

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

TOLEDOT

Haftarah: Shemuel I 20:18-42

NOVEMBER 1-2, 2013 29 HESHVAN 5774

Remember to move your clocks back one hour on Saturday night.

Rosh Hodesh Kislev will be celebrated on Sunday and Monday, November 3 & 4.

Candles and Mincha: 5:33 PM – From now til spring, Mincha is at candle lighting

SHABBAT 9:00 AM

KIDDUSH SPONSORS NEEDED

New Shabbat Morning Children's Program with Morah Avital. For children ages 0 to 5. 10:30 to 11:30 in the playroom. And Shabbat Morning Kids Program with Nina upstairs in the Rabbi's study. Stories, Tefillah, Games, Snacks and more

Shabbat Afternoon Oneg with Rabbi Colish. Games, Parsha, Stories, Snacks and more. 4:00PM

Mincha: 5:00 PM –

Seudah Shelishi and a Class with Rav Aharon 5:30 –

Evening Service (Arbit): 6:20 PM - Shabbat Ends: 6:32 PM

WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE

Shaharit Sunday 8:00, Mon-Fri at 7:00 (6:55 Mondays and Thursdays)

WEEKDAY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE

Monday Night Class with Rabba Yenai – 7PM

Next Shabbat November 9, we change to early Mincha. Even though our plan by popular request of those who come to Tefilah and class was to change the starting time to 8:30, it seems that the ladies have vetoed the decision stating that they would not be able to arrive in Synagogue for the Torah reading. As we dont want to deprive them of this, we will move the starting time back to 9AM. Unfortunately this means that we cannot have our full Shabbat our classes throughout the winter unless we finish early. We will try to start on time and expedite the Tefilah to finish by 11:15 so we can get a 20 minute class in between 11:40 and noon depending on when we can pray Mincha each week. G-d told Abraham to listen Sarah, so we'll take that example and listen to the ladies on this one. So next Shabbat we start at 9AM

We will return for Arbit 15 minutes after Shabbat ends. And we will have a children's program each week revolving between game night and movie night with pizza forty five minutes after Shabbat ends. Adult movie night at Lido. Details will follow this week.

We are hoping to have sponsors to assist us in planning monthly melave malkas with guest speakers or special movies that will be of interest. Stay tuned.

We are changing the planned Friday night dinner for Erev Shabbat Hanukah/ Thanksgiving. Many people will be away. We will instead make this communal Shabbat dinner the week prior on Friday night November 22nd, Shabbat Vayesheb. Please join us.

It will be Chinese. RSVP a must to either Patti, Tina or email Hindy at hmizny@gmail.com. \$20 for those 10 and up \$ 10 for kids 3-9. Last year we had a Thanksgiving dinner on Friday night and it was a huge success. We would like everyone to prepare a minute or two of what Sandy Taught Me!

We are happy to announce that in addition to the Friday night dinner we are planning for November 22, Mr. Richard Altabe, Headmaster Yeshivat Shaare Torah in Brooklyn and former member of the Sephardic Shul, whose father was a past president and close friend of rabbi Abittan ZT"L and whose mother designed the beautiful stain glass windows in the front of our Shul, will be joining us a scholar in residence for Shabbat November 22-23. Mr. Altabe will be speaking at the dinner and again shabbat during lunch. Please make sure to send in your reservations to Patti, Tina or email Hindy (hmizny@gmail.com). We look forward to a wonderful Shabbat together.

Dr. Reeve Simon - Whose Jerusalem? The role of religion and politics in the history of Jerusalem. Motzeh Shabbat -Saturday night, December 14 at 7:30pm.

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Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue, 17th Floor, Artistic Frame at 4PM – Please join us! 212-289-2100
 B'H, I will be in Florida this Shabbat

Editors Notes

Heroes

It is difficult to find a Biblical figure more holy than our forefather Yishak Avinu, Isaac. After being bound on the alter, Isaac was imbued with an extra measure of holiness. This Kedusha made it impossible for him to leave the land of Israel. The Midrash goes further and tells us that Isaac actually lived in Gan Eden for two years following the Akeydah. This is not a man of this world. Furthermore, he has the quality of Gevurah – of strict justice – meaning that there is neither bending nor mercy.

