

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

TOLEDOT

Haftarah: Shemuel I 20:18-42

NOVEMBER 14, 2015 2 KISLEV 5776

DEDICATIONS: In memory of Isaac Mizrahi – 3 Kislev 5725

To subscribe or to unsubscribe, please reply to
ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com
 Newsletter archives now at BenaiAsher.Org

Starting this week, Mincha and Arbit!
Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue,
17th Floor, Artistic Frame at 4PM – Please join us!
212-289-2100 – Mincha/Arbit – Give us 22
minutes and we'll give you the World To Come!

Editors Notes

This week's article was prepared with Mr. Nathan J Franco, Nissim ben Mazal, A'H, in mind. It was the basis of a short speech I made on Monday evening to his family. I heard today that he had a custom to light the extra candle on Hanukah. Read through the story and you'll definitely be touched.

Toledot - Generations – Separated by Time but Bound by Holiness

VeEleh Toledot Yishak – And these are the generations of Isaac. We call this week's portion Toledot. Last month though we read another portion which began with very similar words, Eleh Toledot Noah, and that portion we call Noah. So why is this Parasha called Toledot and not Yishak? We translate Toledot as generations and this week's reading is truly the one that binds the generations of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Although we read of the death of Abraham at the end of last week's portion, in actuality Abraham is alive and well through the marriage of Isaac and Rebecca, through the birth of their twin boys Esav and Jacob and until the day of their Bar Mitzvah and the sale of the birthright. It is only this Parasha which we call "Generations" that is shared by all three.

As last April came to a close, it also brought to an end, the Hebrew month of Nissan. We have a special blessing we say on the trees during Nissan, but because of the cold, we had very few budding fruit trees in the northeast. So Chantelle invited me to join her in the Bronx at The New York Botanical Garden. I had never been there before. I'm not usually that into plants and trees, but seeing the 250-acre site's verdant landscape supporting over one million living plants in extensive collections was amazing.

King David writes in the first Psalm, "He shall be as a tree planted by brooks of water, a tree which brings

fruits in its time; a tree whose leaves do not wilt, and whatever he does will prosper.

When examining a tree, we see the leaves, blossoms and fruits. We see the branches that extend outward. We see the trunk at the core which supports all of those branches and below the trunk extending deep and wide into the earth are the roots nourishing everything above. I thought that the tree represents generations and each of our changing roles. We are all at one time those blossoms and fruits, and then as parents we become branches. Soon after as grandparents and great grandparents we are a trunk supporting those branches. And eventually we move below the earth to join the root system. The roots although hidden are what stabilize, nourish and sustain the tree. We can never forget the roots.

Our roots are in our forefathers, in Abraham & Sarah. Isaac & Rebecca, Jacob & Leah and Rachel. We search within ourselves and hope to draw out their DNA, their qualities of kindness, strength, truth, justice, self-control, humility and hard work. But our roots are not just in these Biblical figures we spend our lives studying. Our roots are also our parents, grandparents, great grandparents who set an example and showed us the way and who although they may be gone inspire us to dig from within ourselves those qualities.

I have often written that it's so important for grandparents to tell their grandchildren their stories and the stories of their parent's and grandparent's as well. They should tell of their challenges and of overcoming them, of their successes and the path towards them and even of the failures and how they were dealt with. Sir Isaac Newton wrote, "If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants." Our giants are those who came before us, and knowing their stories and what they achieved can give us incredible strength when dealing with our own challenges and circumstances.

Many of you know that my dad was an historian of sorts especially when it came to the community. He knew the stories of his parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles so well that he could tell you them as if he was there. He could detail the entire twentieth century from the first two decades when we left Syria through our arrival and growth here. This summer, encouraged by a dear friend Lawrence Jemal, I

started looking into what things were like in the 19th century for Jews in Aleppo and Damascus through various studies, rabbinical writings and stories told over.

I would like to tell over one told by Rabbi Haim Sabato. It is long, but it is amazing and you will tell it again and again, so please be patient with me.

Most of the sages of Aleppo, following the advice of Maimonides, were typically reluctant to depend on others and worked to make a living although their work was always subsidiary to their study. Despite this there were some sages who derived their livelihood from the community. And how was this done?

Today we are very proud of the charitable accomplishments of our community. Few groups in the world can match the openhanded giving habitually practiced by the community. We can take tremendous pride in Bikur Cholim, Maoz LaEvyonim, SAFE, The Angel Fund, our Mikvaot, and our endless support for Torah institutions from local day schools to Yeshivot in Israel and throughout the world. But this habit which we pray to hand down to our children and grandchildren did not begin with us.

In 19th Century Aleppo, there was an endowment for the sages set up by two partners and it comprised courtyards and houses whose rents were distributed to the noted sages. These two gentlemen also established the charitable society and a sick bay to care for the ill. They inaugurated a food fund and a society to assist brides getting married. They ransomed Jews who had been imprisoned by the authorities and interceded with governments paving the way for the annulment of decrees.

