

Understand the Rabbis

In this issue, we address the misconception that we may have less respect for the Rabbis than for the Torah. True, the Rabbis are human. However, by referring to their mutually exclusive positions as grounds for dismissing their wisdom, one forfeits their great knowledge, which G-d desired they transmit. Studying the Rabbi's words, we do not seek G-d's absolute knowledge, but the Rabbi's great theories, be they ultimately wrong or right.

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The Blessings of Isaac

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Transcribed by Students

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 the promptness of the mission was facilitated by G-d. Rashi on this verse 21 states that "Issac thought in his heart, it is not the custom of Esau that the name of G-d 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 G-d'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

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Toldot

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"And Esav said to Yaakov, "Let me swallow some of this red food for I am tired." Therefore, his name is Edom". (Beresheit 25:30)

Esav returns from the field exhausted. Yaakov is preparing a lentil porridge. Esav asks Yaakov to give him the porridge. Yaakov offers to exchange the porridge for Esav's rights as firstborn. Esav

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The Blessings of Isaac

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Transcribed by Students

blessing for the material benefits of this world, which is not the ultimate good. However, Issac 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 G-d 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 G-d 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.

Issac 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, Issac 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 G-d. However, because of Esau's nature, Issac 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, that 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. Issac's miscalculation of Esau's true character resulted because of Issac's nature. Issac was the consummate TZADDIK. He was unable to leave Israel because of said status. Abraham was compelled to send Eliezer to choose Issac a wife because Issac was incapable of judging an individual's true character. As the purely righteous individual, Issac 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 G-d'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, Issac 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 he had always intended to give Jacob and would still do so. However, Esau persisted and Issac relented and blessed Esau. The blessing of Esau was not a true blessing. It was a conditional blessing. In verse 40 Issac 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 Issac 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 Issac as their ramifications have been manifested throughout the experiences of our nation. □

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The Personality of Esav

RABBI ISRAEL CHAI

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Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife who was barren. G-d 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 struggle within her. When she passed the Beth Midrash Jacob sought to get out. Upon passing a place of idol worship Esau wanted to go forth. G-d thereby informed Rebecca that the children she was carrying would be the forebearers 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 to the conquest of the internal world. The two children were not ordinary people but possessed excessive energies and abundant talent and the 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 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 and make progress in two worlds; the world of the intellectual or the world of the physical. 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. In the book of Genesis beginning at Chapter 25, verse 29 and though 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 that 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 despoiled 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. 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, because he was a truly righteous individual, the image of immortality. 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 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 because 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, 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 maaseh avera.. 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. 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 Bore Olam, Creator. ■



Isaac - Oleh Temima

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Transcribed by Students

What is the idea of Isaac not being able to leave Eretz Yisroel because he's an "Oleh Temima", an "unblemished sacrifice"?

I discussed this with Rabbi Mann, who said that Isaac was a different type of personality. He was not an Avraham or Yaakov, who was to concentrate his life on interacting with the world. Isaac's wife initiated dealings with Esav, (she suggested the goat skins to fool Isaac). Isaac's father sought for him a wife. These are two examples of Isaac's removal from world dealings. Remaining in Israel also represents that which would not befit him. "Oleh Temima" means something devoted exclusively and wholly to God. Unlike a sacrifice that is eaten, an "Oleh" is not. It is wholly consumed by flames. Isaac was wholly devoted to God.

I added, perhaps the story in Rashi, that the angels' tears caused Isaac's blindness, means that this act of his self sacrifice perfected him so far (angels alluding to perfection) that he was removed from this world in some manner. One who is blind is removed from this physical life in a very primary way. The Torah says that one who is blind is considered as though he is dead. This means that he is removed from life to a great degree, i.e., removed from physical existence - a mark of perfection.

The event of the Akeida was a trial not only for Avraham, but for Isaac as well. He sacrificed his own life. This must have had a profound effect on him as the medrash that Rashi brings implies. What was that effect? Perhaps living a life subsequent to near death at God's word, elevates one's attachment to God in an irrevocable manner.

Isaac would always be that devoted. The Akeida was not an 'event' of sacrifice, but he now lived a permanent state of sacrifice. He didn't do an isolated 'act' of Oleh Temima, but he remained in that state his entire life.

There is more to be developed on this point.

Reader's Comments: I had an idea this Shabbos that Yitzchak's staying in Israel, actually defined Israel.