So how is it conceivable for us to even imagine that Esav was able to pull the wool over his father's eyes? Is it even remotely possible that Isaac was completely fooled by his son over the course of sixty years?

I think not!

If that's the case, how can we possibly understand Isaac's desire to bless Esav?

Let's examine the blessing that Isaac later gives Jacob before he leaves home. "May G-d bless you... become a host of nations... give you and your seed the blessing of Avraham... inherit the land... which G-d gave Avraham".

Compare that with the physical blessing Isaac meant to give Esav. In that blessing Isaac speaks of, "Elokim giving from the dew of heaven and from the fat of the land and much grain and wine". One blessing pales in the face of the other. One seems to be a physical blessing while the other is a blessing to continue the job that Abraham began.

Rabbi Abittan z'sl explained that Isaac understood that Esav was a physically active man, a warrior, having possibly some of the qualities of his father

Abraham. While he, Isaac and Jacob might both be considered men of the study hall. Sometimes we aggrandize the qualities we imagine that others have and we believe we lack. Isaac hoped that his sons would form a partnership with Esav taking care of the physical while Jacob managed the spiritual. Esav would be the King while Jacob the scholar. This would be the true Yisachar and Zevulun bond.

This becomes evident when we see that Jacob waited for Joseph to be born before leaving his father in law Lavan and returning to the land. Joseph was a match for Esav. We know that Joseph becomes the ruler of the world per se and the one who provides physical sustenance to all. Joseph becomes what Esav could have been.

The Rabbis also compare King David with Esav. Both are red and ruddy. David is the warrior king. He is called my servant by G-d again and again. This is what Esav could have become.

It seems that Isaac was hoping what we all hope for. He wanted his boys to live and work in harmony. He was telling us that in society there must be room for two rulers. One who is king of the physical and who supports, protects and nourishes. The other is the king of the spiritual who studies, teaches and inspires.

Rashi uses the example of Antoninus (possibly Marcus Aurelius) and Rav Yehudah HaNasi when discussing the two nations in Rebecca's womb. Imagine a partnership between the emperor of Rome and the prince of the Sanhedrin and the Academy.

Throughout history, we have had both, for example Rabbi Akiva and Bar Kochva and we've had people who had the unique qualities of both like the Maccabees.

The state of Israel has had many heroes in its short history. Some are heroes of the spirit and some of the body. To mention just a few:

Haham Ovadia Yosef can certainly go down as one of our greatest heroes. Rav Ovadia became Sephardi Chief Rabbi in 1973. He is generally considered to have been one of the greatest rabbinical authorities in the modern Jewish world.

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hachohen Kook was often the bridge of communication between the various Jewish sectors, including the secular Jewish Zionist leadership, the Religious Zionists and non-Zionist Orthodox Jews.

Golda Meir is best known as the first, and only, female Prime Minister of Israel. She was a long-time leader of the Zionist movement in Israel after making Aliyah from America in 1921. Meir's life was so extraordinary that many Hollywood films have been made of her life.

Hannah Senesh became a symbol of idealism and self-sacrifice. She made Aliyah in 1939 and joined the Haganah. During World War Two she volunteered for the British army to be parachuted into Nazi held Europe to assist the war effort. Unfortunately, she was captured, beaten and tortured mercilessly. She was shot by a firing squad, but eventually her remains were transported to Israel. Her songs and poems became famous.

Yonatan Netanyahu was a member of the Israel Defense Forces elite Sayeret Matkal unit. He was killed during Operation Thunderbolt, which successfully secured the release of hostages held by Palestinian and German terrorists in Entebbe, Uganda. The operation was later renamed Operation Yonatan and 'Yoni' became, and remains, a national hero.

