is clear: God desires mankind to possess proof, not belief, for He granted mankind the intelligence to discern proof from belief, and He also offered proof of His existence and His will for mankind through that Sinaiic event. All other claims of divine revelation lack the masses necessary to eliminate fabrication, or include contradictions, thereby reducing those claims to questions or mere belief – not proof. (See www.Mesora.org/God – Rabbi Israel Chait's seminal essay on Revelation)

Possessing only one proven Revelation, the event of God's gift of the Ten Commandments and the Hebrew Bible at Sinai, let us remain true to His words found therein, which include the prohibition to add or subtract from the Hebrew Bible (Deut. 4:2, 13:1).

Mr. Levenson quotes the apostle Paul who declares in the New Testament, "It is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise." Meaning, Christianity views those following their Gospel, as Abrahams "seed". Unlike Christianity, God said numerous times it is Abraham's physical seed from Isaac who are his true heirs (Gen. 14:4-5, 15:18, 17:7-9, Deut. 10:15 and other verses).

God also rejects Ishmael as Abraham's heir, "Ishmael will have 12 princes and be a mighty nation. But My covenant will be established in Isaac to whom Sarah gave birth (Gen. 17:20,21)..." Also, "God said to Abraham, 'Do not be aggrieved regarding the lad [Ishmael] and your maid [Hagar]; all as Sarah said to you [send them away] you shall perform, for in Isaac will your seed be called' (Gen. 21:12)." Furthermore, Abraham follows God's covenant, "And Abraham gave all he possessed to Isaac. And to the children of Abraham's concubines, Abraham gave gifts and he sent them away from before Isaac his son while he was yet alive eastward towards the land of Kedem (25:5,6)." God says Isaac alone carries on God's covenant of the chosen people.

But God's chosen are not a closed group. A Jew, although the proper seed, can forfeit his place in God's covenant through violating God's word. A Christian, Muslim and gentile can equally share God's covenant, provided His word is upheld without distortion. This is sensible, as God created every human for a reason. And that is for the sole purpose of following Him. He desires all mankind to benefit from His directives. If this truth were shared, God's will would become known to all. Sadly, instead, many Jewish leaders and even Rabbis compromise God's messages, falsely suggesting all religions lead to God. The Jew who hides God's true word preferring social acceptance, violates God. He makes man his false god. And there are many such Jews.

And we must understand that God's selection of the Jew, is not for the Jew, as many arrogant and misguided Jews think. God says otherwise:

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“And you shall watch them and keep them as they [the commands] are your wisdom and understanding in the eyes of the nations, who will hear all these statutes and declare, ‘What a wise and understanding people is this great nation. Because what great nation has God close to them like God, whenever (they) call to Him? And what great nation has statutes and laws as righteous as this entire Torah’ (Deut. 4:6-8)...”

Clearly, God desires the Hebrew Bible find favor in the eyes of ‘all’ nations to recognize His wisdom. This is achieved only when the Jew properly performs the commands, defending Judaism honestly and completely — not lying that other religions are acceptable by God. Don’t we see how concerned Moses was that his gentile father in law recognized God? God Himself selected the Jewish kings from Ruth, the gentile, for human perfection, i.e., following God’s ways, is not a birthright, but something accomplished, and by any human being. Even the Jewish messiah will eventually be a descendant from that gentile, Ruth. World religions are correct in their claim that only one religion is sensible. There is only one human race; it is reasonable that there is only one will God has for all people, for under our skin, we are identical creatures.

God’s Hebrew Bible is truth, He does not play favorites. The Jew should take no credit for an act that was not his doing, I mean being born to Jewish parents. Let the Jew — and any human being — take credit for accomplishments alone. And let all peoples strive to accomplish an honest search for, and fulfillment of God’s word. ■

“Clearly, God desires the Hebrew Bible find favor in the eyes of ‘all’ nations to recognize His wisdom. This is achieved only when the Jew properly performs the commands, defending Judaism honestly and completely — not lying that other religions are acceptable by God.”

Patriarchs and formalized in the Torah were a boon to all humanity. Nonetheless, these teachings – represented by the wells – are despised and discredited. Humanity dwells in a relentless self-imposed darkness. Enlightenment seems impossible. But suddenly and without forewarning, light penetrates the darkness and knowledge and truth triumph over ignorance.