It was said that the grandfathers of these two gentlemen had been partners, traders in scrap metal and had made their rounds of the street in a cart, buying up scrap and all kinds of utensils that nobody wanted. They would then clean them, repair them and set out for the nearby villages to sell them door to door.

And who were they? Senor Franco and Senor De Piciotto were extremely close and fiercely loyal partners, negotiating in good faith and setting aside time for their Torah studies. Scrap metal businesses, like most small businesses, sometimes prosper but more often are in decline, spending much and earning little, a wheel turning full circle and turning especially towards poverty. Their commerce, too, diminished almost to the point of collapse. Needing help, they decided to enlist another partner. He would invest money, and they would contribute their labor

and their good name, and perhaps his luck would bring blessing and prosperity to their business, and the Almighty would look favorably upon them.

Said Senor Franco to Senor De Piciotto, "Tomorrow, you do the rounds by yourself and I shall go and look for a partner, and in the Lord's name we shall succeed."

In the morning Senor Franco decided to make a short pilgrimage to the village of Tedef where there is a synagogue, and a sealed cave where legend says that a Torah scroll written by Ezra the Scribe is kept. He rose early and went directly to the cave, lit candles and recited the opening section of the words of Elijah from the *Zohar*. He prayed that Hashem should assist in helping to find a partner and he read from Psalms when suddenly he rose and the words flew from his mouth: "O L-rd eternal! What need have I of a partner of flesh and blood? You shall be our trusted partner!"

Being a God-fearing man he was alarmed at his own words and feared he might somehow have blasphemed against Heaven. Upon reflection he felt more at ease and vowed that of all the profit they made, one-third, the partner's share, would be given as charity to the sages of their city. And at once he arose joyfully and returned to Aleppo.

He did not go to his home but went directly to the great and ancient synagogue to pray Mincha. In the synagogue there is one cave where according to tradition, a revelation of Eliyahu HaNavi took place. There was also a wide corridor that was called the Midrash, where humble sages sat studying the Torah. As Don Franco was about to leave for his home, he saw a sage sitting there studying. As he gazed at him, he saw the sage's face light up with radiance such as he had never seen before. He was almost alarmed, and drew back from him. Fumbling in his pocket, he found one valuable coin, laid it before the sage and left.

The Sage had never put out his hand. Earlier that day his wife told him that the cupboards were empty and he needed to go to the marketplace and earn some money. He tried, but he was drawn to the study hall. With the coin sitting before him he wondered if the coin was placed there by heaven and was reminded of the story in the Talmud feared that perhaps it would diminish his heavenly reward. Then again perhaps it was a gift of Rabeynu Tam whose words he had understood and which brought him intense pleasure and lit up his face.

All this time Senor De Piciotto was waiting anxiously to hear from his partner. At last Senor Franco came

and saw his friend standing before their cart, empty of merchandise. Senor De Piciotto asked if he was successful, and if he found a partner, and if the partner was trustworthy and if the partner had money. Senor Franco affirmed all of these but when asked his name replied, "I am deeply sorry but that I cannot tell you. He made it a condition that his name not be revealed."

Senor De Piciotto found this hard to understand, but accepted his partner's condition. And in the midst of their conversation a certain middleman came to them with a purse full of coins in his hands. Knowing that their cart was empty of merchandise they were embarrassed and did not know how to answer him. They took care of not to utter a syllable that might betray their sorry state of affairs.

A European had approached the middleman and he was looking for old Hanukkah lamps. He said that he collects Hanukkah lamps from various congregations of Israel. He requested that this middleman find some. "The older they are, the more precious they'll be to me."

So he came to the two partners who looked at one another and said nothing. Their hearts told them that that was a good omen. Since the Hanukkah lamp commemorates a miracle, it was obvious that the luck of the new partner at surely brought their new miracle.

They rummage among the utensils and found one old Hanukkah lamp made of brass. The middleman told them to fix the price. For an old piece like this they would charge very little, but for this customer age is an asset rather than a defect and he only wants to have it because it is old. They set a very high price and the middleman paid them. He went to the buyer and immediately returned to them. He told them, go to your suppliers and bring me more lamps like these and I'll pay you four times the price you set.

Senor Franco said to himself I shall go to that Haham whose face I saw lighting up and I'll do him a favor. He found him on his way from the study hall. He told him about the collector. He then went with the Haham to his home. The sage discussed the matter with his wife and she brought out in ancient lamp, many years old, inherited from his father and his father's fathers, men of the Spanish exile. It was old and damaged and could not hold oil or be used for any ritual purpose. He saw that engraved on it was the family name and the picture of a ship. They went and showed it to the foreign trader and when he saw that he was overjoyed and offered a generous price for it enough to keep the siege solvent for months with a

substantial commission for the partners and the middleman.