Oleh Temima means that one is devoted completely to Hashem, i.e., that all of Yitzchak's energy was directed to Hashem (a result of the Akeida experience). And chutz l'aretz (outside Israel) is not fitting for him. Israel is the land designated for the Jewish people. It is designated for the purpose of a society that is wholly devoted to Hashem.

At the time Yitzchak is there, though, the land is not defined that way (except insofar as its designation for the future). Yitzchak is told to stay in the land because (26:3) Hashem will be giving to him and his children this land. His staying there will establish it for the future. (After all, Hashem planned to give this same land to Avraham and his children, yet Avraham was not bound to stay in the land). Yitzchak's staying in the land has a unique establishment (that even Avraham's staying there would not establish). This is because of his nature as the Oleh Temima. All of his energy is devoted to Hashem. Staying in the land makes a statement about the nature of the land. It is appropriate that the one who best illustrates complete devotion to Hashem remain in the land and that is designated for complete devotion to Hashem. ■

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Parashas Toldot

RABBI BERNARD FOX

agrees and the birthright is transferred to Yaakov.

The Sages discuss the reason Yaakov was preparing a porridge of lentils. Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra draws an important conclusion from this aspect of the incident. He argues that Yitzchak was not wealthy. His household was forced to sustain itself with humble foods.[1]

Rabbaynu Avraham ben HaRambam disagrees with Ibn Ezra. He argues that Yaakov's preparation of this porridge does not indicate poverty. Yaakov was a tzadik. He had little interest in delicacies. He was content with simple foods and avoided foods, which might awaken greater appetite.[2]

It is difficult to understand this dispute. What compelled each authority to assume his respective position? This dispute appears to be the result of a more basic argument. Yaakov purchased Esav's birthright. What, precisely, was this right? Ibn Ezra maintains that the first born traditionally inherited a larger portion of the property of the father. This explains Ibn Ezra's assertion that Yaakov was impoverished. Esav observed that his father was not wealthy. He calculated that even a double portion of a poor man's property was worth little. Therefore, he was willing to abandon his rights as first born.[3] From this perspective Yitzchak's poverty was fortuitous. It is an essential element of the incident. It encouraged Esav to sell the birthright to Yaakov. The poverty

might even have been providential.

Rabbaynu Avraham ben HaRambam explains the birthright differently. He explains that traditionally the first born assumed the role of kohen or priest. Esav had no interest in devoting himself to the service of Hashem. This birthright had no value to Esav.[4] Therefore, he sold it to Yaakov. This interpretation results in Rabbaynu Avraham ben HaRambam's position regarding Yitzchak's wealth. From this perspective, poverty or wealth did not play a role in Esav's decision. There is little reason to assume that Yitzchak was impoverished.

This dispute is expressed in one addition area. The last pasuk states that Esav "sold the birthright".[5] The term used for sold is vayevez. This is an unusual and ambiguous term. It is interpreted by many authorities to mean "and he sold". However, Rashi offers another interpretation. He posits that the term means "and he rejected".[6] Why does Rashi adopt this interpretation?

Ibn Ezra understands the birthright as the privilege to inherit a larger portion of the father's property. If this is the nature of this right, its sell cannot be viewed as immoral. It is a straightforward business calculation. Ibn Ezra interprets vayevez to mean "and he sold". This translation does not involve any moral judgement of Esav's decision.

However, Rashi agrees with Rabbaynu Avraham ben HaRambam. He explains that the firstborn was destined to be a

kohen.[7] The abandonment of this right is a moral decision. It is a rejection or belittlement of a spiritual opportunity. Therefore, Rashi interprets vayevez to mean rejection. This implies a moral judgement of Esav's action.

"This is because Avraham obeyed My voice. And he observed My commandments, decrees and laws." (Beresheit 26:5)

As explained above, Hashem admonished Yitzchak to remain in Gerrar. He forbade Yitzchak from traveling to Egypt. Then the Almighty assured Yitzchak that He would be with him. He told Yitzchak that He would make his descendents into a great nation. They would take possession of the land of Canaan. Finally, Hashem told Yitzchak that He would do these things because of the righteousness of Avraham.