Now, Nachmanides' interpretation of the passages can be fully understood. The lessons represented by the wells are embodied in the Bait HaMikdash. It is the focal point of monotheistic and enlightened service to Hashem. From the Granite Chamber adjacent to the Temple, the highest court of the nation teaches justice and morality. Yitzchak's experiences are a harbinger of the future. The first and second Temples were despised by the nations of the world and they were destroyed by them. Nonetheless, there will be a third Bait HaMikdash. This third Temple will be embraced and acknowledged by the very peoples who destroyed its predecessors.

9. A unique element of the Torah's Eschatological vision The eschatological vision represented by these passages is unique. Many religions and nations long for conquest and power over their enemies or those whose view oppose their own. Many religions seek to impose their ideas upon those who deny their "truth". The Torah's view of the Messianic era differs drastically from these perspectives. Ultimately, it is a vision of the triumph of ideas and the acceptance of the Torah's truths – not their imposition upon others.

The triumph of the ideas embodied in these Temples will not be achieved through Bnai Yisrael's conquest of its opponents or through the imposition of Torah doctrine upon "non-believers". Instead, it will be achieved through the triumph of truth over falsehood and the capacity of the light of wisdom to penetrate the darkness of ignorance.

In short, Yitzchak's experiences are representative of an eschatological perspective. They describe the destiny of his descendants – Bnai Yisrael. Yitzchak experiences presages the rejection, persecution, banishment, and eventual and sudden acceptance and triumph of Bnai Yisrael in the Messianic era. ■

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PART I

Reading the Parsha each week, at times we gloss over “simple” information, assuming nothing more is intended below the surface. But this cannot be the case. Maimonides teaches, “There is a good reason for every passage; the object of which we cannot see. We must always apply the words of our Sages: ‘It is not a vain thing for you’ (Deut. xxxii. 47), and if it seems vain, it seems your fault.” (The Guide, Book III, Chap. L) With this in mind, let’s recap the story of Toldos and then isolate the questions.

Rivkah experienced a troubling pregnancy: the children were moving violently within her. Ibn Ezra says that Rivkah first asked other women if her pregnancy was the norm. When the women told her that her pregnancy was abnormal, she sought counsel from God via a Prophet (either Abraham or Shem, Noah’s son). Rivkah was aware of God’s Providence; initiated with Abraham, sustained unto Isaac and herself. The nation of the Jews was to be established through her. This pregnancy was unnatural and must be due to God’s will.

Rivkah then sought out a Prophet and learned from him that she will give birth to twins (two nations) and that the “greater son will be subservient to the younger.” This was the primary message. When she finally gave birth, Esav exited first and the Torah describes him as red and covered with hair. Jacob then exited – his hand seizing Esav’s heel. The Torah then says that Esav became a hunter while Jacob dwelled in tents. Isaac loved Esav, for he captured food for Isaac, while Rivkah loved Jacob. The Torah reveals an imbalance.

We then learn of the sale of the birthright. Jacob’s alacrity in requesting the birthright in exchange for the lentils appears premeditated. Later, Rivkah “somehow” hears Isaac preparing to give the blessings to Esav. Rivkah dresses Jacob in goat skins and in Esav’s garments to deceive the senses of the now blind Isaac, into thinking Jacob is Esav. The ruse works, and “oddly”, not a split second after Jacob leaves Isaac’s presence, Esav enters

requesting the blessings. This alarms Isaac greatly, as he realized through a successful blessing of Jacob that he must have been wrong about Esav. The blessings success indicated Divine Providence. Now our questions:

1) What was God’s intent that Rivkah experience an unnatural, tormenting pregnancy?

2) Why was Rivkah’s response to inquire about God’s Providence from a Prophet, and why did she inquire of the Prophets Abraham or Shem, but not of her own husband Isaac?

3) Of what significance is Esav’s hairy nature?

4) Why are we told that Jacob seized Esav’s heel at birth?

5) Of what significance is it that “Rivkah loved Jacob, while Isaac loved Esav?”

6) How was Jacob “instantly” prepared to purchase the birthright from Esav when Esav asked for the lentils?

7) Why did Rivkah and Jacob agree they must deceive Isaac to obtain the blessings: why not ask Isaac openly?

8) Why was Isaac shocked when Esav came before him to receive the blessings?

9) Why must we know of the split-second timing of Jacob leaving Isaac, and Esav entering?