What was so special about this chanukiah? It was made according to a custom of some of Aleppo that rather than light one candle and the Shamash on the first, they light three altogether and continue throughout the holiday with ten lights on the final night. This custom has been vouched for by many and I have been told that still people in the community do this. Some do not even know why. I have heard it said that the tradition was instituted by exiles from Spain who arrived in Aleppo at Hanukkah. They were saved from a shipwreck by a miracle and added an extra candle in memory of the miracle. This Hanukkah lamp was destined to be displayed in the Louvre in Paris.

Following this episode fortunes changed for the partners. Every deal they touched turned to gold. As they resources increased, they began dealing in more expensive goods. Barely a year passed since that first episode when they bought themselves a shop in the market and stocked it with all kinds of goods. Within a few more years they were appointed local agents for several overseas companies. Eventually they were awarded government warrants and titles of honor including having the kingdom of Spain appoint them honorary consuls.

And every month they worked out their accounts meticulously, setting aside a third of the profits for their anonymous partner. After some years Senor De Piciotto could restrain himself no longer.

At first Senor Franco put him off. Why should you care? Don't you see with your own eyes how luck has worked for us? And how the wheel has turned to our advantage? All this wealth of ours is due to him? But he saw that his partner was not satisfied and nothing he said would convince him. Who ever heard of a partner, who for years had neither taken his money nor checked the accounts? Senor Franco told Senor De Piciotto the whole story of what it happened in the village and in the great synagogue. Senor De Piciotto was a God-fearing man and not only was he not angry but he loved Senor Franco all the more and was exceedingly glad to be in such a partnership.

And so they took the third and added to it considerably and created all sorts of funds for the sages, the poor, the sick, the orphans and all who were in need. They told their children and grandchildren the story and they directed them to do the same. And Hashem blessed them. The generations prospered and their children, grandchildren and great grandchildren did the same.

And the habits of those men and women, of our grandparents, great grandparents all the way back to Jacob, Isaac and Abraham, the qualities of kindness, strength, truth, justice, self-control, humility hard work and serving others, those qualities are within us; within our spiritual DNA. Let us strive to bring them forth and to live the lives that they lived so that our children will tell these stories about us. The story of the Jewish people is a story of Toledot, of generations, perhaps separated by time, but bound by holiness.

Shabbat Shalom,

David Bibi

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading Toldot - Yaacov gets the blessings

- 1- Yaacov and Esav are born. Esav sells the bechor to Yaacov.
- 2- Yitshak moves to Gerar. Abimelech sees Yitshak with Rivkah
- 3- The Pelishtim close up Abraham's wells. Yitshak moves to the valley of Gerar and builds wells there.
- 4- Yitshak goes to Be'er Sheva. Hashem appears to him. Abimelech's people chase after Yitshak to make a peace treaty.
- 5- Yitshak gets old and prepares to bless Esav. Rivkah instructs Yaacov to present himself as Esav and get the beracha.
- 6- Yaacov gets the beracha. Rivkah tells Yaacov to run away to Laban's house.
- 7- Yaacov goes to Laban in Padan Aram. Esav takes another wife.

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

“The voice is Jacob’s voice but the hands are Esav’s hands.” (Bereshheet 27:22)

The episode of the blessings of Yitshak is one of the most crucial episodes in the Torah. This is so because the decision about which son was to receive the patriarchal blessings would determine which would be G-d’s chosen people. The eternal destinies of Jacob and Esav and their offspring were in the balance.

The Oznayim Latorah has a powerful message for us. If we wish in our days to learn from our forefather, Jacob, who merited Yitshak’s blessings, we must consider that his “voice” was a natural real part of him. He learned Torah in his father’s house, in the Yeshivah of Shem and Eber, when he was watching over Laban’s sheep, and when he returned to the land of Canaan. By contrast,

his “hands of Esav” were an artificial, temporary “adornment” of goatskin, so that he could resemble Esav when necessary. When Esav threatened war, even though Jacob was a mighty soldier, he steadfastly held back from battle. The Torah testifies as to Jacob’s “fear” and “distress” (32:8), that he was afraid both of “being killed” and of “killing others” (see Rashi). It didn’t matter to him whose blood, only that blood should not be shed.

If in this generation we must learn to be soldiers as a defense against our enemies, we must only wear “Esav’s gloves” on our hands. Our hands themselves, and our hearts, must be faithful to the living G-d, and the voice of Jacob, and our heritage must not be weakened. Rabbi Reuven Semah

“[Yitshak] called the well 'Esek' because they argued about it.” (Bereshheet 26:20)

When Yitshak lived near the Philistines, they were jealous of him, and whatever he tried to do, they attempted to block it. When he dug wells they tried to stuff them with sand, so as not to be usable. It is interesting to note that Yitshak gave the wells special names, which is meant to teach us something. The word “Esek,” although it is used to mean “argument,” really means “to get involved with” or “to get entangled with.” The lesson we can learn from here is that Yitshak realized this well needed too much involvement with it, which ultimately led to arguments. Therefore, he let it go, and dug a different well. For someone like Yitshak, who spent his whole life serving Hashem, it wasn’t worth it to hassle about this well, since it would involve him too much. He would ultimately lose out on his service to Hashem.