Ariel Sharon was one of Israel's greatest war heroes. Sharon played a significant role in all of Israel's wars from 1948 through the Second Intifada. Perhaps his finest moment was in 1973 when he led the crossing of the Suez Canal helping to secure an Israeli victory in the war. In 2001, Sharon became Prime Minister, leading the fight against the rising Intifada.

Menachem Begin first gained notoriety as the head of the Zionist underground group the Irgun. Upon the founding of the State, he formed the Herut (Freedom) Party which became the main opposition party in Israeli politics for almost 30 years until his stunning victory in the 1977 elections. As Prime Minister in 1977, Begin signed a peace accord with Egypt which earned him the Nobel Peace Prize. He later approved the successful bombing of the Iraqi nuclear reactor at Osirak in 1981.

This week, we were invited to a reading of a new play entitled Damascus Square. Damascus Square tells the story of Eli Cohen. The reading took place in the Safra Synagogue at the invitation of our dear friend, Rabbi Elie Abadie. The play / musical was co-written by Shai Baitel, an expert in Middle Eastern politics and international affairs. He served at the United Nations and at the Israeli Ministry of Justice's Department of International Agreements and International Litigation in legal positions. The reading was led by Multi-Tony Award nominee Tovah Feldshuh, along with Richard Blake, Bradley Dean,

as well as Etai BenShlomo and Natalie Ellis. The evening was sponsored by Joey Allaham's Prime Hospitality.

Ms. Feldshuh is an incredible actress. I recall how moved I was when she brought Golda Meir to life. Here she was reading as the Mosad handler of Eli Cohen. Although seeing the story as a musical and taking into account the artistic license allowed, when the reading/concert ended, it was evident that almost everyone there would go home and google Eli Cohen and try to learn as much about him as they could.

Realizing how little people know about modern Jewish history and that includes Jews, both secular and observant, the reading definitely strikes a chord deep down and encourages one to want to know more.

We wrote about Eli Cohen in the past. Very briefly from the play's website: Eli Cohen was an Israeli spy. He is best known for his work in Syria, where he developed close relationships with the political and military hierarchy and became the Chief Adviser to the Minister of Defense. He was eventually exposed and executed in Syria in 1965. The intelligence he gathered is claimed to have been an important factor in Israel's success in the Six Day War.

Cohen was born in Alexandria to a devout Orthodox Jewish family in 1924. After the creation of Israel his parents and three brothers left Egypt for Israel in 1949. However, in December 1957, Cohen was forced to leave Egypt and he immigrated to Israel. In 1957, Eli was recruited by Israeli Military Intelligence. He then left the military and found work as a filing clerk and married Nadia in 1959.

The Mossad recruited Eli when they started looking for an agent to infiltrate the Syrian government. He briefly moved to Argentina to establish his cover in 1961, then moved to Damascus, Syria in 1962 under the cover name of Kamel Amin Thaabet. He rapidly gained the confidence of senior government officials including Amin Al Hafiz who eventually became Prime Minister.

He toured the Golan Heights and expressed sympathy for the soldiers in the Sun. He famously recommended that Eucalyptus trees be planted at every bunker location. Eventually, the Syrian government began to suspect the infiltration of a spy and using Soviet radio tracking equipment, they isolated Eli's transmissions to Israel. Eli was caught on January 24th, 1965. Despite a large attempt at gaining clemency for Eli, he was executed on May

18th, 1965. (Please see the sidebar for a timeline of Eli Cohen's life).

Our forefather Isaac saw both of his sons as potential heroes. He hoped that with encouragement, Esav might become the person he was certainly capable of becoming. Imagine the pain he felt when Esav came in and Isaac suddenly realized what his son would never become. It is impossible not to shudder ourselves when we read, "And Isaac trembled a great trembling" when Esav finally entered. Rashi quoting the Midrash explains that Isaac saw Gehinam opening under Esav and for the first time understood that this son was truly wicked and would not do teshuva.

