



Parashat Toldot



English version

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## THE ART OF PATIENCE

Republicans want things to stay the way they were. (GOP - Great Old Party) The Democrats want change; they want to rethink what is considered moral. The Democrats' claim against the Republicans is that the Founding Fathers were not that moral. It was immoral to kill the Indians as they were here first. It is immoral to capture Africans and enslave them. Etc. The Democrats' argument seems to be, why keep the old moral systems if they have no relevant basis today.

Judaism views the ways of both the Republicans and the Democrats as faulty. Moral values are not decided by men of the past or present. Morality is decided by the Torah, by G-d and by the Sages who study G-d's word and are His messengers. Yes, the Torah allows slavery, but, as Abraham Lincoln pointed out in his second Inaugural address, not the way that the Confederates captured and enslaved Africans. Yes, the Jews took over the Land of Canaan, but only because G-d promised it to them (see first Rashi Bereshit), unlike the Founding Fathers who got rid of the Indians.

In his late 20's, Benjamin Franklin recorded thirteen virtues in his Poor Richards Almanac that he attempted to live by. Ben placed each one on a separate page in a small book that he kept with him for most of his life. Ben would evaluate his performance in each one daily. Ben would also select one virtue to focus on for a full week. Although Ben was not successful in keeping to his own virtues, I respect him for, at least, having a moral code that he held himself accountable to! A person feels good with himself/herself only when

they have a clear set of moral values and live by them. Did you ever ask yourself what your virtues, ethics, and morals are?

According to Ben, the personal traits to succeed in achieving your goals are **Temperance**: eat and drink moderately. **Order**: Everything has a time and place. **Resolution**: Do what you are supposed to do. **Frugality**: Waste nothing. **Moderation**: Avoid extremes. **Industry**: Lose no time. Cut off all unnecessary actions. **Personal Cleanliness**: in body, clothes, and living space. **Tranquility**: Don't let small, common, or unavoidable problems bother you. The five social traits Franklin suggests to improve relationships are **Silence**: Say only what benefits others or yourself. **Sincerity**: Think and speak innocently and justly. **Justice**: Don't cause harm to others; remember their rights and what you owe them. **Moral conduct**: Remain loyal to your spouse. **Humility**: Learn from the great, humble of the past.

At the time, R' Yisrael Salanter, father of Mussar, made his own, Torah-based ethical code of thirteen virtues, something he lived by. Compare and contrast R' Yisrael's list to that of Ben's, and you will find great insight. *Some of the words in Hebrew cannot be translated into one English word.* **אמת**. Never let a lie leave your lips. **זריזות**. Don't waste a second. **הריצות**. Do whatever you decide to do promptly and wholeheartedly. **כבוד**. Respect every person, even if you disagree with him/her. **מנוחה**. Be calm and serene, always. **נחת**. Speak calmly. **ניקיון**. Personal cleanliness and purity. **סבלנות**. Have patience with everything that



happens in life. **סדר** Order and structure. **ענויה** Recognize your shortcomings and not those of others. **צדק** Forgive others, give in to others, especially to the poor. **קמוץ** Don't spend unnecessarily. **שתיקה** Calculate the benefit of your speech before you speak.

Although the lists seem to be remarkably similar, R' Yisrael's list deals less with Moral relationships and, instead, stresses speaking softly, having patience in dealing with difficult people and situations. R' Yisrael's list adopts the ideas mentioned in the Iggeret Haramban, which focuses, primarily, on humility and soft speech. R' Yisrael also describes humility, instead of recommending learning from people we don't know personally. What is essential to notice is that the nuances are pivot points – that those small differences mature into major ones! Real humility, patience, and soft spokenness, traits that Yaakov exemplified, can make a tremendous overall difference in an entire character!

