Likutei Divrei Torah

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Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

Isaac and Eisav

It's a haunting question. Why did Isaac love Esau? The verse says so explicitly: "Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebecca loved Jacob" (Gen. 25:28). Whichever way we read this verse, it is perplexing. If we read it literally, it suggests that Isaac's affections were governed by no more than a taste in a particular kind of food. Surely that is not the way love is earned or given in the Torah.

Rashi, citing a Midrash, suggests that the phrase translated as, "who had a taste for wild game," and referring to Isaac, in fact refers to Esau, and should be read "there was hunting in his mouth," meaning that he used to entrap and deceive his father by his words. Esau deceived Isaac into thinking that he was more pious and spiritual than in fact he was.

Bolstering this interpretation, some suggest that Isaac, having grown up in the household of Abraham and Sarah, had never encountered deception before, and was thus, in his innocence, misled by his son. Rebecca, who had grown up in the company of Laban, recognised it very well, which is why she favoured Jacob, and why she was later so opposed to Isaac's blessing going to Esau.

Yet the text suggests undeniably that there was a genuine bond of love between Esau and Isaac. The Zohar says that no one in the world honoured his father as Esau honoured Isaac.[1] Likewise, Isaac's love for Esau is evident in his desire to bless him. Note that Abraham did not bless Isaac. Only on his deathbed, did Jacob bless his children. Moses blessed the Israelites on the last day of his life. When Isaac sought to bless Esau, he was old and blind, but not yet on his deathbed: "I am now an old man and don't know the day of my death" (Gen. 27:2). This was an act of love.

Isaac, who loved Esau, was not deceived as to the nature of his elder son. He knew what he was and what he wasn't. He knew he was a man of the field, a hunter, mercurial in temperament, a man who could easily give way to violence, quickly aroused to anger, but equally quickly, capable of being distracted and forgetting. He also knew that Esau was not the child to continue the covenant. That is manifest in the difference between the blessing Isaac gave Jacob in Genesis 27 (believing him to be Esau), and the blessing in Genesis 28 that he gave Jacob, knowing him to be Jacob.

The first blessing, intended for Esau, is about wealth – "May God give you of the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth" – and power, "Let peoples serve you, and nations bow to you." The second blessing, intended for Jacob as he was leaving home, is about children – "May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples" – and a land – "May He give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of … the land God gave to Abraham." The patriarchal blessings are not about wealth and power; they are about children and the land. So Isaac knew all along that the covenant would be continued by Jacob; he was not deceived by Esau. Why then did he love him,

encourage him, wish to bless him?

The answer, I believe, lies in three extraordinary silences. The most pointed is the question, What happened to Isaac after the binding? Look at the text in Genesis 22 and you will see that as soon as the angel has stopped Abraham from sacrificing his son, Isaac drops out of the picture completely. The text tells us that Abraham returned to the two servants who accompanied them on the way, but there is no mention of Isaac.

This is a glaring mystery, tantalising the commentators. Some go so far as to say that Isaac actually died at the binding and was brought back to life. Ibn Ezra quotes this interpretation and dismisses it.[2] Shalom Spiegel's The Last Trial is a book-length treatment of this idea.[3] Where was Isaac after the trial of the Binding?

The second silence is the death of Sarah. We read that Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and weep for her. But the primary mourner in Judaism is traditionally the child. It should have been Isaac leading the mourning. But he is not mentioned in the entire chapter 23 that relates to Sarah's death and its consequences.

The third is in the narrative in which Abraham instructed his servant to find a wife for his son. There is no record in the text that Abraham consulted with Isaac his son, or even informed him. Abraham knew that a wife was being sought for Isaac; Abraham's servant knew; but we have no idea as to whether Isaac knew, and whether he had any thoughts on the subject. Did he want to get married? Did he have any particular preference as to what his wife should be like? The text is silent. Only when the servant returns with his wife-to-be, Rebecca, does Isaac enter the narrative at all.

The text itself is significant: "Isaac had come from Be'er Lahai Roi." What was this place? We have encountered it only once before. It is where the angel appeared to Hagar when, pregnant, she fled from Sarah who was treating her harshly (Gen. 16:14). An ingenious Midrash says that when Isaac heard that Abraham had sent his servant to find a wife for him, he said to himself, "Can I live with a wife while my father lives alone? I will go and return Hagar to him."[4] A later text tells us that "After Abraham's death, God blessed his son Isaac, who then lived near Be'er Lahai Roi" (Gen. 25:11). On this, the Midrash says that even after his father's death, Isaac lived near Hagar and treated her with respect.[5]

What does all this mean? We can only speculate. But if the silences mean something, they suggest that even an arrested sacrifice still has a victim. Isaac may not have died physically, but the text seems to make him disappear, literarily, through three scenes in which his presence was central. He should have been there to greet and be greeted by the two servants on his safe return from Mount Moriah. He should have been there to mourn his departed mother Sarah. He should have been there to at least discuss, with his father and his father's servant, his future wife. Isaac did not die on the mountain, but it seems as if something in him did die, only to be revived when he married. The text tells us that Rebecca "became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death."

That seems to be the message of the silences. The significance of Beer Lahai Roi seems to be that Isaac never forgot how Hagar and her son – his half-brother Ishmael – had been sent away. The Midrash says that Isaac reunited Hagar with Abraham after Sarah's death. The biblical text tells us that Isaac and Ishmael stood together at Abraham's grave (Gen. 25:9). Somehow the divided family was reunited, seemingly at the instigation of Isaac.

If this is so, then Isaac's love for Esau is simply explained. It is as if Isaac had said: I know what Esau is. He is strong, wild, unpredictable, possibly violent. It is impossible that he should be the person entrusted with the covenant and its spiritual demands. But this is my child. I refuse to sacrifice him, as my father almost sacrificed me. I refuse to send him away, as my parents sent Hagar and Ishmael away. My love for my son is unconditional. I do not ignore who or what he is. But I will love him anyway, even if I do not love everything he does – because that is how God loves us, unconditionally, even if He does not love everything we do. I will bless him. I will hold him close. And I believe that one day that love may make him a better person than he might otherwise have been.

In this one act of loving Esau, Isaac redeemed the pain of two of the most difficult moments in his father Abraham's life: the sending away of Hagar and Ishmael and the binding of Isaac.

I believe that love helps heal both the lover and the loved.

[1] Zohar 146b.
[2] Ibn Ezra, Commentary to Gen. 22:19.
[3] Shalom Spiegel, The Last Trial, Schocken, 1969.
[4] Midrash Hagadol to Gen. 24:62.
[5] Midrash Aggadah and Bereishit Rabbati ad loc.

The Person in the Parsha
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Different Forms of Power

The professor was wrong. But in his field of expertise he was always right. His name was Dr. Dennis Wrong, and his surname made him the object of much teasing, at least during his childhood. He was a prominent sociologist, and I took a course from him while still in graduate school. The course was entitled "The Sociology of Power."

I learned a lot from him, and kept notes of his lectures for many years. Some years after I took the course, I came across a book he had written, based upon those lectures, and discarded my notes in favor of his text. The title of the book was Power: Its Forms, Bases, and Uses.

It was in his course that I began to appreciate that "power" need not involve physical coercion. There are many ways to exert power, ways that are much more effective than brute force. This insight has proven helpful to me in many areas of my personal and professional life. It has even helped me come to grips with a problem that is related to this week's Torah portion, Parshat Toldot (Genesis 25:19-28:9).