Gershonides makes an important observation. It is clear from our passage that the extraordinary degree of providence experienced by Yitzchak was a consequence of the Almighty's relationship with Avraham. Yitzchak is one of the forefathers. He was a great tzadik – a righteous person. Nonetheless, at this juncture, he had not achieved the spiritual perfection of his father. Therefore, his providential relationship with the Almighty was not solely predicated upon his own achievements. It was a consequence of the righteousness of Avraham.[8]

Now, we can answer our

questions. Could not the Almighty have made Yitzchak wealthy in Egypt? Why was it necessary for Yitzchak to remain in Gerrar in order to benefit from Hashem's providence? The answer is that the Almighty is omnipotent. Of course, He could have brought about Yitzchak's financial success even in Egypt. However, this would have required great miracles. A higher level of providence would have been required. Yitzchak had not achieved the level of spiritual perfection needed to experience this elevated level of providence. The Divine influence rested upon him as a result of Avraham's righteousness. Avraham's righteousness was adequate to assure Yitzchak's prosperity in Gerrar. In Gerrar, less providential intervention was required. A higher level of providence was required to achieve success in Egypt. Yitzchak had not reached the spiritual perfection requisite for this degree of providence.

This also explains Yitzchak's initial suffering at the hands of the Pelishtim. The Almighty's providence over Yitzchak produced his success. However, his relationship with the Almighty was not great enough to protect him from the natural jealousy and hatred of the Pelishtim. Ultimately, this hatred was overcome. The Pelishtim made peace with Yitzchak. Avimelech, himself, appealed to Yitzchak to enter into a treaty. However, this required Yitzchak's perseverance through the initial persecutions.

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Parashas Toldot

(continued from page 5)

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"Nations will serve you, and governments will bow to you. You will be a master over your brother, and the brothers of your mother will bow to you. Those that curse you will be cursed, and those that bless you will be blessed." (Beresheit 27:29)

When Yitzchak gave this blessing to Yaakov, he believed he was blessing his older son, Esav. Yitzchak did not recognize the depth of Esav's evil. Yet, he could not have failed to detect the uncommon righteousness of Yaakov. Why would Yitzchak bless Esav with sovereignty over Yaakov? Yitzchak must have recognized that Yaakov was the more righteous of his two sons.

Sforno explains that Yitzchak believed that Esav's domination would be a blessing for both children and their descendants. Yitzchak perceived Esav as materialistic, but good-hearted. His benevolent governance over Yaakov would free his younger brother, and his descendants, from toil in the mundane. Esav would be responsible for ensuring that Yaakov could pursue wisdom and truth, unencumbered by this burden.[9]

"And Esav saw that the daughters of Canaan were displeasing in the eyes of Yitzchak, his father. And Esav went to Yishmael and he took Machalat, the daughter of Yishmael, the son of Avraham, the sister of N'vayot, in addition to his wives, to be to him a wife." (Beresheit 28:8-9)

These pesukim explain that Esav recognized that Yitzchak did not

approve of his wives because of their heathen practices. In order to win his father's approval, Esav married Machalat, the daughter of Yishmael, and the granddaughter of Avraham.

These pesukim provide an important insight into the psychology of the rasha – the wicked person. This misguided individual will often pursue objectives that are overtly evil. Lack of knowledge and spiritual perfection cloud such an individual's vision of morality. However, the greater tragedy is that this misguided individual, even when in pursuit of a worthy objective, often fails. The base instincts exert control over the rasha and subvert the individual's efforts to pursue a moral objective.

Esav recognized that his wives were evil. They were a source of torment to his father, Yitzchak. If Esav had been able to evaluate this dilemma objectively, he would have separated himself from these wives. Like his brother, Yaakov, he would have sought a wife from the Padan Aram. The people of that community demonstrated a higher level of moral behavior. Yet Esav, despite his determination to please his father, could not take either of these steps. Rather than eliminating his unacceptable wives, he attempted to compensate by seeking a more appropriate partner. However, he could not follow the example of Yaakov and turn to the community of Padan Aram. Instead, he married Machalat. Machalat had pedigree, but she lacked true quality. Esav could simply not imagine identifying and forming a relationship with a woman of true moral character. □

[1] Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 25:32.

[2] Rabbaynu Avraham ben HaRambam, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 25:29.

[3] Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 25:32.

[4] Rabbaynu Avraham ben HaRambam, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 25:31.

[5] Sefer Beresheit 25:34.

[6] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 25:34.

[7] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 25:32.

[8] Gershonides, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, Page 168.

[9] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 27:29.