It is clear, God intended Rivkah to obtain information vital to the establishment of the Jewish people. Her difficult pregnancy was intended to direct her to one who would inform her of God’s intentions. With that new information obtained via the Prophet – “the older would serve the younger” – Rivkah now cherished Jacob over Esav, as she learned through that prophecy that a matter of “nations” depends on the younger Jacob. (She was told that two nations would issue from her.) The prophecy taught her that she was to be instrumental in securing the younger son’s success as a means of establishing the nation of Israel. She also deduced that Isaac was not given this Prophetic information, for good reason.

The Patriarchs and Matriarchs did not function in accord with simplistic favoritism as we do today. We must not

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TOLDOS

a Study of
GOD’S
PROVIDENCE

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

err and project our emotions onto them. Thus, when the Torah teaches that “Isaac loved Esav while Rivkah loved Jacob,” it must teach an important lesson. It appears this lesson is that Isaac was not as well informed as was Rivkah about the nature of their two sons. Thus, the Torah saw fit to teach us the imbalance of their divergent love, so we might appreciate how God orchestrated His Providence. As Isaac was misled by Esav’s “capturing his father with his mouth” (Gen. 25:28), Isaac loved him more. Isaac was deluded by Esav’s ostensible good nature. Esav disguised himself as upright with inquiries of proper conduct from Isaac (capturing him) to earn Isaac’s favor. In truth, Esav was evil. In contrast, the Torah teaches that Jacob was a “dweller of tents” (ibid 25:27): he was complete in his perfection and delved into the study of God.

Jacob’s proper lifestyle did not present the charade offered by Esav’s veneer. Esav presented himself in the manner he knew his father would cherish. He “captured his father with his mouth.” Thus, the Torah thereby informs us of the need for God’s Providence to work through Rivkah who was more aware of her son’s diverse natures. From the very outset of the lives of Esav and Jacob, Rivkah was taught that the younger Jacob was to rule his older brother and that Jacob was to receive the blessings. This was also substantiated through Jacob’s clutching of Esav’s heel. This strange phenomenon taught Rivkah that Jacob – right out of the womb – was one who could confront and usurp his twin. Later on, Rivkah relied on this crucial knowledge in her plan to deceive Isaac. (Alternatively, Isaac knew Jacob was upright, but his “love” for Esav was meant to cater to Esav’s paternal need, something Jacob did not require.)

It was also vital that Rivkah receive the Prophet’s communication ‘before’ giving birth. Now that she understood the younger was to be favored, she could interpret that act of Jacob clutching Esav’s heel as a Divine message. God was showing Rivkah the means He implanted into Jacob’s nature to ensure her success. God also created Esav with a hairy exterior which would also play a vital role in Rivkah’s plan.

The Torah tells us how Esav arrives home exhausted. The Rabbis teach that he had murdered, committed adultery and idolatry. He did so, for on that day, Abraham had died. A wise Rabbi taught that Esav – a man seeking an Earthly, hedonistic existence alone – was frustrated that his grandfather Abraham would actually perish from this Earth. Esav’s immortality fantasy was abruptly shattered. He no longer clung to the role model displayed by Abraham: “For what is it worth, if it ends?” Esav felt. He therefore went astray from Abraham’s values and committed these grave acts. Esav, exhausted, requested the lentils Jacob had cooked. Jacob ‘instantly’ countered with an offer to purchase the birthright from Esav, in exchange for the lentils. Thus, Jacob’s purchase was premeditated. He had already planned to obtain the birthright prior to this event!

We might explain that Jacob’s readiness to obtain the birthright was due to Rivkah’s informing him of her knowledge obtained via that earlier prophecy. Rivkah most probably explained to Jacob what she learned, that the younger – Jacob – was to rule over the older. This is supported by Jacob’s readiness to purchase the birthright.

Later, Rivkah ‘somehow’ overhears that Isaac was about to give the birthright blessings to Esav. This too is mentioned to teach of God’s intervention, that she hear these words. She then urges Jacob to deceive his father and to disguise himself as Esav in front of his blind father. The point here is that Rivkah is not first informing Jacob “that” he must obtain the birthright, but rather, “how” he can accomplish this. Thus, we find proof that Jacob already knew he was to obtain the birthright blessings. This is why he purchased them from Esav at the outset, for Rivkah must have instructed him to do so. Otherwise, without a proper purchase, what right would he have to take them later? Without Rivkah informing Jacob that he should have the blessings, why would Jacob even think to purchase them? It must be as we suggest, that Rivkah learned through prophecy that Jacob – the younger – must obtain the blessings.