The problem to which I refer does not directly involve the biblical text. Rather, it is derived from the Kabbalistic tradition, from the book of the Zohar. In this tradition, each of the patriarchs is assigned a different spiritual virtue. Abraham, for example, carries the banner of chesed, or lovingkindness. This is easy to understand because almost every record that we have of Abraham's behavior involves qualities such as hospitality and concern for others.

The virtue designated for the patriarch Isaac is gevurah, and this presents a problem. Gevurah means strength or power, and even after carefully reading the entire narrative of Isaac's life, we find no evidence of special acts of strength that he performed or displays of might that he exhibited.

For example, Isaac was never involved in a war. He was decidedly pacifist in every conflict that he encountered. This is in stark contrast not only to the other patriarchs but to almost every other biblical hero.

Abraham, for example, courageously pursued the combined armies of four kings in order to rescue his nephew Lot. Jacob wrestled with an angel and boasted of his conquest of a portion of land which he "wrested from the Amorites with my sword and bow." (Genesis 48:22) Moses

slayed an Egyptian tormentor and waged war against Sichon and the giant Og. Joshua is the quintessential general, and the first kings of Israel, Saul and David, led their people in battle.

But Isaac? We find no trace of martial activity on his part. Why then is strength considered his signal virtue? Why does he, of all the biblical heroes, carry the banner of power.

I first found this dilemma articulated in a wonderful book of commentaries on the weekly Torah portion, MiSinai Ba, by contemporary Israeli scholar Rabbi Yehuda Shaviv. Rabbi Shaviv discovered a somewhat obscure passage in the Midrash that not only formulates the question but provides an answer. The passage reads: "Where do we find that Isaac was a strongman, a man of power? Behold: how many wells he did dig! It is written, 'And the Philistines stopped up all the wells which his [Isaac's] father's servants had dug… Isaac dug anew… and gave them the same names… And Isaac's servants, digging in the wadi found there a new well of spring water… And then they dug another well… He moved from there to dig yet another well...' (Genesis 26:15-22). Behold the power that he possessed!" (Midrash Tanchuma, Buber Edition, Toldot 7).

Isaac's power did not resort to coercion and involved neither aggression nor physical force. His was the power of persistence, of the stubborn commitment to pursue his goals despite the obstacles with which he was confronted. He avoids conflicts and seeks alternate paths to his objectives, yet he projects neither weakness nor cowardice. Ultimately, he achieves his objectives and exclaims that they are especially blessed, as we read, "Now at last the Lord has granted us ample space to increase in the land."

Isaac's capacity to persist in the face of frustration is demonstrated in the very beginning of our Torah portion. There we read of how he and his wife Rebecca face the challenges of infertility. What was his response? Prayer! As we read, "Isaac pleaded with the Lord on behalf of his wife… And the Lord responded to his plea…" (Genesis 25:21). The Torah does not tell us just how long he prayed. We are left to "do the math" for ourselves. Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebecca, and sixty years old when Esau and Jacob were born. He persisted in prayer for no less than twenty years. That is how he demonstrated strength and power.

Professor Wrong does not offer Isaac as an exemplar of this alternate form of power. But he does enumerate numerous examples, drawing from history and literature and sociological research, of a wide variety of forms of power which do not involve violence. As always, the discoveries of modern social science find precedents in ancient Jewish texts. Consider, for example, the fact that while the Talmud in Tractate Kiddushin 49b speaks of the strong man as one whose "fellows fear him because of his might", a contrasting definition is offered in the Talmudic tome entitled Avot D'Rabbi Nathan. There we read, "Who is the strongest of the strong? He who can convert his enemy into a friend."

The Sages memorialize Isaac's paradigm in an unforgettable passage in the beginning of the fourth chapter of Pirkei Avot, Ethics of the Fathers. There we read, "Ben Zoma said… Who is strong? One who masters his evil impulse, as it is written, 'He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules over his spirit is better than he who conquers the city.' (Proverbs 16:32)"

Rabbi Israel Salanter, the brilliant ethicist who lived in the latter half of the 19th century, explains that besides physical strength there are two models of

gevura. One way is to "master the evil impulse" and become "slow to anger." But, insists Rabbi Salanter, such an approach suppresses but does not totally eliminate the evil impulse. A person who chooses this way may be "slow to anger," but anger still resides within him.

The alternate model is the person who "rules over his spirit." He totally circumvents his evil impulse. He finds ways, writes Rabbi Salanter, to "conquer the city" by persuading its inhabitants that his rule will benefit them. He demonstrates his care and compassion for them and thus wins them over. This is the preferred way to demonstrate strength.

I conclude by paraphrasing a remark by Rabbi Shaviv in his helpful essay: Throughout our history, resorting to struggle and even war was often necessary. Certainly Abraham and Jacob, and even Moses, had to follow that route.

But it is so comforting to know that there is another way, Isaac's way. It is a way which avoids battle and heroically persists in the search for paths to blessings and roads to peace.

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot

Religion by Relegation

In an almost casual, offhand way, our sidra tells us of a series of incidents in the life of Isaac that are apparently of no special significance, but in which our rabbis have seen the greatest importance.

Isaac lived in the land of Canaan, which suffered from scarcity of water most of the year, and he therefore decided to dig a well. We are told of three wells that he and his entourage dug. The first two involved him in difficulties with the people of Gerar, a Philistine nation. The first of these Isaac called Esek, because it was the cause of much strife and contention. He was no more successful with the second well; after his servants dug it, he incurred the hatred of the people about him. He therefore called the second well by the name Sitna, meaning enmity. It was only when the third well was dug that happiness prevailed once again; and so he called the third well Reĥovot, meaning: room, freedom, scope, peace, or joy.

Of what importance can these apparently prosaic matters be to later generations, who search in the Torah for matters of timeless significance and are not particularly interested in economic clashes and riparian rivalry in ancient Canaan?

Nachmanides, following the principle of the rabbis that "ma'aseh avot siman levanim," that the deeds of the fathers anticipate the history of the children, has taught us that the three wells of Isaac recapitulate the stories of the three great Sanctuaries of the people of Israel. The first well is a symbol of the First Temple, which was destroyed because of Esek – because of the battles and wars waged on the Jewish people by the surrounding nations. The second well, that called Sitna, represents the Second Temple, for this Temple was brought to ruins by the hatred and enmity that prevailed among the children of Israel during that period. However, the third well, Reĥovot, is the symbol of the Sanctuary that has not yet been built – that of the great future. It represents the Beit haMikdash which will one day be rebuilt in Jerusalem, and which will last forever in a spirit of Reĥovot – freedom, peace, and plenty.

However, the question remains: why indeed was Isaac successful with the third well, while failing with the first two? In what way was the third well, symbol of the Third Temple, superior to the others?