We can see this in our own lives very often. Sometimes we want to do things, thinking that they are hassle-free, but then we see that we get too involved. At that point, we can either let go and do something else, or try to force the issue and get entangled. This could lead to arguments, and to being taken up with something we didn’t want. We should learn from Yitshak and go on to the next thing - don’t get involved unless necessary. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

TIME STUDY

One Minute With Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda

“How come you never have time to go anywhere with the kids?” Sarah peevishly asked her husband.

“I really would like to,” replied Jack, “but I am always too busy making a living – or simply too exhausted – to enjoy the family.

Sarah stared out the window for a few moments as she carefully considered his words. "Why don't you analyze how you spend your time," she finally suggested, "and maybe we could reset your priorities to make time for us?"

The exercise that Sarah proposed would benefit most people. It might even shock some who function on auto-pilot just to keep up with their overloaded schedules.

There was a time when people were mainly concerned with acquiring the basic necessities: food, clothing, and shelter. In today's world, these basics are covered for many members of the populace. (Of course, there is still a poverty level about which we must all be concerned, but the general standard of living is higher than it has ever been.)

The problem today in Western society is not what to live "on," but what to live "for." Leisure time has become an industry. Sports, exercise, travel, and entertainment advertisements vie for the attention of pleasure-seeking consumers. The choices people make in deciding what to do with free time tells much about their values and spiritual maturity. Time is a valuable commodity; it's not at all "free."

Conduct and record a time study of your own. Evaluate how much time you spend earning a living, and how much time you spend actually living. Your value system may need some adjustment, but in the expensive game called life, it pays to do damage control and cut your losses as soon as possible.

RABBI ELI MANSOUR
Visit DailyHalacha.com, DailyGemara.com,
MishnaBerura.com, LearnTorah.com
Changing Our Perspective on Prayer

In the beginning of Parashat Toledot, we read of Ribka's infertility, and her and Yishak's prayers for children. God ultimately accepts their prayers, and Ribka conceives with twins – Esav and Yaakob.

The Talmud takes note of the fact that all four matriarchs – Sara, Ribka, Rahel and Leah – were infertile at one point or another. In the cases of Sara, Ribka and Rahel, they waited for years before being able to have children. The Sages explained that God specifically made the matriarchs infertile "because He desires the prayers of the righteous." Meaning, He wanted the great Sadikim and Sidkaniyot, our Abot and Imahot, to pray. He brought the anguish of childlessness upon them so that they would be moved to pray to Him.

The obvious question arises, is this fair? If the Abot and Imahot were indeed righteous – which they

undoubtedly were – then didn't they deserve children even without prayer? Why did God make them have to pray for children?

In truth, this question is asked only because of our fundamental misconception about what prayer is, and what purpose it is intended to serve. We often mistakenly approach prayer as a way of getting what we want. At a vending machine, we put in the coins, press the right button, and receive the item we choose. This is how many people view prayer: we recite a specific text in the specified way in the hope of getting what we want, whether it is health, children, financial success, and so on.

From this perspective, it is indeed strange that God would make the righteous matriarchs barren and force them to endure the frustration of infertility just so that they and their husbands would have to go through the exercise of prayer.

But this is not at all what prayer is. The Hebrew word for prayer – "Tefila" – means "tying" or "binding." Thus, for example, "Tefillin" are the boxes that we tie to our bodies, to connect ourselves with the sacred texts contained within them. And this is the purpose of Tefila – to connect us to God. Our relationship with our Creator is built and enhanced through the experience of prayer. Tefila means not simply saying the words, but also feeling connected to God through the recitation. When we pray, we must exercise the heart, and not only the mouth – because the primary purpose is to connect with the Almighty with our minds and our emotions, and not simply to move our lips.

The Sefer Hakuzari (by Rabbi Yehuda Halevi, Spain, 1075-1141) writes that for the righteous, the moments of prayer are the highlight of the day. For somebody whose primary aspiration in life is connecting with God, there is nothing more gratifying than prayer. He prays not because he needs money for an expensive car, but because he wants to draw close to God. And this is why prayer is such an exciting and uplifting experience for him.

This excitement can be seen on the faces of righteous people as they pray. In fact, the Netziv (Rav Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin of Volozhin, 1817-1893) writes that the reason why Ribka fell from the camel when she saw Yishak for the first time (Bereshit 24:64) was because she saw him praying. The awesome sight of a Sadik like Yishak praying, connecting to the Creator with his entire being, was overwhelming.

We can now perhaps understand the Sages' comment that God "desires the prayer of the righteous." The more righteous a person is, the more God wants him or her to pray, to connect and foster a relationship with Him. God orchestrates events and situations to inspire a person to pray so that he can draw closer to his Creator. If our prayers are answered, then this is just the proverbial "icing on the cake." The primary reward of Tefila is the connection and bond with God.