Letters

Reader: I just purchased a copy of the Tanach because I want to walk in the ways of Hashem. On your site you have very convincingly placed much emphasis on logic as opposed to blind faith, but it seems that you are having the same "blind faith" in what the Sage's say. This seems to be more confusing (to me) when whole sections are based on what they said, as if what they said is what happened without dispute. I read in the Stone's Edition that the Sage's said that the day Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of pottage was the day they were all mourning for Abraham's death, and that this even more emphasized the where Esau was, because instead of mourning he was going about life as normal. Although this makes sense, from where did they get this information? I do not doubt that they are VASTLY more knowledgeable than I - but if I blindly accept what they are saying, is that not just as much walking by faith? Thanks in advance for your thoughts.

Mesora: One must never blindly accept anything. This is of no benefit. In such a case, the mind is absent.

You are right, in that the Torah records absolutely true events. On the other hand, the Rabbis, although with no exact source in Torah, at times suggest events based on their study of the text. The Rabbis may transmit events which have been passed down, or derive their accounts from the text. In either case, if the Rabbis suggest an idea, it should be studied for the sake of arriving at their underlying opinions, as this study "of the Rabbis' words" is a study of valid ideas. If two Rabbis argue regarding an event, they cannot both be correct in an absolute sense, however, they both have ideas from which we may learn. For example, the "os" or sign given to Cain by G-d is disputed. One Rabbi suggests this sign was a dog. Another disagrees. They cannot both be correct as to this historical fact. However, they both have an idea from which we may derive an accurate idea.

Our study of the Rabbis is not a study of "absolutely, true events", where we discount the one whose opinion we disagree. No. In the study of the Rabbis' words, our goal must be to arrive at each one's "theory", as this affords insight into valid ideas. □

Reader: Why was Jacob allowed to lie to his father? Isn't lying against the Torah?

Mesora: The "truth" is that Jacob deserved Isaac's blessing, and Rivka knew

this. She was intent on upholding the truth, and she also knew that if she didn't act, even with deception, that the blessing would never be Jacob's - it was now or never.

A Rabbi once taught, a "lie" is not inherently evil, if it is not about an important matter. That is, if I lie about what flavor ice cream I like, it is inconsequential in terms of absolute knowledge about the life G-d wishes for man. A lie is evil when it forfeits the truth about life. Here, the lie perpetrated by Rivka was inconsequential, and in fact, she intended on upholding an important truth, i.e., who would be the leader of the nation.

Reader: Thanks for sharing with me your perspective on the "Truth" that Jacob upheld, as promoted by his mother. However, I still don't understand why it had to happen in a seemingly "tricky" way, as opposed to something more straightforward.

Mesora: Regarding Rivka and the "truth", it appears she had no other option than to deceive Isaac, and secure the blessing which was rightfully Jacob's. Had she told Isaac that in fact, Esav was not deserving - as he was a wicked person - Isaac may not have believed it, or it may have had catastrophic results. Imagine a father, who all his life felt his son was perfected, only to hear that he was a murderer, a rapist, and an idolater.

Rivka, with her high level of wisdom, devised the only plan she felt would succeed, which did not oppose Torah principles, as we see, G-d did not rebuke her. Additionally, the verses state that as soon as Jacob secured the blessing, no sooner did he leave his father's presence, that Esav entered. I feel this indicates that G-d worked with His providence to assure all went as Rivka intended, and that G-d prevented Esav from arriving while Jacob was deceiving Isaac. Had Esav seen Jacob in front of his father, he might have killed him for stealing the blessings, even though Esav sold them earlier.

Truth is at the focus of a Torah life - how else may we arrive at what is real? However, truth, at times, must be compromised, if we are to uphold life, and "absolute truths". Rivka demonstrated that for the success of the absolute truths, i.e., Torah ideals, other areas of fact may be compromised. Similarly, one may lie to save his life. This in no way distorts one's goal of striving for Torah truth. I fact, it preserves absolute truths. □

The Difference Between Isaac's and Rivka's Prayers

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Rashi's comments on Genesis 25:21 where both Isaac and his wife Rebecca prayed for children. Rashi notes the word selected by God's response, "And He was appeased towards HIM." (God answered Isaac but not Rebecca.) Rashi derives a principle, "There is no comparison between the prayer of the righteous descendant of one righteous (Isaac son of Abraham), and the righteous descendant of one wicked." (Rebecca's father was wicked.) Therefore, Isaac, a descendant of another righteous person, received a response from God, but Rebecca did not.