Permit me to provide an answer which has been suggested to me by my uncle, Rabbi Joseph M. Baumol, which not only answers this question but also

provides us with a powerful moral for our own lives. If we analyze carefully the three verses which tell of how these three wells were dug, we will discover one significant difference between the first two and the third. The first two were dug by Isaac's servants, his hired help. Of the first well we read: "Vayaḥperu avdei Yitzḥak," "And the servants of Isaac dug the well." With regard to the second well, we read: "Vayaḥperu be'er aḥeret," "They dug another well." In both cases, Isaac relegated his duties and activities to others. Only with regard to the third well do we find the element of personal participation: "Vayaḥpor be'er aḥeret," "And he dug another well" (Genesis 26:19, 21, 22). As long as Isaac was going to leave the performance of his duties to others, and not do them himself, there was bound to result Esek and Sitna, hatred and argumentation. It is only when Isaac, despite the many people ready to serve him, was willing to dig the well by himself, that he was able to achieve Reḥovot – the peace and plenty and freedom that he so very much desired. The Third Temple, that which will last unto all eternity, will come about only when every Jew will take it upon himself to perform the "Vayaḥpor be'er aḥeret," the willingness to work by himself, to commit his own energies, talents, concern, and participation to the sacred tasks which we have been assigned.

Actually, Isaac's career from the very beginning reveals this tension between relegation and participation. Throughout his life we find signs of his struggling to learn this great principle of personal involvement. Even before he was conceived, the message came to his father Abraham that Sara would bear the child, Isaac. However, the message came not from God Himself, as it were, but through an angel. And so, when Sara heard it she laughed and ridiculed it – incurring Abraham's annoyance and God's irritation. Only afterwards do we read, "And the Lord said unto Abraham" – when God Himself addressed Abraham, by Himself and not through an angel, Sara began to believe in reverence and awe, and not doubt in mocking laughter, that she would be blessed with a child.

The great story of the Akeida also reveals this oscillation between relegation and participation. At first, Abraham decides to offer up Isaac himself. At the last moment, his hand is stayed and, instead, Abraham offers up a ram caught in the thicket nearby. The Torah puts it this way (Genesis 22:13): And behold, "Ayil aḥar ne'eḥaz basvakh," which we normally translate: "A ram was caught in the thicket behind them." But this has also been interpreted in an equally valid fashion as: "Another ram was caught in the thicket" – that is, instead of Isaac, another sacrifice was discovered: the ram. Isaac's life was saved and a "messenger" was offered up in his place, the ram!

His very marriage followed the same pattern. Isaac did not himself go to look for a wife; his father sent the servant Eliezer instead. According to our tradition (Tosafot on Ketubot 7b), Eliezer was legally a "shaliaḥ kiddushin," an agent to marry a woman for Isaac by proxy. No wonder, as the Netziv has pointed out, throughout their married lives Isaac and Rebecca suffered from a sense of distance and remoteness between them, a lack of open communication and participation with each other. The Netziv sees this symbolized in the event that occurred when Isaac and Rebecca first met. There we read that at the moment she saw him, Rebecca took her veil and covered her face. This veil is a symbol of a domestic curtain, an obstruction that prevented them from communicating freely. If there is no direct personal participation, then there is a possibility of misunderstanding and even enmity.

So it was with the wells. It took two difficult diggings until Isaac learned that you ought not send someone else to do your tasks. He then learned that only if "he dug another well," by himself and with his own effort, could he achieve Reĥovot, the peace and freedom and space that he needed for his full development.

This idea is especially important in contemporary society. As civilization grows more complex, each person grows less whole and less integrated, for he is less involved in the tasks that require his attention and devotion. With the division of labor, and the progressive concentration of expertise in narrower and narrower fields, we begin to suffer alienation, a sense of distance between ourselves and our fellow-man, a withdrawal from all of life to within ourselves. Especially in our crowded cities, this introversion and withdrawal takes place if only as a means to protect what little precious privacy we have left for ourselves.

And of course, to some extent, we must limit our involvement in society and the lives of others. We need the mechanics of the delegation of duties and tasks in order for society to function. A good administrator is one who does not do everything by himself, but sees to it that others do their parts. We cannot and should not attempt to do everything by ourselves.

The halakha recognized this idea and incorporated it in the institution of sheliĥut, agency. We are permitted to designate an agent to perform certain tasks, not only in financial law, but even with regard to such mitzvot as the giving of charity or the writing of a sefer Torah. Nevertheless, the principle of sheliĥut is not valid for every occasion. For instance, I cannot make an agent to eat in the sukka for me, nor can I appoint someone to listen to the sound of the shofar for me. If I do, I have failed to fulfill my religious obligations. How do I distinguish between those functions for which I can appoint a messenger, and those which I must perform myself? The famous author of the Ketzot haĤoshen put it this way: I may make an agent to perform any commandment save a mitzva shebegufo, a mitzva which I am required to perform with my own body, my own self. Thus, charity can be given by anyone – the important consideration is the result, that the poor man be fed or housed. Anyone may write a sefer Torah for me, provided that I commission it and possess it and use it. But when the commandment is that I eat in a sukka or that I hear the shofar – that is a commandment relating to my body, to my person, and no one can take my place.

Thus, certain things cannot be delegated and relegated to others. Today, as we are threatened with the progressive depersonalization of life, we must emphasize as never before the mitzva shebegufo, the significance of the individual, of selfhood, of personal participation and responsibility. We must come to recognize that we are each of us not only a collection of assignable functions, but integrated, whole, unique individuals, who must act by ourselves and as ourselves.

[Excerpted from Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot: A Commentary for the Ages – Genesis, co-published by OU Press, Maggid Books, and YU Press; edited by Stuart W. Halpern]

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

The Value of Planning, Forethought, Process and Development

The pasuk says, "And Yaakov boiled a stew, and Eisav came in from the field, and he was exhausted." (Bereshis 25:29). The sad news reached the family that Avraham Avinu has passed away. Yaakov Avinu was cooking lentils because it is customary to serve a mourner round food items. (This is why an egg is typically eaten at the

Seudah Mafsekes before Tisha B'Av.) Yaakov Avinu was cooking lentil soup for his father as part of the customary "Seudas Havra'ah" (the first meal a mourner consumes following the funeral, typically prepared by neighbors). Eisav came home from the field tired and famished. We know the rest of the story. Eisav asked for the lentil soup. Yaakov made a deal with him. Eisav sold the birthright to Yaakov, and thus abandoned the bechora. This is the beginning of Parshas Toldos.

The Tolner Rebbe asks three interesting questions:

On the above cited pasuk (vayazed Yaakov nazid), Rashi explains that the word vayazed means to cook. However, the far more common word for cooking in the Torah is the word bishul or some derivative of that root word. Why suddenly over here when the Torah wants to say that Yaakov was cooking lentil soup does the Torah use the word vayazed, necessitating for Rashi to explain that vayazed is the same as bishul?

What was the dish that Yaakov cooked? The Torah here calls it nazid (some kind of soup). It is not until five pesukim later (Bereshis 25:34) that the Torah calls it nazid adashim (lentil soup). Why do we need to wait to find out what Yaakov was cooking? Get to the point right away!

Yitzchak was a wealthy man. Avraham Avinu was a wealthy man and he gave everything that he had to Yitzchak. We are not aware of Yitzchak suffering any financial setbacks. Would we not expect Yitzchak to have servants in his house who did the cooking? Yaakov was a diligent student. He spent his time in the Yeshiva of Shem v'Ever. He learns all the time. Later in life, he learned fourteen years straight without sleeping. Yet what is he doing at the beginning of Parshas Toldos? He is cooking! What about the servants? In fact, the Medrash here points out the humility of Yaakov Avinu that he was cooking lentil soup himself, despite the fact that his father had many servants!