Yaakov and Esav seemed so similar for the first 13 years of their life. No one knew that they were different. So much so, Yitzhak and Rivka made the parenting mistake of their life: they brought them up the same and gave them the same schooling! (R' Shimshon R. Hirsh) Only when they were 15 did we see the stark contrast between the two. How does the Torah describe the difference at the outset, when they were just 13? *Yaakov was an innocent man, dwelling in tents*, while *Esav was a man who understood hunting, a man of the field*. Rashi explains this to mean *a man who wastes time and hunts with bows animals and birds*. I can understand how Rashi learns that Esav is a man who hunts, but how does Rashi learn that Esav, being a man of the fields, wasted time? The Rosh understands the word שדה to be an acronym שפך דם, which means that Esav would lie in ambush in the fields, away from civilization, to murder people. The K'li Yakar learns that Esav would be in the field to rape girls, in a place where no one would hear them scream. But how does Rashi know that Esav wasted time?

Hunting game is for people who are bored and for people who are materialistic. When a person gets busy with food and drink and other earthly bodily pleasures, he starts to belittle fear of G-d and serving Him. Spirituality becomes secondary when Pleasure comes first. (Rabenu Bachye) Esav had a second name added. Edom. When and why was Edom added? When Esav comes home, tired from sinning 5 major sins in one day, on the day of Grandpa Avraham's death, he smells the lentils that Yaakov was preparing for Yitzhak's meal of mourning. Esav says to Yaakov הֲלֵעֵיטָנִי נָא מִן־הָאֲדָמָה הַזֶּה הָאֲדָמָה Give me, now, a big mouthful of this red pottage. Why did Esav refer to lentils that were being cooked as red? Don't red lentils turn brown when they are cooked?

The answer is that Esav can't wait for the food to be ready! He needs to have what he wants, NOW! Edom means red impatient, unwilling to wait for the big things in life, and, for sure, not for the big things of the afterlife. Not having patience is what led Esav to the five grave sins he committed on that fateful day. Raped an engaged girl, killed, denied G-d's existence, denied the Resurrection of the dead. He could not have the patience to follow the laws of Firstborn Priesthood, so he gave that up too. (Bava B 16b) He didn't have enough self-control to wait for the appropriate time to get married, nor did he have the patience to earn his own money, so he became איש שדה.

At the pivotal point, at the age of 13, the Torah classifies Yaakov as a yeshiva student, and Esav, as a person who wasted time?!? Is that the way to personify such polarized differences?

The answer is that this is where it all begins, at the nuances and small differences in virtues and moral standards. The best men come from patient yeshiva students who maximize their time, and the worst men come from people who waste time and have no patience. Patience, of course, is rooted in humility. Rashi says, on the passuk הָאִישׁ מִשֵּׁה עֲבִירָו מֵאֵד מְכַל־הָאֲדָמָה And the man Moshe was the humblest of men, Rashi explains this humility as patience. Because when a person is humble, he realizes that no one owes him/her anything. Neither G-d nor



people. Do you realize how much patience G-d has and had for you, waiting for you to take your life seriously? G-d waited during ten generations of sinners, 1656 years, before bringing the Flood, to show us how much patience He has with humanity! (Avot 5,2) There is no better way of being G-dly than by being patient with yourself, others, and with G-d.

Today, more than ever before, people have lost patience for waiting. Waiting for Mashiach, for the

final results of the elections, for something big to happen in the news. Waiting for life to get back to normal, for the Covid vaccine, or for the stocks to mature and make me rich. Waiting for a raise, a stimulus, a donation, or an email from a customer. Waiting for an apology, a date, a compliment, a job- offer. I think it is because like R' Yisrael teaches, G-d wants us to learn patience.

### Selfie steps to patience

1. Only with patience can you conquer, master, win, understand, forgive, love, hope, sell, buy, write, educate, heal, diet, grow, succeed, influence, have children and help them transform into adults. A man who is a master at patience is a master at everything else.
2. Patience is not passive. On the contrary, patience is concentrated strength. Your patience can come from a place of letting go of yourself. Or it can come from a place of holding on to yourself. When you run out of patience, it means that your patience came from a weak, inner place, from the outset. Your patience had a limit, an expiration date. Those who their patience endures are those who were strong internally from the beginning. Those who understand that patience is bitter at the outset, but its fruits are sweet don't give their patience any limit. Because they know that all things are difficult before they become easy.
3. Patience is something you have to have the patience to acquire. At every red light, every traffic jam, every disrespectful comment.
4. Learn to become a human being, not a human having or a human doing. We love being in control, watching our efforts produce immediate results, and a direct connection between what we do and what we get. Patience is a lesson that G-d is boss, and that what you have and do, is because G-d allowed it to be so.
5. Ironically, people who have no patience are usually people who waste time. (Esav) Make sure you use your time wisely, working smarter, not harder. The most productive people, the highest achievers, those with the best time management skills, seem to have the most patience.
6. Most importantly, pray for patience, in the Patience Prayer of Elokay Netzor, at the end of Amidah. Pray to watch your tongue, to not respond to adversity, to be humble, to open your heart to wisdom.