We are a nation of heroes and potential heroes. Let us remember all of our heroes. Let us read about them, talk about them and tell our children about them.

May we all be worthy to raise children and children who will follow in the steps of their forefathers and truly live up to their capabilities.

Shabbat Shalom

David Bibi

Eli Cohen - Chronology

1914 Shaul Cohen emigrates from Aleppo Syria to Egypt.

Dec 16, 1924: Eliahu (Eli) Cohen is born in Alexandria, Egypt.

March 22, 1945: 2 young Jewish Palestinians are hanged in Egypt for the political assassination of former British Colonial Secretary Lord Moyne.

Jan 1947: Eli Cohen chooses to enlist in the Egyptian army, rather than pay the proscribed sum expected of young Jews. Eli is declared ineligible on the grounds of questionable loyalty.

Nov 1947: Increased harassment by the Moslem Brotherhood forces Eli to leave university and study at home.

1949/1950: Continuing troubles provoke many Jewish families, including the Cohen family to leave Egypt. Eli remains to try and finish a degree in electronics.

1951: Following a military coup, an anti-Zionist campaign is initiated in Egypt. Eli is arrested on suspicion of engaging in Zionist activities.

Jan 27, 1955: An Israeli intelligence unit operating in Egypt and attempting to destroy Egyptian relationships with western powers, is

uncovered. The unit sabotaged American and British installations expecting that this would be considered the work of Egyptians. After a trial, two of the group's members are executed. Eli had aided the unit and was implicated, however no link between Eli and the accused could be found.

Dec 1956: Official anti-Semitic attacks, house raids and mass arrests continue to persecute Egyptian Jewry. Eli is eventually driven out of Egypt by the Ministry of the Interior. With the help of the Jewish Agency Eli travels to Israel via Naples by boat.

August 1959: Eli marries Nadia in a modest Sephardic ceremony in Tel Aviv.

Late 1960: Eli works in various occupations until he is persuaded by the Mossad to join it. After months of intensive training Eli is sent to Argentina for the first phase of his mission, adopting the alias Kamal Amin Ta'abet.

Dec 1961: Following a military coup in Syria, Eli leaves Argentina and travels via Israel, Zurich and Egypt to Damascus.

1962: Eli takes a risk beyond the call of duty to deliver an explosive letter to Adolf Eichmann's negotiator Rademacher who was in hiding in Syria.

Feb 1961: Eli joins the Baath party promising to become 'a true example of the struggling Arab'.

March 1961: In a military coup, the Baath party seizes power in Syria.

1962-1965: Eli visits Syria's southern frontier zone and supplies Israel with photographs and sketch plans that were to be of inestimable value during the Six Day War.

October 5, 1963: Eli attends the Sixth National Convention Of The Baath. As a member of the Syrian National Revolutionary Command and volunteer worker for Radio Damascus Eli had access to most sessions, while high level contacts allowed him entry to closed sessions.

1964: Eli discovers Syrian plans to divert the headwaters of the Jordan to cut off Israel's water supply. Eli looks into the plans of Al-Fatah (Palestine National Liberation Movement) to use guerrilla warfare to attack Northern Israel. Eli's brother Maurice is one of the operatives employed by Mossad to receive Eli's messages.

November 1964: Eli returns to his home in Bat Yam for the birth of his third child. Eli assures Nadia that there will be only one more trip abroad before he returns to Israel permanently.

November 13, 1964: Following a Syrian artillery attack on the Israeli settlements of Dan, Dafna and Shear Yishuv, Israeli jets successfully bomb Syrian positions. Information Eli had provided on the Syrian artillery positions proves to be vital.

Jan 24, 1965:

Syrian efforts to find a top-level leak are stepped up. With the help of Soviet tracking equipment and a period of radio silence, it was hoped that any illegal transmissions could be identified. In a pre-dawn raid, Eli Cohen is caught while transmitting to Israel. Eli is interrogated and tortured. Meanwhile, Israeli Foreign Minister Golda Meir leads a campaign, petitioning the international community to force Damascus to consider the consequences of hanging Eli. Diplomats, Prime Ministers, and Pope Paul VI try to intercede.