The Tolner Rebbe cites a Malbim who explains the relationship between the word vayazed and the idea of cooking. The Torah uses the same root word in the expression "Ki ba'davar she'ZADU aleihem" (Shemos 18:11), where it means planned or schemed. The Malbim asks: Why is the same root word in Lashon HaKodesh used for cooking and also for planning and scheming? The Malbim answers that when a person schemes, he is cooking up a plan. The word zeidim (as in the expression zeidim b'yad osekei Torasecha) refers to people who plan nefarious and malevolent schemes. These plans that they "cook up" need to first percolate until they are fully ready to be put into action.

There is an expression – if someone wants to cheat in business, he "cooks the books". What kind of expression is that? It is the same idea. If someone wants to try to fool his partner or the government or someone else, he may plan how to charge this expense and how to charge that expense. That is "cooking the books".

That is why the expression vayazed is synonymous with the expression "bishul"—it requires this great forethought of planning, which is synonymous with "cooking up a plan" to do something.

Now we can explain why the pasuk specifically uses the verb vayazed Yaakov nazid. The Torah is trying to indicate that Yaakov Avinu carefully planned this activity with great forethought and intent. He reasoned: My father just became an avel. I want to cook for him. Yaakov's action was done with great planning and forethought in order to fulfill the commandment of honoring his father. This answers the first question.

That is why he did not just let the servants cook the soup—the third question. This was not just

a bowl of soup. This was Kibbud Av. Yaakov wanted to do it, and he wanted to do it from the get go. "I don't just want to serve my father. I want to cook the soup and I want to prepare the soup. This is how I want to serve my father." The purpose of the cooking was not just to get something on the plate (for which the word bishul would have sufficed). The cooking over here was a well thought out plan of providing the Seudas Havra'ah and fulfilling the mitzvah of Kibbud Av v'Em.

This is also why the Torah does not state right away that it was a bowl of lentil soup—the second question. That is immaterial at this point. At this point, the Torah is interested in stating that Yaakov was doing the act of cooking, the act of preparing food to serve his bereaved father. If his only interest was to convey the bottom line, then the menu would have been mentioned up front: A bowl of lentil soup. However, that is not the Torah's intent over here. The Torah is trying to emphasize that Yaakov did this entire act with great forethought.

This answers all three questions.

The Tolner Rebbe explains further that within this idea of planning and forethought lies one of the fundamental differences between Yaakov and Eisav. Eisav (as we also see from his name and from his whole life) is not interested in process. He is not interested in preparation. He is interested in the bottom line. That is why the name Eisav is related to the verb ossuei (done). Yaakov comes from the word Akov – crooked. Yaakov's whole life was a life of process, a life of growing, a life of becoming. His life was a life in which the journey and the path itself had merit.

Eisav is a "Just get it done" person. That is why Chazal say that when Yitzchak Avinu told Eisav "Go out and hunt for me," the Medrash says that Eisav said to himself – If I find an animal quickly, fine, I will hunt for it, otherwise I will steal an animal from someone who has already found one. To Eisav, it was just a matter of getting it done. How? Where? The process is all immaterial.

This is reflected in the difference between Yiddishkeit and secularism. Yiddishkeit emphasizes process and growing in stages. "Going through the motions" itself has value. This is not the case in the secular world. They are not interested in process. What's your batting average? How many runs did you score? How much money do you make? They are not interested in the effort you put into it. It is just the "bottom line." This is not a Jewish value.

Anu ameilim v'hem ameilim (we toil, and they toil). We are rewarded even for the toil (even when it does not necessarily lead to concrete accomplishment). This is the difference between Yaakov and Eisav.

The Tolner Rebbe told an amazing story at the end of this presentation: In Europe there were a number of very brilliant people. There was a child prodigy known in Europe as the prodigy from Meit'zat. He wrote a sefer called Chidushei ha'Ilui m'Meit'zat (https://www.hebrewbooks.org/50602). He later came to America and was a Rosh Yeshiva in Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchonon. His name was Rav Shlomo Polacheck (1877-1928). His son told over an amazing story about his father:

When Rav Polacheck came to America from Poland and he saw children playing with toys and games, he cried. Why? He said "If I would have had the opportunity to play with toys and be a child when I was young, I would be a bigger Talmid Chochom than I am today – because the process of growing up is important." There is a thing called maturation. There is a stage called childhood and a stage called

adolescence and a stage called adulthood. He was such a prodigy that perhaps he knew Mishnayos by heart at age three. Someone who knows Mishanyos by heart is not able to play around with whatever little toys three-year-olds played around with in Europe. So, he did not really experience childhood. He said about himself that if he would have had a proper childhood, he could have become an even greater Talmid Chochom (which is hard to imagine).

That is the point of the Tolner Rebbe's whole shtickle Torah. Process and development have value. A person cannot just skip to the bottom line or skip to the end. That is what we learn from "vaYazed Yaakov nazid."

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

A missing letter provides a clue to the survival of the Jewish people. In Parshat Toldot, we read how Jacob deceived his father Isaac into thinking that he was his twin brother Esau. Isaac declared (Bereishit 27:22),

"Hakol kol Yaakov v'hayadaim yedei Eisav." – "The voice is the voice of Jacob but the hands are the hands of Esau."

From here the Midrash teaches as follows. As long as the voice of Jacob is heard in houses of prayer and halls of study, the hands of Esau will not be able to destroy the Jewish people. Now, many of our commentators ask how the Midrash derives this lesson from our verse. After all, Isaac exclaimed, "Hakol kol Yaakov," – "The voice is the voice of Jacob," indicating that the voice was heard, "vehayadaim yedei eisav," – "and the hands are the hands of Esau," indicating that his hands were there and they were powerful.

'Malei vechaseir' - The Vilna Gaon brilliantly explains that this has everything to do with 'malei vechaseir'. What is 'malei vechaseir'? The term literally means 'complete and incomplete', and it refers to a phenomenon that we sometimes see in the Torah, wherein some of the words are missing a vowel. Each time this happens, "zeh omer darshaini," – the word cries out for an explanation.

I cannot think of a better example of this than in the verse that we have quoted. "Hakol kol Yaakov." The word 'kol' is mentioned twice. On the first occasion the 'kol', the voice, is spelled kuf-lamed which is 'chaseir', missing the vav. On the second occasion just one word later, it's spelled kuf-vav-lamed which is 'malei' – complete – it has the vav in the middle of the word.

Thanks to the Vilna Gaon we can now understand the Midrash. Because the first word 'kol' is missing a vav, it is indicating that something is absent. The voice is not as loud as it might have been. Kol has become 'kal' – light. The power of the voice has gone. It is in such circumstances, God forbid, that "hayadaim yedei Eisav" – the hands of Esau can be powerful.

Authentic Jewish voice - What emerges from here is a timeless and powerful lesson for the Jewish people. Time and again we have needed to fight for our very survival on the battlefield, but in addition to doing that there is another source of great Jewish strength. It lies in the kol Yaakov, the sound of Jacob, our voices in our shuls and in our halls of study. It is the authentic Jewish voice of tradition, and the more it is heard the stronger we, as a nation, are. The better our Jewish education, the more we have a capacity to guarantee our survival.

Yes indeed, a missing letter of the Torah provides us with the key to Jewish survival.