### LOVE WHAT IS

The Chafetz Chaim once asked a certain Jew how he was doing. The man said, "It would not hurt if life were a bit better." The Chafetz Chaim responded, "How could you possibly know that "it would not hurt" if life would be better? Hashem

knows what is best for you, and since He is merciful and only good, He certainly *wishes* to give you more good than what He has given you. He is certainly *capable* of giving you more than He has given you. It is obvious from the fact that He has



not given you more, that what you have and what you don't is what's best for you!

We internalize this message each and every day. Lesson one – **G-d is everything**, for He rules in all of our reality – וְאַתָּה מוֹשְׁל בְּכָל. Lesson two- **G-d is solely good**. - טוב-יְהִי לְכָל יִרְחֻמֵּי עַל-כָּל-מַעֲשָׂיו.

The Chafetz Chaim derived this No Complaints lifestyle from a Rashi in this week's Parasha. Rashi asks, when Yitzhak blessed his son with his whole heart, he blessed him in an unusual way. וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים *And Elokim shall give you...* Why would Yitzchak use the Name of Elokim, the Name of G-d of Judgement, when blessing his son? Wouldn't the Name of YKVK, the Name of G-d of Mercy, be more appropriate? Rashi writes what the blessing using G-d's Name Elokim infers אם ראי *If it is appropriate for you, G-d will give you. And if it is not appropriate for you, He will not give you.... G-d doesn't just give us whatever we pray for, if it is not good for us. Because He trusts us that we trust Him.* (See Rashi 27;28)

Yitzhak knew that his son Esav was having difficulty with accepting Elokim, G-d's attribute of Judgement. As the Midrash says, אמר עשו - אף באותו *Esav said, how could it be that even my righteous grandfather Avraham died five years before his time? If so, there is no Judgement, and there is no Judge!*

Yitzhak was telling his son, No! All the blessings of life, all the blessings of G-d come in the form of difficulties. *As if* G-d is judging, behaving harshly. The greatest blessings that G-d gives you come with difficulty. Because the way that G-d gives His blessing is Elokim. Through difficulties and loss, tests and annoyances, sweat and tears.

*Every single time* the Tanach mentions that G-d blessed anyone or anything, it uses the Name Elokim, His Name of Judgement. וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים ; וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-יָנֹס וְאֶת-בְּנָיו ; אֶת-יָנוֹס הַשְּׂבִיעִי וַיְקַדֵּשׁ אֹתוֹ ; (Except in two places, where those who were blessed with YKVK, G-d's Name of Mercy, were blessed with unusual blessings - Yosef's master, and Oved Edom HaGiti.) Here, in Yitzchak's blessing, the word Elokim is unique. It does not say Elokim. Rather, it

says, HaElokim, The Elokim. When Yaakov blessed Yosef, he also used the Name HaElokim. וַיְבָרֶךְ אֶת יוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמֶר הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר הִתְהַלְכוּ אֲבֹתַי לִפְנֵי אֲבֹרָהֶם וַיִּצְחָק הָאֱלֹהִים הָרַעָה אֹתִי מֵעוֹדִי עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה. Why HaElokim?

The Seforno on this word HaElokim comments: *When you focus on His goodness, even as G-d of Judgment, He will bless your fields.* The way for the Jew to bring blessing upon himself is to search for the goodness in the difficulties, to recognize and then focus on the goodness in The Elokim, the judgement.