Feb 28 - March 19 1965:

Eli's is tried in a military tribunal, but is denied legal defense.

May 8, 1965:

The sentence of the 'special tribunal' is announced at a press conference, Eli Cohen is to be executed by hanging. There would be no appeal.

May 18, 1965:

Eli is allowed to see a Rabbi and to write a final letter to his wife Nadia.

Eli is hanged before a crowd of more than 10,000.

June, 1967: Aided by the brave intelligence work of Eli Cohen, Israel defeats the combined Arab armies in the Six Day War

Canaanite women at the age of 40 (2148) brings disappointment to Yitzchak and Rivkah. In 2171, when Yakov and Esav are 63 and Yitzchak is 123, Yitzchak blesses Yakov and Esav. The Parsha details the duplicity of Yakov and Rivkah in fooling Yitzchak.

6th Aliya: Yitzchak blesses Yakov with spiritual and material gain, after which Esav returns to discover Yakov's plot. He receives his own blessing for material gain, and is determined to kill Yakov. Rivkah, fearful for Yakov's life, convinces Yitzchak to send Yakov to her brother Lavan in search of a shiduch - a wife. Yitzchak confirms on Yakov the future of the Jewish nation before his departure to Lavan.

7th Aliya: Yakov departs for Padan Aram, and Esav marries the daughter of Yishmael. (his 1/2 1st cousin)

Being that tomorrow is Rosh Chodesh, the Haftorah is exclusive for a Shabbos that coincides with Erev Rosh Chodesh. The Haftorah is from Shmuel I Capt. 20. It describes the emotional parting between Yehonasan the son of Shaul, and Dovid, the future king of Israel. The Gemara states that the greatest love ever manifested between two people was the love that existed between Yehonasan and Dovid.

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

1st Aliya: Yitzchak is 40 years old (2088) when he marries Rivkah. After 20 years, Esav and Yakov are born. The Parsha jumps from their birth to Yakov's purchase of the 1st born rights from Esav at the age of 15. (2123 - the day Avraham died)

2nd Aliya: The Parsha returns to the story of Yitzchak and Rivkah and the famine which forces them to settle among the Plishtim. Yitzchak, like his father before him, has a moral confrontation with Avimelech, after which his fields are uniquely prolific and financially successful.

3rd Aliya: Yitzchak's financial success leads to jealousy with his Plishtim neighbors. He re-digs Avraham's wells, resulting in a confrontation with the Plishtim over water rights. He moves back to Beer Sheva.

4th Aliya: Hashem (G-d), in a dream, confirms for Yitzchak the future of his children. Avimelech, the King of the Plishtim, and his General, Phicol, approach Yitzchak to make a peace treaty.

5th Aliya: The treaty between Yitzchak and the Plishtim is celebrated. The Parsha returns to the story of Yakov and Esav. Esav's marriage to two

Dovid had already been anointed by Shmuel to succeed Shaul as king, and his relationship with his mentor, King Shaul, had deteriorated to the extent that Dovid had to flee for his life. Yehonasan, wanting to ascertain the extent of Shaul's hatred for Dovid, devised a plan, whereby Dovid would be absent from Shaul's Rosh Chodesh meal. If his father acted lovingly in asking about Dovid's absence, then it would be safe for Dovid to return. If not, Dovid would flee. In the end, Dovid was forced to flee Shaul's wrath. The extraordinary aspect of Yehonasan's love for Dovid was the fact that he protected Dovid with his life, even though he knew that Dovid would succeed Shaul as king, rather than himself.