Therefore, Jacob was prepared at all times for the right moment to purchase them. Then he must act to obtain them even through deceit. For a lie is not absolutely prohibited by God. As we see God told Samuel (Sam. I; 16:2) to make believe he was offering a sacrifice, although he was really en route to anoint Jesse’s son in Saul’s place. Samuel feared that Saul would learn of this and would kill Samuel for attempting to replace him with a new king. Thus, God instructed Samuel in a deception. Jacob too did not argue with Rivkah about this deceit. He was only concerned that his father should not curse him, but he had no concern about the deceit itself as a sin to God. Jacob knew a lie was necessary at this time. And Rivkah as well as many others lied for just reasons. Ibn Ezra teaches there is no harm in lying if it is for a proper motive. (Gen. 27:13)

In summary, Rivkah required Divine instruction due to the imbalance between Esav and Jacob, and between her and Isaac. She would have to act with cunning and deceit to bring about the nation of Israel. God orchestrated her abnormal pregnancy precisely to educate her: the issuing nations of Jacob and Esav and how they must be guided through her. Compelled to inquire from a Prophet, Rivkah became equipped with the Divine knowledge, vital to ensure that the blessings are bestowed upon the proper recipient.

There was a need for Rivkah to learn of the different natures of her two sons. She learned through prophecy that Jacob would be the superior. But she also learned through seeing his hand clutching Esav’s heel, one more essential lesson. Through this act, Rivkah learned that Jacob possessed the natural tendency to usurp Esav. It was only through this knowledge gained by seeing his hand grabbing his brother’s heel that Rivkah thereby learned that she must harness his nature to ensure that the prophecy comes to be. Had she merely received knowledge that Jacob was to be superior, this knowledge alone would not compel her to act through Jacob. Rather, she witnessed Jacob grabbing his brother’s heel. She understood she saw this for a reason: their competitive display was a necessary indication to her that her two sons

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each have different natures by divine intent. Rivkah understood both she, and her son's natures would play vital roles. Working with their natures, Rivkah must ensure Jacob overturns Esav in "status" at the right time.

Rivkah teaches the young Jacob this prophecy so he is ever-prepared from that point to purchase the birthright when the moment presents itself. Rivkah and Jacob strategize a plan that succeeds, but again, only through God's Providence. For we see that "no sooner that Jacob left, did Esav return." This is to teach that God controlled the timing to the second, ensuring Rivkah and Jacob's success (Gen. 27:30). And finally, Isaac too attests to Jacob's rightful receipt of the blessings, as he tells Esav, "and he is surely blessed (ibid 27:33)." For Isaac realized that since he was able to utter the blessings, it must have been God's will that Jacob receive them.

Isaac's sudden shock (ibid 27:33) also explains why Rivkah did not inquire from her husband about her abnormal pregnancy, but only from Abraham or Shem. For she understood that Isaac would reject the idea of Esav's unfit character. That is why Jacob too could not openly ask for the blessings, even though he rightfully purchased them. Until Isaac successfully uttered the blessings, he would not accept Esav as unfit. Rivkah therefore avoided approaching Isaac with her concerns regarding her pregnancy, and when securing the blessings for Jacob. Isaac again confirms to Esav that Jacob was correct in taking the blessings, as Isaac says to Esav, "your brother came with wisdom and took your blessings." Why does Isaac say "with wisdom?" Perhaps to teach Esav that Jacob was correct. The obvious questions and clues to their answers are the true "codes of the Torah." This is God's method of directing us to unlock the Torah's mysteries, imbuing us with an ever-growing appreciation for His wisdom; thus, developing our minds and souls by understanding the perfection of our Matriarchs and Patriarchs.

Could it be that God prepared Rivkah to be Lavan's sister, so she might learn of his cunning, as a preparation of this necessary deceit of Isaac? And could it be that Rivkah's training of Jacob to use

deceit helped to prepare Jacob to deal with Lavan for those 20 years when Lavan tried again and again to deceive Jacob? If so, it ends up that Lavan's cunning came back to haunt him. For he displayed to Rivkah in his childhood home a deceitful nature. Thereby, Rivkah learned to be cunning herself and achieved a good outcome regarding the blessings. Through Rivkah's deceit, Jacob learned how to deal with Lavan. Lavan's cunning came full circle and ended up ruining him.