There is a strange story in the Talmud that brings this concept to light. *A certain R' Mani told his Rebbi R' Elyashiv, how his in-laws, who were rich, were acting in a haughty fashion and insulting him. So, R Elyashiv prayed that those rich in laws become poor. When they became poor, they started bothering R Mani, to support them. R Mani told R' Elyashiv, and R' Elyashiv prayed that they become rich again. Then, R Mani complained that he did not like the way his wife looked. R' Elyashiv asked for the name of R Mani's wife. Chana. R Elyashiv then prayed that Chana become beautiful. But then, when Chana became beautiful, she was constantly preoccupied with herself and haughty. She did not want R' Mani anymore. R Mani told this to R Elyashiv, and R' Elyashiv prayed that Chana return to her old looks.* (Taanit 23b)

This is something that we can learn from King David. Even when King David was cursed by the Chief Rabbi, Shimi Ben Gera, he said to himself, יְהוָה אֱמַר לוֹ קָלִל, *G-d of Mercy (YKVK) commanded him to curse me.* (Shmuel 2 16:10) King David teaches that we should never take anything personally, because G-d is behind every insult... What? But why? Why would G-d want that person to insult me?

I don't know. But once you accept that G-d is behind the insult, you can realize the benefits, the perks, all the good in the insult that you would not recognize if you would not accept it. Here is a list of a few possibilities. A. To develop acceptance of yourself B. To develop "elephant skin". C. Burn away some calories of pride and arrogance. D. You'll find out who your true friends are. E. You will go to the drawing board and improve yourself.



And, many times, these are a good payoff for the insult.

The Midrash tells us that the power to bless with G-d's Name Elokim was given to Yitzhak. (See Baal Haturim 2;3) Why specifically Yitzhak? Yitzhak was the Patriarch who barely said anything, and who is symbolic of acceptance. Accepting a wayward child, accepting a runaway son, accepting rebellious daughters-in-law, accepting his father's prophecy that G-d wills that he be sacrificed, accepting his mother's tragic death, accepting his grandchildren's decision to sell their own brother. He even accepted himself for making the biggest "mistake" of his life, of mixing up his own children, and blessing the "wrong" son. This is why Yitzhak blessed using G-d's Name Elokim.

I recently saw the following joke, and it taught me a lesson for Shalom Bayit. *A married couple was celebrating their 60th wedding anniversary. At the party, everybody wanted to know how they managed to stay married so long. The husband responded, "When we were first married, we came to an agreement. I would make all the major decisions, and my wife would make all the minor decisions. And in 60 years of marriage, we have never needed to make a major decision."*

This can be applied to the relationship between Man and G-d, as well, in accepting G-d as Elokim, and that He gives us only what is best for us. G-d

wants us to accept what is, minding our own business in those areas in which G-d gives us no choice, and busying ourselves only with decisions in the areas that that G-d *does* give us choice. As Byron Katie wrote, *"I am a lover of what is, of reality, not because I'm a spiritual person, but because it hurts when I argue with reality. I can find only three kinds of business in the universe: mine, yours, and G-d's. Reality is G-d, because it rules. Anything that's out of my control, your control, and everyone else's control - I call that G-d's business. Much of our stress comes from mentally living out of our own business. When I think, "You need to get a job", "I want you to be happy", "You should be on time", "You need to take better care of yourself", I am in your business. When I'm worried about past or future, earthquakes, floods, war, or when I will die, I am in G-d's business. If I am mentally in your business or in G-d's business, the effect is separation. Every time in my life that I had felt hurt or lonely, I had been in someone else's business".*

Keeping connected with G-d is the only way to be connected to blessing. He doesn't want you to "get involved" in the "big decisions", the areas where you have no choice. He just wants you to say, all day, again and again, יְקֻוֹךְ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, that YKVK is our Elokim; or, in laymen's terms, that all the judgement of G-d is all His Kindness. To realize that יְקֻוֹךְ הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים YKVK is HaElokim! (Devarim 4;35)

Here are the Selfie Steps: The self-help steps that will help you access the blessings that Yitzhak and Yaakov blessed you.

1. Want what you have and don't want what you don't have. Embrace your life as it is, rather than as you wish it to be.
2. Each blessing you mention YKVK Elokenu, each Shema recital, remind yourself that the difficulties of your life are all G-d's Mercy and blessing.
3. Realize where you have choice in life, and only mind your own business. Not G-d's business. And not anyone else's business.

## BIG-PICTURE THINKING

Life coaching is simply asking a bunch of not simple questions. In life, if you just focus on the smallest details, you never get the big picture right.