And this is also how we should approach life's challenges and difficulties. The Sages' comment about the matriarchs' infertility shows us that God will occasionally bring a person to a difficult situation for the specific purpose of inspiring him to pray. Life's challenges offer us the great opportunity to connect to God through prayer. If we seize that opportunity, then regardless of whether our prayers are answered, we come out of the experience stronger and spiritually elevated. And, we can feel comforted by the knowledge that God wants our prayers, He wants us to build a relationship with Him – and for this precise reason He occasionally brings us into situations that impel us to call to Him in sincere, heartfelt Tefila.

Toldot 5776 - The Eighth Blessing Victor Bibi

There is a ruling in the Talmud which is codified in the Shulhan Arukh (OH 214) which states that a blessing which does not include the Holy 4 letter name of God (YHVH) is not a valid blessing. (Berakhot 40). We can extend this concept to assume that this Divine Name (YHVH) is actually the essence of all blessings.

Furthermore we know that the Avot (our forefathers) were conduits to channel blessings from the celestial regions. So when Rabbenu HaAri teaches (sighted by R. Yishak Shrem) that Yitshak was endowed with eight blessings, we see it reflected in the numerical value of this Divine Name (YHVH) 26 multiplied by the 8 blessings totaling 208; the same as the numerical value of יִשְׁחַק Yishak. Furthermore writes the Ari, seven of these eight blessings were directed by Yishak to his son Yaakov. This also is reflected in the numerical value of this Divine Name (YHVH) 26 multiplied by the 7 blessings totaling 182; the numerical value of יַעֲקֹב Yaakov.

Simple math (8-7) reveals that one blessing remained for Yishak to dispense. It is this last available "eighth" blessing which occupies the narrative in this week's parasha. Yishak had intended to channel it to his son Esav by asking the latter to bring him some game and prepare it into something tasty. However it was Yaakov who actually received the blessing that God grant him the dew of

heaven and the fat of the earth. Upon hearing what had occurred, his brother Esav cried out to his father. "There is one berakha remaining with you - bless also me father." Esav realized that this was the only blessing available and it too had been given to Yaakov. A close reading of the blessing includes a reference to it being the eighth blessing. In Pasuk 28 it is written that Yaakov be given from the fat of the earth"- or יִמְשַׁח the word fat hinting to הַנֶּמֶשׁ or from an aspect of the eighth blessing. How did Yishak suddenly discover a way to give Esav the blessing? Yaakov was not the original intended target for this blessing. We explained earlier that his name יַעֲקֹב Yaakov was limited as a recipient of only the first seven blessings. Therefore this additional blessing given to Yaakov would be subject to certain conditions. He would be constantly judged to determine if he has met the prerequisites for this blessing to become effective. After Esav pleads and utters a cry, he too is granted a right or access to this eighth blessing. This would only take effect, if and when Yaakov might be derelict in meeting his conditions for the blessing. As it says in Pasuk 39 "His father Yishak then replied and said, "The fat places of the earth can still be your dwelling", יִמְשַׁח הַנָּה, namely from this eighth blessing you can still gain access.

In the words of R. Moshe Alshikh. Esav would take from an already available supply of God's generosity. No new blessing was added on account of Esav. There was only a redistribution of the blessing. The word יִמְשַׁח meaning he has access "from" the fats (or from the eight) instead of יִמְשַׁח meaning "with" the fat parts or the eight. He would not own the blessing - but only relate to it as a slave without possessions.

There are ten Divine channels whereby the Creator dispenses spiritual influx into the worlds. The eighth channel which parallels this eighth blessing noted above is known as הוֹד Hod; which in relationship to the body of man is associated with his thigh.

In Parashat Vayishlah we are told of a struggle for this eighth blessing between Yaakov and the Angel of Esav. The latter is unable to overcome Yaakov in wrestling the blessing away, but was able to damage his thigh. Namely the angel revealed that Yaakov was susceptible in the area associated with הוֹד or the eighth blessing. As dawn breaks, Yaakov demands this blessing be given over to him completely without reservation. The latter does not acquiesce but does recognize that Yaakov has advanced spiritually gaining an ability to struggle even with Esav's celestial force in order to obtain permanent access to this eighth blessing. The Angel of Esav in recognition of his new spiritual prowess now calls him Yisrael - he who struggles with a celestial force. This conforms with the Talmudic dictum that even the evil angel answers amen. **וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל** The name Yisrael had been revealed on earth in connection with Yaakov's spiritual ascension at

Peniel. The rights to the eighth blessing being assigned now to Yisrael as opposed to Yaakov. Namely the one who will be relentless in struggling for the blessing.