PART II

Having shared these ideas with a friend, he asked a fine question:

I understand that 'after' Rivkah witnessed Isaac favoring Esav, Rivkah had grounds to omit Isaac from her prophecy and her plans. But before she even had the prophecy, prior to giving birth...she avoided asking Isaac for an explanation of her abnormal

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pregnancy! She asked either Shem or Abraham. How can you explain this avoidance of Isaac 'before' Isaac ever expressed any favoritism towards Esav?

I recognized the problem and immediately went back to the verses. Reading from the very beginning of the Parasha, I was bothered by the first two verses:

And these are the generations of Isaac son of Abraham; Abraham bore Isaac. And it was when Isaac was forty that he took Rivkah the daughter of Betuel the Arami from Padan Aram, the sister of Lavan the Arami, for a wife.

Think about this: the first verse already says "Isaac son of Abraham." Why then does it repeat "Abraham bore Isaac?" And in verse 2, if we are already told that Betuel – Lavan's father – was an "Arami," why are we told again that Lavan was also an "Arami?" If Lavan's father was an Arami, then we know Lavan his son is also an Arami!

There are no redundancies in God's Torah. I thought about the first question. I realized "Abraham bore Isaac" must indicate something new. The word "bore" is also a difficulty, since men cannot "bear" children, implying pregnancy. This must mean something akin to "bearing."

Abraham sought a wife for Isaac. We thereby learn that Isaac was incapable of selecting one for himself. We may suggest, "Abraham bore Isaac" means that Abraham "raised" Isaac. In other words, Isaac – more than any other, was in need of paternal dedication and guidance. He was not as others, who approached marriage independently. His self-sacrifice on the altar had a profound affect on his nature. He was not even allowed to leave the land, as God told him to remain in Gerar and not descend to Egypt. Therefore, this first verse emphasizes Isaac's dependence upon Abraham.

The second verse contains a redundancy as well. We know Betuel is an Arami, so it is unnecessary to teach that his son Lavan was also an Arami...if that means a nationality. Or Hachaim teaches that Arami in fact is not indicating a nationality, but a character trait. Switching two letters (in Hebrew)

"Arami" becomes "Ramai," meaning a swindler; a liar. In this verse, we are being taught that Isaac married a woman whose father and brother were liars. So even though we are taught that Betuel is a liar (arami), we must also be taught that Lavan too chose this lifestyle, as it is not inherited, as seen from Rivkah's upright stature. Now the questions.

Why must we learn of Isaac's dependency on Abraham? Why must we learn that Rivkah's father and brother were liars? I feel these two verses answer my friend's question.

We are taught that Rivkah – one who observed the cunning personalities in her father and brother – was able to detect Isaac's shortcomings in terms of interpersonal issues. This prompted Rivkah to avoid approaching her husband Isaac with matters of her strange pregnancy. The Torah cleverly hints the two reason why Rivkah avoided Isaac: he was not fit, and she was cunning enough to know this from experiencing shrewd human nature in her home. We now understand why she went to Abraham or Shem, not Isaac, when she needed to understand the nature of her pregnancy and how it could affect the establishment of B'nei Yisrael.

These two verses appear at the very start of our Parasha, as they explain the succeeding verses, and Rivkah's actions. No question in Torah is without an answer. This time, we were fortunate enough to discover it. It is amazing how subtle redundancies can shed light. Again, one of the true codes of Torah.

God's Providence

Esav was born red and unnaturally covered with hair, conveying Divine intent. The only other mention of Esav's exterior is the means which Jacob used to deceive his father, thus tricking Isaac into believing he was Esav. This teaches that God's Providence was at play in the birth of these twins. God ensured that a means existed through which the blessings would be successfully transmitted to Jacob.

First, God provides the impetus (a

troubling pregnancy) to direct the righteous towards obtaining greater knowledge. He gave Rivkah Prophetic insight into the future of the Jewish nation that would emanate from Jacob. It is clear from this example that God wishes men and women to engage their intellect. We are not to sit back while God runs the world. The opposite is true: God desires that the path and progress of mankind, be directed by mankind. We are to use all in our power to achieve the best outcome for ourselves and all others. God says this in Genesis 1:28, "Fill the Earth and conquer it." But since man cannot know all variables or control even a few of them, God assists man when necessary. God therefore imparted to Rivkah His plan, and the necessary tools with which to attain success. These "tools" include Rivkah's own cunning personality adopted from her brother and father, Esav's hairy nature, Jacob's personality, which was capable of usurping Esav, and Rivkah's hearing both Isaac's wish to bless Esav, and Esav's wish to kill Jacob. Besides acting on God's clues, Rivkah devised her own methods, such as dressing Jacob in Esav's clothing in anticipation of Isaac smelling the fragrance of the field, and thereby assuming this was Esav before him.