On the surface, this contradicts the principle, "Where penitent people stand, even the wholly righteous cannot stand." (Yevamos 64a) This latter statement implies that the individual's own state of perfection is the sole criteria for their status. If one is righteous, their lineage is of no regard. If this is so, Rebecca, being righteous, should have been answered as well. Why is lineage an issue?

To answer this problem, let us read Rashi again carefully: "There is no comparison between the prayer of the righteous descendant of one righteous, and the righteous descendant of one wicked." Rashi is addressing a specific act: Prayer. Let us rephrase the question: "What is it in one's lineage which determines one's level of prayer?" What is prayer? It is the institution of one approaching the Creator as the Source of all of one's fate. When one recognizes God as real, he cannot help but to beseech God for

his needs, and ultimately desire a relationship via prayer, even once his needs are met. God is the true Authority.

Maimonides, in his code of law, the Mishneh Torah, Chap. VI Laws of Rebelliousness, outlines the laws of honoring parents, "Honoring fathers and mothers is a great positive Mitzvah, so too fearing fathers and mothers, and they are equated by the Torah to the honor and fear of God,.....In the manner that we are commanded to honor and fear God, so too are we commanded on their (parents') honor and fear." Additionally, we find the Ten Commandments are split into two sections: The first five deal with man's relationship with God, the second deal with man's relationship with his fellow man. The one problem is that Honoring Parents is included not in the second five, but in the first five dealing with our relationship with God. This appears out of place. How is Honoring Parents part of the laws dealing with our relationship with God?

I believe the answer traces back to the design of man's entrance into the world, and his maturity. Man is not created today as was Adam, fully grown. Man enters the world as a dependent infant, he grows through various processes, losing and regaining his teeth, acne, becoming more full of hair, reaching adolescence, child rearing, and old age. Why? Is this just accidental? Of course not. This is part of God's design. To cover each stage would be a lengthy topic requiring many

hours. Additionally, it would remove us from the topic. The one stage to which we should direct ourselves is childhood, and in particular, our dependency on parents.

A child learns from early on, the concept of "authority". Parents are taller, stronger, more capable, they punish us, and they nurture us. They are the source of our good and "evil". We turn to them for all our fears and desires. In short, God designed mankind in a manner where he must learn the concept of an authority figure. Had man been born complete, tall, and independent, with all the knowledge needed to survive, he would have no need for parents, and he would forfeit the lesson of authority. But it is vital that this lesson be learned, as it is essential for the recognition of one other need, recognition of God. It is only through our state as feeble and dependent infants, that the role of authority may be successfully permeated into our being. We require some semblance of authority to be projected ultimately onto God. Without learning what authority is from youth, we cannot begin our approach to God.

"Honor your father and your mother.....Equated by the Torah to the honor and fear of God." This is the lesson of Maimonides. The equation is that fear and honor of God is modeled after fear and honor of our parents. For this reason, the command to fear and honor parents is rightfully placed in the section dealing with our approach to God, not our fellow man.

Now we understand why Rebecca

was not answered, her role model was not compete, in fact, he was wicked. Rashi intimates that Rebecca suffered a marred image of authority, and this had some effect on her prayer. God did not answer her. But if she had been the only one praying, we do not know God's response. She might have been answered. Perhaps, her lack of response, according to Rashi, was a lesson of some sort, teaching that only in this scenario, Isaac had the right role model from whom he could build upon his fear and love of God. God therefore selected only him as the recipient of an answer.

In prayer, this makes a great difference, as prayer is where one is in dialogue with God - the true Authority. (My chavrusa asked, "But did not God grant children to Abraham, whose father was wicked?" One possible answer is that Abraham did not pray for children, God bestowed children on him as God's own plan.)

This is not the case with the other statement, "Where penitent people stand, even the wholly righteous cannot stand." This refers to one's ability to exercise his free will and perfect himself. It is not discussing one's relationship to God as an authority. There is no contradiction.

Fear and honor of God parallels the evil and good from parents learned from youth.