The Or Hahayyim explains that as long as Yaakov (now Yisrael) will exercise his dominion over Esav by serving Hashem in holiness, the blessing will remain in effect. Should Yaakov fail to serve ה' properly, Esav would assume dominion over him. This is why we find that even a relatively mild dereliction of duty towards God by the kingdom of Yehuda led Edom (Esav) to recover politically. (Melakhim II 8:22). We also see this occurring earlier in history where ה' had stirred up Esav's descendants against Shelomo Hamelekh as a consequence of the latter's negative activities. (Melakhim I 11:20-25). Throughout the generations there remains a struggle between Yisrael and Esav for this eighth blessing. The Syrian-Greeks had temporarily usurped the position of Esav as the primary antagonist of Israel during the era of the Hashmonaim. Rome associated with Esav would only regain dominion over Syrian-Greeks a few hundred years later.

A pinnacle event in our national struggle for control of the eighth blessing occurred during Hanukah. The original impetus at that time was aroused through the spiritual and physical valor of the Hashmonaim. Subsequent to their victory, our Rabbis established the eight days of Hanuka as a tikun - rectification of this channel of דוד Hod (damaged by the Angel of Esav) a redirecting of the eighth blessing to Yisrael. It is obvious that the miracle was effectuated by the משיחאנומחש having their root in the number eight; their name indicating הנמח or eight. It was the שמן oil; also having its language root in the number eight which was rendered impure but then miraculously located and then lasting for eight days; All of this reminding us of our continued struggle for the eighth blessing.

Our task today is to continue to make ourselves worthy to hold on to this eighth blessing. If we falter, Esav would absorb some of its spiritual benefits. This is based on the prophecy received by Rivka that "one nation will grow stronger than the other nation". Our Rabbis explain that Caesaria (the domain of Esav) and Jerusalem (the domain of Yaakov) are as two ends of a seesaw. The one accessing the eighth berakha of Yishak will be on top while his counterpart on the bottom. (Megilah 6).

The Prophet Ovadya envisions a time when the struggle for the eighth blessing will be concluded. He sees (1:18) the house of Yaakov becoming fire, the house of Yosef a flame, and the house of Esav turning to straw.

Rabbi Wein DISAPPOINTMENTS

Disappointments are almost always based on the failure of people, technological gadgets or public policies to live up to expectations. Therefore, the higher the expectations are, the greater the disappointments. Because we invest so much confidence and hope in our political leaders, we are invariably doomed to disappointment and frustration when they turn out to be merely fallible human beings.

We are always looking for that great leader, with the ability to justify our outsized expectations and hopes. The greater the electoral victory, the harder it will be for that victor to somehow justify one's electoral success. So the best solution to ameliorate our frustrations and disappointments is not to set our expectations too high.

The fact that the companies that manufacture and market all of our new electrical and communication wonder devices advertise them in terms of perfection and ease of operation, only serves to disappoint us when those exaggerated claims do not match up with the reality of the product itself.

So we are constantly searching for the next iPhone that will achieve the required perfection that we expect.....resembling the racing greyhound dog chasing the mechanical rabbit around the track. I have found in my years of rabbinic experience that unrealistic and exaggerated expectations of one another often lie at the root of family and domestic dysfunction.

Never believe the sales pitch of the well-meaning shadchan. Except for certain rabbis, no perfect people exist. Realizing and accepting this as a necessary reality of life will go a long way in reducing the unnecessary disappointments that we often bring upon ourselves.

In the recently concluded season, the great cities of New York and Chicago suffered only minor disappointment when their respective baseball teams did not win the ultimate championship in the World Series. I happened to be in both cities when their respective teams finally lost the playoff rounds for the championship. The mood in both cities was less of disappointment and more of pride – even wonderment – that their teams had unexpectedly achieved so much and made it so far in their quest for the championship.

At the beginning of the baseball season, few in either of these two cities had any expectations that these

teams would somehow be able to contend for the championship. Since the expectations were low, the disappointment at the failure of either of these teams to win the championship was muted and more easily taken in stride.

In the broader and more important areas of life, it is clear that people should not expect that marriage, a new job, or a new face in politics and government will somehow solve all problems and bring us to paradise on earth. We must have a proportionate and realistic view of people and events and not give in to wishful thinking, boastful hopes and completely unrealistic scenarios.

The creation of the State of Israel was and is a great historical and spiritual event. However those that thought that somehow it would end all of the problems in the Jewish world, raised expectations that could not be fulfilled. Hence, so many utopians today express disappointment in this wonderful state and its unbelievable achievements.

We had very high expectations after the Six-Day War...and therefore we had enormous disappointment after the Yom Kippur War. We repeated this cycle of euphoric expectation and later depressing disappointment regarding the twenty-year-old "peace process" that began with the Oslo agreements and continues until today.

By giving in to our hopes and wishes and not looking at the reality of our adversaries face-to-face realistically, we are always surprised by the recurring waves of terror that have accompanied all efforts at peace and mutual understanding and respect. I think that by now almost all of us have lowered our expectations regarding this issue of peace with the Palestinians.

Therefore the level of disappointment has also been tempered and most Israelis, if not most Jews the world over, have adjusted to the tenseness and difficulties and situation here in the Land of Israel. We wish things were different but we realize what the reality is, and we simply have to make the best of a very difficult and dangerous situation.