Why were the blessings necessary at all? God can certainly achieve His plan without man! I believe Isaac's blessings were required as a means of silencing those descendants of Esav who would claim rights to his legacy, rejecting Jacob. Talmud Sanhedrin 91a teaches how Ben Pasisa responded to Alexander when the Ishmaelites sought claim of Abraham's legacy. Ben Pasisa responded, "If a father sends away all his sons and gives them gifts while yet alive, do these sons have any future claim on the father's legacy?" (Referring to Abraham's casting of all sons except Isaac, Gen. 25) This silenced the Ishmaelites. And I believe Isaac's words too were necessary – not as causative of blessings, but as his exclusive selection of Jacob. Future generations of Esav can no longer justly claim Abraham's legacy through Isaac, now that Isaac declared Jacob his sole inheritor through these blessings. ■



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TOLDOT

Rivka, Isaac, Esav & Jacob

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RABBI REUVEN MANN

IN this week's Parsha, Toledot, we read about the birth of twins, Yaakov and Eisav to the second matriarch, Rivka. Although they shared the same womb the boys were hardly identical. In fact, they could not have been more different. It is obvious that the Torah does not believe that biology or heredity is destiny. In fact, "Yichus" (pedigree) is not as compelling as it is cracked up to be. The Torah attests to the diverse natures of the two brothers. Eisav, we are told, was a proficient hunter and a man of the field. Yaakov, however, was a pure person who "dwelled in tents." At first glance the information that he lived in tents does not seem to convey anything about his character. Rashi, picking up on the reference to tents says, "the tent of Shem and the tent of Ever." Thus, according to Rashi, the tents are halls of learning, what we would call, Yeshivot. Yaakov was not engaged in materialistic pursuits, but devoted all of his energy

to studying with the most exalted teachers of the time. What was the attitude of the parents to their very different children? The answer comes as a surprise. Yitzchak, we are told, loved Eisav because "the hunt was in his mouth," and Rivka loved Yaakov.

A number of questions arise. Are we to infer that Yitzchak only loved Eisav but not Yaakov? That would seem very strange given his dedication to spiritual perfection and love of learning. It should also be noted that the Torah provides the reason for Yitzchak's love of Eisav but merely tells us that Rivka loved Yaakov without providing any explanation for her preference. The Torah is also strangely reticent about her attitude toward Eisav. How are we to understand this vital matter?

There is no question in my mind that Yitzchak loved Yaakov. Although the Torah does not say this explicitly it can be inferred from the fact that Yaakov was a "dweller of tents." Yitzchak had been raised by Avraham and valued nothing more than learning and good

deeds. It is not necessary to mention that he loved his younger son who dedicated his life to Torah study. In fact, he later appointed him to be the heir of the spiritual heritage of Avraham and the next leader of the religious movement he had founded. The Torah, however, needs to tell us what his attitude was toward Eisav, who did not stay in Yeshiva but was a mighty hunter who aimed for success in materialistic pursuits. It therefore informs us that, indeed, Yitzchak did love him and the reason is because "the hunt was in his mouth." On the simple level this means that he took great care of his father and served him the best meals. On a deeper level it implies that, as the Rabbis say, Eisav was extremely meticulous in performing the mitzvah of "kibbud Av" (Honoring one's father). In addition he demonstrated great concern for performing all mitzvot associated with his profession such as giving proper tithes. He created the impression that while his energies were directed to the physical world he did so for worthy spiritual purposes. Judaism believes that developing the world through agriculture and other necessary professions is a great mitzvah, as long as one is doing it for moral goals.

Yitzchak was convinced that Eisav desired to serve Hashem through the proper use of his talents as a hunter and farmer and that is why he loved him as well as he loved Yaakov. Rivka, however, only loved Yaakov. She did not have the same feeling for Eisav. Perhaps she was more skeptical especially as she had come from a family of people who knew how to practice the arts of deception. She adhered to the philosophy of, "Respect him and suspect him." On this matter her instincts proved to be correct and Yitzchak suffered extreme disappointment when the true character of Eisav became apparent.

Parents need to love their children but must be honest and able to acknowledge their true character and flaws, for only then can they be a positive force in their lives. May we attain this level of wisdom and honesty.

Shabbat Shalom. ■

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