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*

Two Worldviews of Bechor-First Born: Primogeniture or Not? The Essence of Judaism

Although not obvious at first glance, there seems to be an underlying recurring theme in the Biblical narrative of the Book of Genesis concerning the concept of the First Born and the rivalry between brothers. Many of the issues that are presented in the Torah can be framed through the prism of how to understand this concept of Bechor-First Born, and the competition between every generation of brothers can better be analyzed as a struggle between the First Born who feels entitled due merely to his birth position, and the more deserving younger sibling, who feels more worthy based on his actions. Several key words in the text in every story point us in this direction. It is only in our Parsha, Toldot, where the clash over the Bechora is the main focus. In addition, the concept of First Born can help us understand two larger world views of this concept, and man's general mission between Jews and non-Jews, as well as the goal and achievements by God to eradicate a misguided belief system in Egypt, based on the concept of the Bechor-First Born.

The concept of Primogeniture, i.e. the right, by law or custom, of the firstborn child to inherit the parent's entire estate and authority, in preference to shared inheritance among all or some children, represents a world view that has always existed in most societies, and still exists today. It is a concept of power and preference, not by merit, but, rather, by birth order. Before she became Queen of England in 1952, Queen Elizabeth's sister, Margaret, reportedly privately tried to assert that she would be a "better" queen, due to her personality and skills. But this idea was quickly was shot down, since royalty in England (and most countries that have had royalty) has nothing to do with "worthiness," and is always determined by Primogeniture, the accident of birth. We will see that this concept of the First Born is antithetical to the Jewish concept of First Born.

The Book of Genesis is a Series of Competitions Between the First-Born Younger Sibling

Although not highlighted in the text directly, except in the story of Jacob and Esau, the verses all use, from the very beginning that each story of siblings, is a battle between the elder first-born, who feels entitled because of birth order, and the younger who is more deserving, because of his actions. In the non-Jewish world then (and often still today), merit played little role is who inherits and receives the power. How does the Torah and Judaism view these incidents?

In the first set of siblings in the Torah, it is not clear from the text what precisely is the cause of the fight between Cain and Abel is about. Clearly, God favors the younger Abel which incensed Cain. There are dozens of credible Rabbinic explanations about the cause of this hatred. Perhaps it was about the birth order itself. Cain felt entitled, that God had to accept his offering (even though it was lesser, according to the Rabbis) because he was the First-Born. Abel felt that his superior offering should be preferred by God. But the Torah "alludes" to the first-born controversy by telling us that Hevel-Abel brought from the first-born animals (Genesis 4:3-4). While he understood that he could never be an actual first born, perhaps Hevel, by bringing from superior cattle and that it was also first born, God would favor him. And such was the case, which Cain could not accept, and eventually murdered Abel as a result. An important principle was established in this story which follows in the rest of the book of Genesis: first born in Judaism does not signify automatic entitlement. God judges only on merit, not

entitlement. Hence God favors the superior offering of Hevel, the superior actions of all men, regardless of their status in life (for example, King David was the youngest and the least likely (physically) to be king, as Samuel went through each of his six brothers first before God told Samuel that David was the worthiest).

In the next group of brothers, following the Flood, their father Noach became drunk, Cham was involved somewhat in the sin and Cham's son, Canaan, clearly sinned with his grandfather. Shem took the lead and, with his brother Yefet, preserved his father's dignity without shaming him, by walking backwards into the tent, in in order to clothe him. Noach praises and blesses Shem, curses Canaan, and gives a secondary blessing to Yefet (Genesis 9:18-26). One might think that, in this particular case, that the eldest brother, the First-Born, was more righteous and most deserving because of his actions, since every place in the Torah that describes the three siblings, Shem is mentioned first, and we assume he is the eldest. However, the Midrash, based on a verse in the next chapter (Midrash, Bamidbar Rabbah 4:8, Genesis 10:21), proves that Yefet was the oldest. Although he did not sin, he should have taken the lead in this story, but he abdicated this responsibility. Thus, the more meritorious child, Shem is blessed (and from him emerges Abraham and the Jewish people). However, it is often said that the exception proves the rule. There is one place in the book of Genesis where the actual first-born son IS more deserving due to his actions: that of Abraham, who towered morally over his younger brothers Nachor and Haran (Genesis 11:27).

When it came to Abraham's sons, clearly, a different story emerged. When Sara could not get pregnant, it was Sara's idea to give her maidservant, Hagar, to Avraham to have a child, as that might help Sara to eventually get pregnant herself. As soon as Hagar became pregnant, things changed and there was great enmity between the two women. Sara became very upset, and Hagar eventually ran away (Genesis 16:3-6 with Radak commentary). The details are not clear, and certainly nothing about first-born is mentioned directly in the Torah. However, Radak explains the verb (mentioned twice) "Vatekel Gvirta Bi-eineha." As soon as Hagar became pregnant, she began to look down upon her mistress Sara. Now, she would give birth to the eldest son, Yishmael, and by that right alone, she is entitled to become the mistress of the home and take Sara's place as the only wife to Abraham and receive all the power. Hagar's view of the first born is what caused Sara so much psychological pain, because of the Jewish view of the first born is quite different (see below). Eventually both Hagar and Yishmael were forced to leave Abraham's home, because they continued to assume that merely being the first born gave them all the rights and special status, which was an improper assumption.

In the next generation, twins are born. Even though he was old by only a few moments, Eisav assumed he was the only entitled son of Isaac and Rebecca – as the Bechor. In a strange story, Eisav comes from the field tired and famished. Jacob, his brother, sells him the Bechora-first born rights, the first born, cand Eisav responds that if he is going to die, why does not he need this power or title (Genesis 25:32-33). This is the first narrative where the first-born issue is front and center. Based on this story, we can begin to see th two different views of the Bechora-first born son. The non-Jewish view is clear and has been the claim of the "upper class" of society for millennia. I am privileged because of birth. All power is due me, and I do not have "earn it" or justify my ways. But what, then, precisely, is the Jewish view of Bechora-first born?

Based on this story and a Midrash, Maharal (Maharal, Netzach Yisrael, chapter 15, p. 87) write and intimates that for Eisav (and the non-Jewish world), the role of the first born is a physical one, about power in this world. For the Jew, it is about responsibility and (reward for) the Next World. Jewish Bechora-First Born is about responsibility to others, not power. Thus, if Eisav is really about to die, Bechor is worthless to him. (later on, Jacob could not understand why Jacob had so many children. If Bechor-First Born is about this world, more children do not help a Bechor. But if it is about responsibility, then more children, more spirituality adds to the Bechor-First Born concept).

The word Bechor-First Born recurs repeatedly is the Jacob-Eisav story, because each child basis his claim upon his understanding of this concept, although in a different manner. Jacob uses the term when he appears to Isaac disguised as Eisav, to show his father why he is worthy to receive the blessing – he is the Bechor. Eisav uses the term to complain that his physical rights and power as a first born were stolen through the sale and blessings (Genesis 27:32, 36). Neither son realizes that Isaac truly understands his children. Thus, Isaac gives Jacob (whom he thinks is Eisav) a blessing only about physical benefits in the world, since that is what Eisav desires and that is what the Bechor signifies to him (Genesis 27:19, 28-29, 28:1-4). (Later on, Isaac gives Jacob the "real" blessings, based upon Jacob's understanding of the spiritual nature of the Bechora – the Land of Israel and many children).