We should not expect any magic bullets or great political initiatives that some will solve our problems in one fell swoop. Instead it will require a gradual change of mindset and an acceptance of reality by all concerned in order to move forward in attempting to build a more stable and peaceful relationship. I have no doubt that this will eventually occur

Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks A Father's Love

"The boys grew up. Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the outdoors; but Jacob was a mild man who stayed at home among the tents. Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob" (Gen. 25:27-28).

We have no difficulty understanding why Rebekah loved Jacob. She had received an oracle from God in which she was told: "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger" (Gen. 25:23).

Jacob was the younger. Rebekah seems to have inferred, correctly as it turned out, that it would be he who would continue the covenant, who would stay true to Abraham's heritage, and who would teach it to his children, carrying the story forward into the future.

The real question is why did Isaac love Esau? Could he not see that he was a man of the outdoors, a hunter, not a contemplative or a man of God? Is it conceivable that he loved Esau merely because he had a taste for wild game? Did his appetite rule his mind and heart? Did Isaac not know how Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of soup, and how he subsequently "despised" the birthright itself (Gen. 25:29-34). Was this someone with whom to entrust the spiritual patrimony of Abraham?

Isaac surely knew that his elder son was a man of mercurial temperament who lived in the emotions of the moment. Even if this did not trouble him, the next episode involving Esau clearly did: "When Esau was forty years old, he married Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and also Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite. They were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebekah" (Gen. 26:34-35). Esau had made himself at home among the Hittites. He had married two of their women. This was not a man to carry forward the Abrahamic covenant which involved a measure of distance from the Hittites and Canaanites and all they represented in terms of religion, culture and morality.

Yet Isaac clearly did love Esau. Not only does the verse with which we began say so. It remained so. Genesis 27, with its morally challenging story of how Jacob dressed up as Esau and took the blessing that had been meant for him, is remarkable for the picture it paints of the genuine deep affection between Isaac and Esau. We sense this at the beginning when Isaac asks Esau: "Prepare me the kind of tasty food I like and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my blessing before I die." This is not Isaac's physical

appetite speaking. It is his wish to be filled with the smell and taste he associates with his elder son, so that he can bless him in a mood of focused love.

It is the end of the story, though, that really conveys the depth of feeling between them. Esau enters with the food he has prepared. Slowly Isaac, and then Esau, realise the nature of the deception that has been practiced against them. Isaac "trembled violently." Esau "burst out with a loud and bitter cry." It is hard in English to convey the power of these descriptions. The Torah generally says little about people's emotions. During the whole of the trial of the binding of Isaac we are given not the slightest indication of what Abraham or Isaac felt in one of the most fraught episodes in Genesis. The text is, as Erich Auerbach said, "fraught with background," meaning, more is left unsaid than said. The depth of feeling the Torah describes in speaking of Isaac and Esau at that moment is thus rare and almost overwhelming. Father and son share their sense of betrayal, Esau passionately seeking some blessing from his father, and Isaac rousing himself to do so. The bond of love between them is intense. So the question returns with undiminished force: why did Isaac love Esau, despite everything, his wildness, his mutability and his outmarriages?

The sages gave an explanation. They interpreted the phrase "skillful hunter" as meaning that Esau trapped and deceived Isaac. He pretended to be more religious than he was.[1] There is, though, a quite different explanation, closer to the plain sense of the text, and very moving. Isaac loved Esau because Esau was his son, and that is what fathers do. They love their children unconditionally. That does not mean that Isaac could not see the faults in Esau's character. It does not imply that he thought Esau the right person to continue the covenant. Nor does it mean he was not pained when Esau married Hittite women. The text explicitly says he was. But it does mean that Isaac knew that a father must love his son because he is his son. That is not incompatible with being critical of what he does. But a father does not disown his child, even when he disappoints his expectations. Isaac was teaching us a fundamental lesson in parenthood.

Why Isaac? Because he knew that Abraham had sent his son Ishmael away. He may have known how much that pained Abraham and injured Ishmael. There is a remarkable series of midrashim that suggest that Abraham visited Ishmael even after he sent him away, and others that say it was Isaac who effected the reconciliation.[2] He was determined not to inflict the same fate on Esau.

Likewise he knew to the very depths of his being the psychological cost on both his father and himself of the trial of the binding. At the beginning of the chapter of Jacob, Esau and the blessing the Torah tells us that Isaac was blind. There is a midrash that suggests that it was tears shed by the angels as they watched Abraham bind his son and lift the knife that fell into Isaac's eyes, causing him to go blind in his old age.[3] The trial was surely necessary, otherwise God would not have commanded it. But it left wounds, psychological scars, and it left Isaac determined not to have to sacrifice Esau, his own child. In some way, then, Isaac's unconditional love of Esau was a tikkun for the rupture in the father-son relationship brought about by the binding.

Thus, though Esau's path was not that of the covenant, Isaac's gift of paternal love helped prepare the way for the next generation, in which all of Jacob's children remained within the fold.