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

“The voice is the voice of Ya’akob and the hands are the hands of Esav.” (Beresheet 27:22)

The Midrash explains this verse by noting that the power of the Jew lies in his voice – that is to say, in his prayer and Torah study. The power of Esav, however, lies in his hands – that is to say, his military strength. When the Jew realizes the source of his strength he need not fear the strength of Esav. It is only when he ignores his own strength and instead usurps that which is rightfully Esav's that he must be concerned with the might of Esav.

Rabbi Ephraim Nisenbaum writes that Rav Shlomo Wolbe was asked to comment on the hot issue of Yeshivah students in Israel who do not serve in the army. We should note that Rabbi Wolbe passed away quite a number of years ago and it seems that this issue was contentious even then, as it is today. Rav Wolbe explained that there are various elements employed in fighting a war: the air force, the navy, ground troops, and so forth. Their goal is shared, but they use different means to achieve the goal.

Rav Wolbe said that he had spoken with many groups of soldiers in the IDF, and they repeatedly mentioned that they feel more secure knowing that people are praying and studying for their success. Torah study and prayer are an important means of defense, and the Yeshivah students' service is no less important than that of the soldiers involved in active duty. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Reuven Semah

“They called his name Esav” (Beresheet 25:25)

Not only did Ya'akob and Esav differ in the way they looked, their names also had different implications. Ya'akob comes from the word *ceg* which means heel, and this signifies humility, amongst other traits. Esav comes from the word *huag* - already finished - because he was born with hair, nails and teeth like an adult who is already finished. The implication of this name is that he doesn't need to improve, he is already finished, whereas Ya'akob means someone on a lower level who has to grow higher. Indeed, Ya'akob got his name changed to *ktrah* - Yisrael - which means 'prince,' because he recognized in himself the need to improve.

Many of us are content to stay on a certain level without thinking about growth. The fact that we are on this level means we grew this far, so why continue? That is the way Esav looked upon himself because he felt he was already finished. We who came from Ya'akob have within us the capacity to grow by realizing we are not there yet. So long as we have the energy, we must strive for higher levels, and as is guaranteed by Hashem, “He who comes to be purified will be helped from Heaven.” Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

The Long-Term Effects of Negative Influences
The Torah in Parashat Toledot tells that Esav married two women, both of whom were idolaters, and these marriages caused great distress to his two righteous parents, Yishak and Ribka. Significantly, the Torah writes that Esav's wives were a cause of aggravation “to Yishak and Ribka,” mentioning Yishak before Ribka. A number of Rabbis understood this to mean that Yishak was more disturbed by these marriages than Ribka was. Yishak grew up in the home of Abraham and Sara, and thus had little exposure to idolatry, whereas Ribka was raised in the home of Betuel, a corrupt idolater. She was accustomed to such beliefs and behavior, and thus although she was a righteous woman and was obviously very distressed by Esav's choice of wives, her distress was less than that felt by Yishak.

When we consider the chronology of these events, a striking lesson emerges from this insight. Yishak was forty years old when he and Ribka married (25:20), and it was only twenty years later, when he was sixty, that their children, Yaakob and Esav, were born (25:26). Esav got married at the age of forty (26:34), and thus Ribka had been married for sixty years by the time Esav married. Imagine – she had been living with Yishak, a great Sadik, for sixty years, and yet she was still affected, if only infinitesimally, by the influences of her youth. Although she was strong enough to overcome these early influences and become a righteous woman, nevertheless, some effects still lingered. Even after sixty years, she did not completely rid herself of the impact caused by her exposure to idolatry.

This should serve as a stern warning to us, that we must exercise extreme care regarding what we choose to expose ourselves and our children to. It is simply incorrect to say that we won't be affected, that we can read, see or hear whatever we like without being influenced. Even many years later, the media we expose ourselves to has an impact. None of us can claim that he is greater than Ribka Imenu. And if she was not impervious to the spiritually harmful effects of negative influences, then we are certainly vulnerable – and all the more so. It behooves each and every one of us to limit our exposure to hostile influences as much as possible, so we can continue growing and advancing in our spiritual development, and follow the example of greatness set for us by our righteous Abot and Imahot.