What, Then, Is the Unique Jewish View of Bechor-First Born?

There are four unique Jewish aspects to the first born, which, in a sense, are the core values of Judaism. The first is that the birth of a first-born forces every parent, for the first time in his or her life, possibly, to focus on someone else besides themselves. A baby cannot survive unless a parent changes attention from self and devotes serious attention to the infant, which continues for many many years. Thus, a Bechor forces a parent to become other-directed, not inward directed. Second, the first child has the unique role of assisting the parent physically as he or she gets older. Not only assisting as a babysitter, but with tasks around the house. Until very recently, the oldest child had to do many physical and "adult" tasks, often helping a parent at work or in the field and function as an adult before he or she might be "ready." This forces a Bechor to mature earlier and take on more mature roles. It is for that reason that on the verse to respect one's parents, the Talmud states that respect must also be given to the eldest child, who takes on a quasi-parent role. Nachmanides specific mentions that the Bechor-First-Born often has to take on the role of the parent (Exodus 2:12, Ketuvot 103a, Nachmanides commentary on Genesis 32:5). Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik writes about he, as a Bechor-first born, had to help his parents physically. It is for that reason only, he claims, the Torah gives a first born a double portion as an inheritance for the physical work and responsibility for the many extra hours a first born must devote to the family (Deuteronomy 21:17). (Unlike in English, Hebrew words are formed from letters that often have a deeper meaning. The three letters of Bechor, Bet, Kaf, Resh, each all double the numerical values of the letters that they follow). The third role of a Bechor (as well as any human being and especially a Jew), is realizing that there are others (i.e., parents) in the world. He or she is not alone, is not a beginning to do what he she wishes but is a part of a continuing to previous generations, to parents and grandparents. Later siblings automatically realize this by having older siblings, but a Bechor must come to this unique realization. I am not the beginning but part of a

continuity. Finally, Rabbi Soloveitchik says that the role of Bechor is that of a teacher to younger siblings. It is up to him or her to educate younger children, both as a role model and actual teaching when parents cannot do so.

The rivalry of brothers and the First Born does not end with Jacob and Esau. In the very next generation, the brothers feel that as the eleventh child, Joseph, is not special or should be treated as a Bechor-First Born. but Jacob had been deceived. He only wanted to marry Rachel. Thus, in his mind. Joseph, Rachel's first born, should be the first born (it is almost as if Jacob is oblivious to how much pain the concept of first born caused in his past). Jacob gives Joseph a special coat not only as a sign of affection but also to signify that Jacob considers him the first born (Genesis 37:3-4). The brothers are angry. But then it gets worse. When Jacob's dreams are about the brothers bowing down to Joseph and giving him power, they believed that Joseph only understands the non-Jewish concept of Bechor-First Born – power and privilege. It is for that reason that they must get rid of Joseph to establish a proper Jewish family with the proper concept of first born (Genesis 37:6-11, 19-23). We all know the rest of the story. That was never Joseph's intention. The family reunites, and, for the first time, a united Jewish family becomes he Jewish people.

But that is not the end of the story about sibling rivalry in the Torah. At the end of Genesis, when Jacob is supposed to give a blessing to Joseph's first-born son, first Jacob reiterates that Joseph is his first born, by giving each of Joseph's sons a separate share in the Land in Israel – double portion (Genesis 48:5-6). Then, with the actual blessings for Joseph's sons, Jacob intentionally switches his hands, and gives the younger son, Ephraim, the blessing with his right-dominant hand, because, once again, he is more worthy, even though the Torah stresses that he is not the Bechor-First Born (Genesis 48:5-6). But this, too, is not the end of the story. If we look back again at each description of sibling rivalry in Genesis, it is true that in each generation, the younger sibling was "victorious" and more worthy. However, in each succeeding generation, the older brother was less angry and more tolerant of that success. While Cain kills Abel, Sara banishes Yishmael, but he is not killed. Jacob is forced to run away from Eisav but ultimately they reunite as friendly brothers in the end. Finally, all the children of Jacob reunite and leave peacefully. But, after that, when Menashe is slighted Jacobin not receiving the first blessing, we see that Menashe displays no anger and does not even react negatively. And then, this trajectory continues even into the Book of Exodus. The three leaders of the Jewish people in the remainder of the Torah, are three siblings: Miriam, Aaron, and Moses. However, Moses is the youngest. Yet, when the older Aaron is passed over for Moses and God informs Aaron that Moses will be the Jewish leader, not only is Aaron not angry, but the Torah states that Aaron is actually joyous for this brother (Exodus 4:14). Thus, we have come full cycle – from killing a brother who triumphs, to being happy for the younger brother who is victorious.

*** This column has been adapted from a series of volumes written by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel "*The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*" available from Urim and Amazon. For the full article or to review all the footnotes in the original, contact the author at nachum@jewishdestiny.com**

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Yaakov Neuburger

Worthy of Blessing

It has to disturb us anew every year: how are we to make peace with Yaakov's ascendancy to the station of the Avos in a seemingly duplicitous fashion? How meaningful is a blessing that is snatched in an evidently

underhanded manner? Furthermore, the Ramban (Bereishis 27:4) wonders why Rivka did not share the prophecy that she received at the outset of the parsha with her husband. After all, it was this prophecy that mandated Rivka to procure the beracha and its attendant superiority for Yaakov. All it would take is one heart to heart conversation with Yitzchak and they could parent collaboratively, and yet that never happened.

To be sure, the Ramban does suggest numerous narratives that would justify Rivka's surprising silence. Perhaps she thought that Yitzchak received the same prophecy. Maybe it was offensive to Yitzchak that she went to the "competition" for guidance. Possibly the prophecy could drive Yitzchak into non-action altogether. Yet, in apparent resignation that the questions loomed far greater than the answers he concluded, Ramban writes "Perhaps it was all orchestrated carefully by G-d so that Yaakov would be blessed, and Eisav as well with the blessing of the sword, And by Him alone actions are understood". In other words, for years and years Hashem was controlling the conversations of Rivka and Yitzchak in order to bring about the berachos in this surreptitious manner. However, the takeaway of that is beyond our ability to probe.

Nevertheless, Rav Yitzchak Vorkover, long-time friend of the first Gerer Rebbe and antecedent of the Amshinover dynasty, did give us an appreciation. It resonates with me and I am indebted to Rav Yaakov Rackov, son of the beloved rav of Gateshead, Rav Betzalel Rackov zt"l and a rosh kollel in Beitar, for sharing his insight with me.

How can we attach meaning to a definitive and decisive moment that finds Yaakov posing as Eisav dressed in Eisav's clothing? He explained that this is how Hashem lets us know that even if there will be times when Yaakov's offspring wear Eisav's clothing, the beracha will still be totally intact; the legacy of Avraham unequivocally and unquestionably will still define us. In other words, for over sixty years, Hashem orchestrated that there never was the right moment for Rivka to share the mandate that she received during pregnancy; that Rivka would continuously eavesdrop on Yitzchak's conversations; that at all times, Rivka would strategize how she will seize the moment to grab the berachos. All this so that even millennia later and maybe often in between, when Jews would look in the mirror and see all the outward and inward trappings of foreign cultures, they would simultaneously feel embraced by the berachos and missions bestowed by Yitzchak Avinu.