The job of the life coach is to bring about bigger picture thinking, and to get the big picture right.

Thinking “big picture” is thinking like the Gedolim, the Jewish Leaders. It is the way that the Rishonim, the commentators on Shas, analyze the Talmud and come up with a deeper truth. By bringing in other seemingly contradictory pieces of Talmud and putting it all together, they find a deeper truth that is not recognized at first. If you focus only on the piece of Talmud you are learning at the present, you can never get down to the truth. Because, like the Aron Hakodesh that is symbolic of the Torah, Torah knowledge is a blend of width, length and depth.

If you want to live a life of truth, you cannot focus on the present, alone. When making big picture decisions in life, we need to bring in the future and all the possibilities that it may bring. We need to look at the past and how that might affect the future. Big picture thinking is something we can learn from our Forefather, Yaakov.

וַיְהִי עֶשָׂו אִישׁ יָדָע צֹדֵד אִישׁ שָׂדֶה וַיַּעֲקֹב אִישׁ תָּם יָשָׁב אֶהְלִים *And Esav was a man who knew hunting, a man of the field, while Yaakov was a simple man, who sat in the tents* (of Shem and Ever). Of the Four Sons in the Haggadah, the *Tam* is just a simpleton. On the other hand, Yaakov is described with the virtue of being an *Ish Tam*, a simple man. In which way is simplicity a virtue? And how can we learn from it? Also, if Yaakov was known for being the Man of Truth, תָּמָן אֶמֶת לַיַּעֲקֹב, why then was he titled *Ish Tam*, a simple man, and not *Ish Emet*, a man of truth? And why was Yaakov known as the man of truth? Wasn't he dishonest to his blind father Yitzhak when he presented himself as Esav while taking the Berachot, even if they were rightfully his?

Rabbeinu Bachye explains that there is a level of truth greater than that of being honest. And that is the level of being *Tam*, an “all-inclusive truth”. *Tam* is a *Machriah* מַכְרִיעַ, a blend and underlying truth between two opposing truisms, similar to the word תְּיוֹמֶת, the middle of the lulav. (See Alei Shur B; Emet) How so?

In our holy Seforim it is written that there are seven Middot of G-d, and that Avraham personified the Middah of חֶסֶד: that even if you are not deserving of something, G-d will, in any case, give it to you. Yitzhak personified the Middah of

גְּבוּרָה, that G-d will give you only what you deserve. But Yaakov personified G-d's Middah of תַּפְאֶרֶת, or a blend between his father's and grandfather's personification. A blend between גְּבוּרָה, strict judgment and, חֶסֶד, endless kindness. That sometimes, even if the truth is that you do not deserve kindness in the present, nevertheless, it could be that something in the past or future has made or will make you deserving of kindness or mercy. This big-picture-truth was the truth of Yaakov. *Tam* is not just honesty. *Tam* is finding the all-inclusive, *underlying* truth.

It is true, in the present, Yaakov was dishonest. But in the big picture, when we figure in both the past and the future in the equation, Yaakov was Emet. For in the past, Esav had sold his rights of the firstborn to Yaakov, and in the future, Esav was not competent to accept the Priesthood and its responsibilities. Esav not only sold the firstborn rights to Yaakov. He scorned them, by selling them for lentils.

The Talmud teaches us that the difference between אֶמֶת and שֶׁקֶר is that אֶמֶת has “legs” to stand firmly on, while the שֶׁקֶר has just one-legged letters. (Shabbat 104a) In order for you to access the underlying truth, you can't get stuck on one point, on one leg. You need a broader knowledge and awareness, like the two-legged letters of אֶמֶת. Big-picture thinking is the way G-d runs His truth in His world of optical illusions. The Chafetz Chaim explains why the signature of G-d is Truth. Because when you look at the letters אֶמֶת on a signet ring, they appear to be backward. Only after the letters are stamped can we see the message that is intended. The same is with recognizing the truth of G-d in the world: we need big-picture thinking. In the present, when we are looking at the letters of Emet on the signet ring, it does not look like Emet, for in the present, the world looks like it is full of Sheker. But only when one is able to see the bigger picture of past, present, future can one see the Emet, the truth that G-d is really in charge. Real truth, eternal truth, is always a blend of past, present, and future. When we get locked into the present, we cause ourselves unnecessary stress, aggravation and frustration. As an Egged bus driver once said, *No one ever misses a bus. They just got early for the next bus.*