We see how essential our proper actions are, not only for ourselves, but for the perfection of our children. Let this concern be prominent in our eyes as we raise our children to fear, and ultimately love God. □

Understanding Rashi

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: I am an Orthodox Jew and I have a problem. If you can believe it, I don't like Rashi! At all! I regret to say this. It would be so much easier if I could be in awe of his knowledge. But he causes me to distrust the whole concept of the Mesorah. I feel he asks us to believe fantastic things in order to accommodate Midrashic interpretations or his world view (the Patriarchs were perfect). How is it to be believed that Yaakov didn't lie to Yitzchak when the holy words of Torah say that he did just that, albeit for a good reason? How is it fathomable that Eisav cold halachically slaughter meat with a bow and arrow?

Is it possible to study in a 100% Orthodox way and not accentuate Rashi? Thank you.

Mesora: Belief in Rashi, or any other Torah commentator's words on philosophy, is not obligatory. We must only follow the Rabbis in areas of halacha, Jewish Law. The Torah teaches, "Al pi haTorah asher yorucha", "In accordance with the Torah (commands) that they teach you." Outside of Torah law, the Rabbis have been given no jurisdiction by God. You need not agree with them. The Torah is replete with arguments between this Rabbi against that Rabbi. Ramban did not take Maimonides' words as "truth". Ramban used his own mind to determine what makes sense. In philosophy, we have no obligation to follow any given author. There is no "psak" in hashkafa. We must use our minds, as did the Rabbis. Use your mind as you see makes sense.

However, let us not be so fast to dismiss Rashi, a brilliant thinker, without due study of his words. Perhaps what Rashi is saying is something deeper than the surface meaning. I recently read an Ibn Ezra which made a statement which astonished me. The Ibn Ezra says on the command to Abraham to "be perfect" the following commentary, "You should not ask why perform circumcision." On the surface, Ibn Ezra defies all which he stands for, i.e. a life of understanding. How then can he verbalize such a statement? I don't believe Ibn Ezra is saying we should not use our minds. Rather, he is teaching us that Abraham should not make his performance of divine decrees dependent on his own intelligence. Ibn Ezra teaches that man can fall prey to an erroneous notion that "only when I know the reasons will I perform, but not before". To this, Ibn Ezra teaches, "do not inquire why the circumcision". Do not let your inquiry determine your acts. "Be perfect with God and don't render your intelligence

superior to his" - this is what Ibn Ezra is teaching.

We must respect the level of brilliance and ingenuity displayed in the Sages' commentaries, and not dismiss their words so quickly as nonsensical. If we can notice the obvious questions on THEIR writings, certainly they have noticed them too! And yet they committed their words to ink! Mustn't we then give them the benefit and assume the obvious questions which we lodge, were considered by them? Of course! Then let's do so with your Rashi, and see if we can unravel some deeper idea intended by Rashi.

In Genesis, 27:18, Isaac asks, "Who are you?" Yaakov replies, "I am Esav your firstborn." The Torah clearly states that Yaakov lied to his father Isaac in order to acquire the blessing justly sold to him by his twin Esav. But Rashi then interprets Yaakov's words "I am Esav your firstborn. to mean, "I am, (and) Esav is your firstborn." Meaning, Rashi seems to be twisting Yaakov's words from one flowing, lying statement, into two separate truths, that is, "I am" and "Esav is your firstborn." But the Torah clearly states that Yaakov lied! How can Rashi contradict the plain meaning of the Torah's words? Additional proof that Yaakov knew he was lying, was his response to his mother, "I might get caught." He didn't say, "it is wrong to lie."

I would like to pose a possible answer: Perhaps Rashi was teaching that although Yaakov lied, he still did not look at the situation of lying as a free-for-all permission to lie brazenly, and without control. Perhaps Yaakov, although lying, did so only with words that were necessary to fulfill his mother's command. So Yaakov chose words which veered less from the truth. Yaakov valued over all else, the search for truth, and living by truth. So even when it came to a necessary lie, he did so with the most minimalistic expression of a lie. He did not allow his emotion's any outlet, even in a situation where a lie was essential.

Study of God's universe requires a complete allegiance to truth. This being Yaakov's dream, he wished to keep himself allegiant to truth at all costs, and was extremely careful not to allow a necessary lie to have any effect on his goal. Had Yaakov not been careful while lying, he feared that the attraction to lying might remain, how ever little, and he would suffer by losing knowledge if this tendency to lie might reappear later in his life.

Rashi teaches us through an apparent contradiction, and perhaps purposefully that startling, what high level of sensitivity to truth our Patriarch Yaakov displayed in even permitted actions. ▣