Indeed, the "birchas Avraham", though an inseparable part of the package of the first berachos (see Ramban , ibid), were given separately to Yaakov as he fled from Eisav who was bent on killing his brother. At that time Yaakov was as clearly distinct and as distanced from Eisav as he will ever be, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. That describes how, albeit in comfort and peacefulness, we will always be the best suited heirs for the "birchas Avraham".

May we be granted the wisdom and the courage to distinguish ourselves and carry our legacy forward with absolute pride in peace and health. May we not need to rely on Hashem's patience with His chosen children even if they will resemble, at times, the brother who surrendered his bechora.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Yaakov and Esav: Closeness and Alienation

Yonat Lemberger

In our portion of Toldot, a relationship is forged – between Yaakov and Esav, between Israel and Edom; a relationship so complex, yet so fascinating. Much like a suspense novel with twists and turns, our story is both sensational and sensual. It is a story that holds true even

now, and continues to shape our worldview till this day.

Esav's character, as an idol worshipper and a killer, is well known. The Midrash (Bereshit Rabbah 63, 8) says:
"'…ruddy all over…' – Rabi Aba bar Kahana said: a murderer in his entirety…'And Esav came from the field, and he was faint' – after having killed a man. As is written in Jeremiah (4, 31): '…my soul is faint before the murderers.'"

Let me suggest another prism through which to view Esav.

The Torah commanded us – "You shall not hate your brother in your heart" (Vayikra 19, 17). The Torah also instructed us – "Thou shall not abhor an Edomite for he is thy brother" (Devarim 23, 8). Edom is Esav.

Our Sages expanded on this idea: "'You are to pass through the borders of your brethren, the children of Esav' (Devarim 2, 4) – 'your brethren' – these are the sons of Esav. Despite the fact that they are the sons of Esav, they are still your brethren! As is written: 'Your brethren that hate you have said' (Isaiah 66, 5) – although they hate you, they are still your brethren! The same idea is expressed in the following verse: 'For the violence done to your brother Yaakov' (Ovadiah 1, 10) – although he spills your blood and robs you, he is still your brother." (Devarim Rabbah, Otzar HaMidrash, Devarim 2, 4) A brother who murders? What kind of relationship is this?

Let's revert to the beginning of the story. Rivka is barren. God hearkens to Yitzhak's prayers. Rivka conceives and "behold, there were twins in her womb". This Gordian Knot between Yaakov and Esav is described in a very picturesque manner as early on as Rivka's pregnancy.

The twins in Rivka's womb were both the fruits of Yitzhak's prayers. Can there be greater closeness than this? However, right from the outset, the Torah dampens any hope for an idyllic existence and optimism.

"And the children struggled within her" – the Hebrew word, va'yitrotzatzu [they struggled], conveys discomfort, dispute and even the desire to be set free. But all of this happens "within her", the struggle is confined to a limited space, from which the twins cannot break away. They hold onto each other inside their mother's womb, and they don't let go even when they emerge – Yaakov's hand "had hold on Esav's heel", and this very heel will be etched into the younger brother's name – "And he was called Yaakov [from the Hebrew word akev = heel].

The Midrash foresaw the grim future, the struggles and clashes that would go on for generations yet:
"'And the children struggled' – Rabi Yochanan said, both run to kill each other. Reish Lakish says, both violate that which the other deems important." (Bereshit Rabbah, 63, 6).

The call or code which guides the conduct of any nation, or by which its identity is defined, is usually determined by the conflicts and clashes with the competing nation. The strife described here is expected to impact the way in which the identity of the sons of Yaakov and the people of Esav are ultimately shaped.

Furthermore, God's words to Rivka do not reflect a real separation or detachment: "And the Lord said unto her: Two nations are in thy womb, and two peoples shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger."

This verse, too, depicts the complexity of the relationship between Esav and Yaakov: two distinct nations that will "become separated" the minute they leave the womb. However, the separation is not a complete one, as the Torah immediately adds "and the elder shall serve the younger." They will always

be connected. They might be different nations, but tied to each other nonetheless.

After God's words to Rivka, the Torah emphasizes the following fact – "and behold there were twins in her womb." The Hebrew word for twins is written with one letter missing – tomim – instead of te'omim, and the exegetes saw this as an expression of the separateness within the closeness. The Netziv writes as follows: "It is written tomim and not te'omim to teach us that it was not as she [Rivka] had thought – that the distinction between them will only be visible upon birth, but in her womb they are like one; rather, even inside the womb they were already tomim – the incomplete word, missing the letter alef – to show us how disconnected they were one from the other."

Twins yet distinct; joined yet separate. One might call it a hybrid reality of sorts: detachment and attachment existing concurrently.

The Torah speaks equivocally in other matters concerning Esav and Yaakov: Each of the brothers shaped his own identity. Yaakov is "a quiet man dwelling in tents" while Esav is "a cunning hunter, a man of the field." The Torah describes explicitly the parents' attitude to both: "And Yitzhak loved Esav because he ate of his venison; and Rivka loved Yaakov."

Our Sages maintained that Esav's predetermined fate, while still in his mother's womb, would be that of an idol worshipper and murderer. Interestingly, his father never viewed him as such. Rather confusing.

The ambivalent attitude towards Yaakov and Esav can also be found in the story of Esav's selling his birthright to Yaakov. We will not elaborate on this matter, but the question remains: Who is ultimately considered the firstborn? Furthermore, how is being the firstborn significant? Is it a mere technicality, nothing more than a description of who emerged first from the womb? Or perhaps it is a legal status that is even tradable; or a social/family rank that can be passed on?

Let's revert for a moment to Yitzhak's love for Esav. The Torah describes this love as a profound one, which leads Yitzhak to believing that Esav is the son most deserving of the Blessing of Avraham; Esav is the son that will continue the family line. This can be clearly seen from the way Yitzhak reacts to the trickery used by Yaakov to obtain the blessing. It is quite obvious that Yitzhak's decision to give the blessing to Esav was not arbitrary, but based on principle. Yitzhak is hardly amused when he realizes he had been deceived: "And Yitzhak trembled very exceedingly, and said: Who then is he that has taken venison, and brought it me, and I have eaten of all before you came, and have blessed him? Indeed, he shall be blessed."

And Esav's response is likewise solemn: "When Esav heard the words of his father, he cried with an exceeding great and bitter cry, and said unto his father: Bless me, even me also, O my father. And he said: Thy brother came with guile, and has taken away thy blessing. And he said: Is not he rightly named Yaakov? For he has supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and, behold, now he has taken away my blessing. And he said: Have you not reserved a blessing for me?"

Much like when the birthright was sold, in this matter of the blessing, we are once again left with questions. Indeed, Yitzhak blessed Yaakov with the Blessing of Avraham. However, when he gave the blessing, he was sure he was giving it to Esav, and his intentions were directed to the latter. In such a situation, who is, in fact, the son who is blessed? Who is the ultimate receiver of the blessing – the person standing before the one who bestows the blessing,

or is it the person to whom the blesser's intention was directed?

Prima facie, the Torah seems to give a clear-cut answer: Yaakov is the blessed son. However, it is no coincidence that the Torah creates struggles and complications when depicting the relationship between the two brothers, the latter's relations with their parents as well as that of the two nations-to-be. Consequently, we are left with a bitter-sweet blessing.