RABBI ELI MANSOUR
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Rabbi Wein

The troubling question that has persisted throughout the ages of biblical commentary on this week's parsha is: What is Yitzchak thinking in regard to giving the blessings and heritage of Avraham to Eisav? Basically the comments and explanations fall into two categories. One of them is that Yitzchak is fooled by Eisav and is really unaware of his true nature and wanton behavior.

Rashi, quoting Midrash, interprets that Eisav "hunted" his father with his pious speech and cunning conversation. Yitzchak is fooled by Eisav and believes that Eisav, the man of the world and the physically powerful figure is better suited to carry on Avraham's vision than is Yaakov, the more studious and apparently more simple of the brothers.

The other opinion, more popular among the later commentators to the Torah, is that Yitzchak is aware of the shortcomings of behavior and attitude of his elder son. His desire to give the blessings to Eisav is due to his wish to redeem and save his son, and to enable Eisav to turn his life around and become a worthy heir to the traditions of his father and grandfather. He thinks that by somehow giving the blessings to Eisav, Yaakov will not really suffer any disadvantage in his life's work, while Eisav will find his way back to holiness through the blessings that he has now received.

These two divergent attitudes towards the wayward child in Jewish families is one that is enacted daily in Jewish family life. Later Yitzchaks either willfully allow themselves to be deluded regarding the behavior and lifestyle of children or they are aware of the problem and attempt to solve it with a giving nature and a plethora of blessings.

Rivkah, Eisav's mother, is not fooled by her son's apparently soothing words nor does she believe that granting him blessings will somehow accomplish any major shift in his chosen lifestyle. To a great measure she adopts a policy of triage, saving Yaakov and blessing him while thus abandoning Eisav to his own chosen wanton ways.

The Torah does not record for us the "what if" scenario – what if Eisav had received the blessings would he then have been different in behavior and attitude, belief and mission. However, from the words of the later prophets of Israel, especially those of Ovadiah, it appears to be clear that God somehow concurred with Rivkah's policy and holds Eisav to be redeemable only in the very long run of history and human events.

The verdict seems to be that one must be clear eyed and realistic about the painful waywardness and misbehavior of enemies of Yaakov, be they from within or without our immediate family and milieu. There are many painful choices that need to be made within one's lifetime and especially in family relations.

There are few pat answers to varying and difficult situations. Perhaps that is why the Torah itself does not delve too deeply into the motives of Yitzchak and Rivkah but is content merely to reflect the different emotional relationships each had with their two very different sons. The Torah emphasizes the role that human emotions play in our lives and does not consign all matters to rational thought and decision-making.

Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks

In an earlier Covenant and Conversation I quoted the Netziv (Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin, 1816-1893, dean of the yeshiva in Volozhin), who made the sharp observation that Isaac and Rebecca seem not to have communicated closely. Rebecca's "relationship with Isaac was not the same as that between Sarah and Abraham or Rachel and Jacob. When they had a problem they were not afraid to speak about it. Not so with Rebecca" (Commentary to Gen. 24: 65).

The Netziv senses this distance from the very first moment when Rebecca saw Isaac "meditating in the field" at which point she "covered herself with a veil." He comments, "She covered herself out of awe and a sense of inadequacy as if she felt she was unworthy to be his wife, and from then on this trepidation was fixed in her mind."

Their relationship, suggests Netziv, was never casual, intimate. The result was, at a series of critical moments, a failure of communication. It seems likely that Rebecca never informed Isaac of the oracle she had before the twins, Esau and Jacob, were born, in which God told her "the elder will serve the younger." That apparently is one reason she loved Jacob rather than Esau, knowing that he was the one chosen by God. If Isaac knew this, why did he favour Esau? Therefore he probably did not know, because Rebecca had not told him.

That is why, many years later, when she heard that Isaac was about to bless Esau she was forced into a plan of deception: she told Jacob to pretend he was Esau. Why did she not simply tell Isaac that it was Jacob who was to be blessed? Because that would have forced her to admit that she had kept her husband in ignorance about the prophecy all the years the children were growing up.