There is a fascinating argument between two mishnaic sages that has a bearing on this. There is a verse in Deuteronomy (14:1) that says, about the Jewish people, "You are children of the Lord your God." Rabbi Judah held that this applied only when Jews behaved in a way worthy of the children of God. Rabbi Meir said that it was unconditional: Whether Jews behave like God's children or they do not, they are still called the children of God.[4]

Rabbi Meir, who believed in unconditional love, acted in accordance with his view. His own teacher, Elisha ben Abuya, eventually lost his faith and became a heretic, yet Rabbi Meir continued to study with him and respect him, maintaining that at the very last moment of his life he had repented and returned to God.[5]

To take seriously the idea, central to Judaism, of Avinu Malkeinu, that our King is first and foremost our parent, is to invest our relationship with God with the most profound emotions. God wrestles with us, as does a parent with a child. We wrestle with him as a child does with his or her parents. The relationship is sometimes tense, conflictual, even painful, yet what gives it its depth is the knowledge that it is unbreakable. Whatever happens, a parent is still a parent, and a child is still a child. The bond may be deeply damaged but it is never broken beyond repair.

Perhaps that is what Isaac was signalling to all generations by his continuing love for Esau, so unlike him, so different in character and destiny, yet never rejected by him – just as the midrash says that Abraham never rejected Ishmael and found ways of communicating his love.

Unconditional love is not uncritical but it is unbreakable. That is how we should love our children – for it is how God loves us.

[1] He would ask him questions such as, "Father, how do we tithe salt and straw?" knowing that in fact these were exempt from tithe. Isaac thought that meant that he was scrupulous in his observance of the commandments (Rashi to Gen. 25:27; Tanchuma, Toldot, 8).

[2] See Jonathan Sacks, Not in God's Name, 107-124.

[3] Genesis Rabbah 65:10.

[4] Kiddushin 36a.

[5] Yerushalmi Hagigah 2:1.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL
"And Isaac trembled a very great trembling"
(27:33)

"And he (Esav) cried out a great and exceedingly bitter outcry" (27:34)

Here we have the case where two men were subject to the most awesome alarm. When Yitzchak Abenu realized that he had been in error for so many years, "And Isaac trembled a very great trembling". He was a Prophet and surely he knew both of his sons well. And yet he was tricked for many years and almost gave the Blessings to the wrong son. Isaac suddenly understood that he had committed an error of such magnitude that would have altered the entire history of the great nation which was expected to rise up to become the people of Hashem. Chazal tell us that he saw Gehenom open up before him and he trembled exceedingly. The Midrash tells us that Isaac was even greater than Abraham in wisdom, since he possessed his father's wisdom and also had progressed on his own. And yet, still he was fooled by Esav.

The same applies to Esav as well, since they both "cried out with a most exceeding outcry". Since by Isaac this meant that he was completely fooled, then by Esav it also means that he was completely fooled. Esav thought he was honestly entitled to the Blessings. If he had realized that he was inferior to Jacob his brother, then even though he might have been disappointed when Jacob received the Blessings, he wouldn't have made such an outcry. But his cry proves that he really thought he deserved the Blessings.

Thus both Isaac and his son Esav cried; one for the many years of error and his almost fatal mistake, and the other for not getting what he thought he deserved. In Slabodka Yeshiva we were constantly taught: A person must always examine his motivations. A person always gives himself the benefit of the doubt and rarely acknowledges his

faults. Even when he suspects certain flaws in his character, he never has any idea how serious they are. He can only improve if someone else points them out to him, for example your father, mother, spouse, boss, Rabbi or teacher etc. A person must be a Listener, "And Jacob listened to his father and mother" (28:7). Jacob who sat in the tent was the one who knew his own faults. He listened and obeyed his great parents.

Even when you do listen you have to listen and hear things many times. It takes 40 years before you fully understand its meaning. "The ear that hears the admonition of life will always abide in the midst of the wise" (Mishle 15:31). Adapted from "Shabbat Morning Talks" by R' Miller ZT'L

Parts of this newsletter are courtesy of Project Genesis: Torah on the Information Superhighway. Permission is granted to redistribute, but please give proper attribution and copyright to the author and Project Genesis, and refer to learn@torah.org and <http://www.torah.org/>. Both the authors and Project Genesis reserve certain rights. For full information on copyrights, send email to copyrights@torah.org.

Shabbat Shalom From Cyberspace E Mail Edition is published each week since 1995 and is distributed to 18,000 readers. Our goal is to spread torah knowledge. Articles are downloaded from sites and from e-mail forwarded to us. We encourage you to reprint the newsletter and distribute it to co-workers, friends and family. You can retransmit copies by fax, mail or by hand. Be a part of the Mitzvah of spreading torah. It takes so little to make copies and distribute them. And with E Mail it just takes a click to send this along. To subscribe directly or have us send to a friend or family member Send a request to ShabbatShalomNewsletter@Gmail.com with your name, phone, fax and E-Mail Address