This once again takes us back to the words of God to Rivka during her pregnancy: "Two nations are in thy womb, and two peoples shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger." The various exegetes, much like our Sages, are not decisive as to who shall serve whom, who is the master and who is the servant. According to the Midrash, the Torah is deliberately ambiguous:

"God uses an ambiguous formulation deliberately. If He had wished to clearly say that the elder shall be a slave to the younger, He would have used the Hebrew formulation verav ya'avod la'tza'ir, and had He wished to say unequivocally that the younger shall be slave to the elder, He would have said – verav ya'avod ba'tzair. But the Torah's formulation, leaves the meaning equivocal – each of the parties may serve the other, depending on the times." (Ha'amek Davar on Bereshit 25, 23)

The two nations will never become truly separated. The connection between them is perpetual and, according to the Midrash, it is hardly clear who is superior and who is inferior; who is the head and who is the tail – it all depends on the times.

Yaakov's conduct, as well as that of his mother Rivka, remains disputed. After receiving the blessing, Yaakov is forced to flee to Charan, and remain in exile for many years, falling victim to recurring acts of manipulation and trickery, even on the part of his own children.

The blessing attained using slyness; the purchase of the birthright; the Torah's emphasis on Yitzhak's love for Esav – all of the above present the Torah's complex position on Esav himself, on the relationship between Yaakov and Esav and, later on, the relationship between the Israelites and the Edomites. One might even say that the dichotomy between these two nations is intentionally blurred.

In the first chapter of his book titled Two Nations in Your Womb, Israel Yuval identifies the differences between Yaakov and Esav as originating in their parents:
Yitzhak was a man of the field: "And Yitzhak went out to meditate in the field at eventide."

The first encounter with Rivka took place in the field.

When Rivka sees Yitzhak for the first time, it is written of her: "And she took her veil and covered herself." The veil is much like the covering of the tent, as is written immediately afterwards: "And the servant told Yitzhak all the things he had done. And Yitzhak brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah." Rivka is brought into the tent, and is concealed within, while Yitzhak is a man of the field.

Same holds true for their sons: "And Esav was a cunning hunter, a man of the field, and Yaakov was a quiet man, dwelling in tents."

Hence, it is clear why "And Yitzhak loved Esav (because he ate of his venison); and Rivka loved Yaakov." Yitzhak's love for Esav and Rivka's love for Yaakov is not whimsical. The love of both was profound because it reflected their values and worldview.

Yitzhak the farmer, the man of the field, sees his son Esav, a

man of the field himself, as his successor. Rivka, who is hidden in her tent, loves her son Yaakov, "the dweller of tents", and views him as the successor.

Esav is the son of Yitzhak: "And it came to pass, that when Yitzhak was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, he called Esav his elder son, and said unto him: My son; and he said unto him: Here am I." Yaakov is Rivka's son: "And Rivka spoke unto Yaakov her son, saying: Behold, I heard thy father speak unto your brother…"

But ultimately, the separation between the two brothers, Yaakov and Esav, is not so extreme and final; they remain connected, tied in a Gordian Knot that cannot be untied. Furthermore, Esav's world cannot be looked upon as being all-bad. After all, Esav's core traits, as a man of the field, are rooted deeply in Yitzhak. Esav is Yitzhak's beloved son. This is not a superficial love; rather, a love that penetrates the very essence of Esav's soul.

The intricate relationship between the two brothers is further manifested during their encounter upon Yaakov's return from Charan, after many years in exile. This is how the Torah describes the crux of this meeting: " And Esav ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him; and they wept."

On the above verse, the Midrash says as follows: "Rabi Shimon bar Yochai says: It is a known fact that Esav hates Yaakov, why then did he kiss him? Because at that moment, his [Esav's] heart was filled with compassion and he kissed him [Yaakov] with his whole heart." (Sifre on Beha'alotcha, 69)

The Midrash on the portion of VaYishlach says thus: "The word vayishakeihu [and he kissed him] has punctuation markings above it. Rabi Shimon ben Elazar explained it thus: This teaches us that his heart was filled with compassion at that moment, and he kissed him with his whole heart. Rabi Yanai responded and said: If this be so, why do we need special markings [above the word]? The reason must be that he did not really intend to kiss him, but approached in order to bite him. However, Yaakov's neck turned into marble and Esav's teeth broke. Why then is it written 'And they wept'? One [Yaakov] wept for his neck; Esav [wept] for his teeth." (Bereshit Rabbah, 78, 9)

Our Sages deliberate on this sibling relationship, focusing especially on Esav's attitude to Yaakov and what this might teach us about Esav's personality. Who then is Esav? What is his true nature? One thing is clear – the Torah depicts a warm and loving encounter between the two: " And Esav ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him; and they wept." But immediately following this description, we are told of a cautious separation: "And Esav returned that day on his way to Seir… and Yaakov journeyed to Sukkot…"

This encounter comes to a close with the extraordinary words uttered by Yaakov: "Nay, I pray thee, if now I have found favor in thy sight, then receive my present at my hand; forasmuch as I have seen thy face, as one sees the face of God, and you were pleased with me."

Yaakov says to Esav that looking at his face – the face of a hunter and idol worshipper – is like "one who sees the face of God".

The Talmud (tractate of Sotah 41) and various Torah exegetes (like Rashi) discuss this exceptional verse and try to tone it down by saying that these are either words of flattery uttered in fear, or else they are a threat. Be it as it may, these words were uttered. Yaakov could have chosen less powerful

words, be they flattery or threat. This could only mean that the words Yaakov chose to describe his experience when looking into Esav's face are meaningful, if only for the fact that they were uttered by Yaakov.

Esav, the twin brother who sold his birthright and went on to lose his blessing, never lived to see Yitzhak's sincere love for him truly materialize. Esav, the murderer, the idol worshipper, is nonetheless – a brother. "Although he spills your blood and robs you – he is still your brother." (ibid.)

The brothers struggled within their mother's womb, and this strife will forever lie heavy on the two nations, walking side-by-side along the path of history, jointly and separately.

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perz

A People and A Land

There is a remarkable connection between the Land of Israel and the People of Israel – a connection, a chemistry, an alchemy unlike the connection between any other people to a land.

And it is rooted in this week's Parasha.

We know that in the last 150 years or so since the agricultural settlements were built by the pioneers, this land has yielded impossible results. Israel has been able to grow incredible fruit and vegetables, exported globally, out of places that were thought impossible – arid land, deserts, even the air using hydroponic technology. Drip irrigation, cloud seeding, desalinization – Israel has also turned places with so little water into those with useable water and even a surplus.

A water and agricultural marvel.

Both of these things are rooted in the original pioneers – our forefathers, as we find in this week's Parasha. Wherever Yitzchak went, he found wells – he goes to the land of Gerar where the Philistines couldn't find water and yet everywhere he went and dug, he found water. Yitzchak was in this area, in today's Negev Desert, during a famine. Yet we are told that when Yitzchak planted in that land, during a time of famine, he was blessed by Hashem with a one hundred-fold yield.

Since time immemorial until today, there seems to be an alchemy, a marvelous marvel of a connection between the land and the Jewish people. May this continue to grow and flower, because it is not only a blessing for Israel but for all of humanity.