Had she spoken to Isaac on the day of the blessing, Isaac might have said something that would have changed the entire course of their, and their children's, lives. I imagine Isaac saying this: 'Of course I know that it will be Jacob not Esau who will continue the covenant. But I have two quite different blessings in mind, one for each of our sons. I will give Esau a blessing of wealth and power: "May God give you the dew of heaven and the richness of the earth ... May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you" (Gen. 27: 28-29). I will give Jacob the blessing God gave Abraham and me, the blessing of children and the promised land: "May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples. May he give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now reside as a foreigner, the land God gave to Abraham" (Gen. 28: 3-4)'

Isaac never did intend to give the blessing of the covenant to Esau. He intended to give each child the blessing that suited them. The entire deceit planned by Rebecca and carried out by Jacob was never necessary in the first place. Why did Rebecca not understand this? Because she and her husband did not communicate.

Now let us count the consequences. Isaac, old and blind, felt betrayed by Jacob. He "trembled violently" when he realised what had happened, and said to Esau, "Your brother came deceitfully." Esau likewise felt betrayed and felt such violent hatred toward Jacob that he vowed to kill him. Rebecca was forced to send Jacob into exile, thus depriving herself for more than two decades of the company of the son she loved. As for Jacob, the consequences of the deceit lasted a lifetime, resulting in strife between his wives, and between his children. "Few and evil have been the days of my life," he said as an old man to Pharaoh. Four lives scarred by one act which was not even necessary in the first place since Isaac did in fact give Jacob "the blessing of Abraham" without any deception, knowing him to be Jacob not Esau.

Such is us the human price we pay for a failure to communicate. The Torah is exceptionally candid about such matters, which is what makes it so powerful a guide to life: real life, among real people with real problems. Communication matters. In the beginning God created the natural world with words: "And God said: Let there be." We create the social world with words. The Targum translated the phrase in Genesis 2, "And man became a living soul" as "and man became a speaking soul." For us, speech is life. Life is relationship. And human relationships only

exist because we can speak. We can tell other people our hopes, our fears, our feelings and thoughts.

That is why any leader – from a parent to a CEO – must set as his or her task good, strong, honest, open communication. That is what makes families, teams and corporate cultures healthy. Everyone must know what their overall aims are as a team, what their specific role is, what responsibilities they carry, and what values and behaviours they are expected to exemplify. There must be praise for those who do well, as well as constructive criticism when people do badly – criticism of the act not the person, who must feel respected whatever his or her failures. This last is one of the fundamental differences between a "guilt morality" of which Judaism is the supreme example, and a "shame morality" like that of ancient Greece (guilt makes a clear distinction between the act and the person, which shame does not).

There are times when much depends on clear communication. It is not too much to say that there was a moment at which the fate of the world depended on it. It happened during the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 when the United States and the Soviet Union were on the brink of nuclear war. At the height of the crisis, as described by Robert McNamara in his film, *The Fog of War*, John F. Kennedy received two messages from the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev. One was conciliatory, the other far more hawkish. Most of Kennedy's advisers believed that the second represented Khrushchev's real views and should be taken seriously.

However one man, Llewellyn Thompson Jr., had been American ambassador to the Soviet Union from 1957 to 1962 and had come to know the Russian president well. He had even spent a period of time living with Khrushchev and his wife. He told Kennedy that the conciliatory message sounded like Khrushchev's own personal view while the hawkish letter, which did not sound like him, had probably been written to appease the Russian generals. Kennedy listened to Thompson, gave Khrushchev a way of backing down without losing face, and the result was that war was averted. It is fearful to imagine what might have happened had Thompson not been there to establish which was and which wasn't the real act of communication.

Parents and leaders must establish a culture in which honest, open, respectful communication takes place, and that involves not just speaking but also listening. Without it, tragedy is waiting in the wings