When the Torah tells us תַּמִּים תִּהְיֶה עִם יִקְנֹק אֶלְהֶיךָ Rashi explains this – Do not inquire (through unnatural means) after the future, and accept whatever G-d brings upon you. How did Rashi understand that the word *Tamim* means to accept the present, or accept the future? Because being *Tam* is thinking bigger picture, not getting stuck on something you do not understand.

The month of *Kislev* is a month in which we are to accept that the reason why we sometimes have difficulty accepting G-d's decisions is because we are behaving like the *Ksil*. The fool. How so?

אֶת-זֶאת לֹא יָדַע וְכִסִּיל לֹא יִבְרִין *A simpleton will not know, and a fool will not understand this.* The problem with the fool is that he sees a whole airplane, but he walks over to one specific screw and asks, “Why is *this* screw *here*?” זֶאת. I want to understand this one little screw; why is it here?! Fool! First understand the whole plane, and then you will be able to understand the reason and place of that screw! But we think that we have better questions than that fool. *I want to understand why I did not catch this bus. I want to understand why people are not being nice to me* (most of the time, they themselves don't know). *I want to understand why I do not understand why...*

In the big picture, when we bring in past and future, we have a lot to be humble about. All haughtiness is a lie, for it is focusing on one moment. This was the key to our forefather Avraham's humility, especially when he was praying to G-d for G-d to change His decision about Sodom. וְאָנֹכִי עָפָר וָאֵפֶר *And I am like dust and ashes.* Why dust and ashes? Because Ashes are something that may have had a glorious past before you burnt them, but now, they are only ashes. Dust may have had no past, but it has potential for a glorious future. Avraham said to G-d, *My greatest feeling of humility comes from looking at my past*

### G-D, WHY THE DELAY?

People don't have as hard a time believing in G-d as they do accepting G-d. So many times, people pray and G-d makes the person wait, and then, sometimes, only after a while, G-d gets things moving. Many times, many people have a hard time understanding G-d, and accepting that He has His reasons for the delay.

*and my future. Then I realize how humble I need to be. I realize that You have reasons that human beings are not capable of understanding, when they focus on the details of the present.* One of the names the Torah uses for the word “grave”, is the word שְׂאוֹל, pronounced as *Sheol*. Doesn't that word mean loan? Why do we call a grave, a loan? As Amin Adjmi once told me, *All that we own in life is a loan, except for our own souls...*

Many times in life, we don't want to face the truth, because the truth may be too hard to accept, too humbling. And our ego is sometimes more precious to us than our ability to get on in life. So then the sad thing happens: we lie to ourselves again. And a lie told often enough eventually seems to us to be the truth. All this makes life complicated. But Yaakov was a simple man. He was the man of truth. He was the other extreme of his twin brother, who was loved by Yitzhak כִּי-צִיד בְּפִיו *because he had game in his mouth.* What does that mean? A hunter's trade is to fool its prey into thinking that the coast is clear, while actually, the trap has been set. The greatest danger is when someone fools himself. Like the enticing appearance of prey, as it looks in the present, but in the big picture, when we bring in the future, the person is just setting himself up for a trap. Esav was so good at fooling his father, he even fooled himself. Yaakov was the opposite of fooling himself; he totally accepted himself, as he was. Everything was clear, thought out – past, present, future. Yaakov never, ever, fooled himself.

A lie can travel half way around the world while the truth is still putting on its shoes. Because for the truth, we need to decelerate making the final analysis. Not to jump to conclusions. To be “simple”, not to assess the present without factoring in the past and future.

Everything in the Shidduch of Rivka was clearly the Hand of G-d, and how it all happened so fast is amazing. It is so strange then, that G-d made them wait so long for a child. Yitzhak and Rivka prayed, and G-d put them on hold. Why should they have to wait so long to have a child?

Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld points to an amazing thing in our Parasha. וַיַּעֲתֶר לוֹ ה' And G-d allowed *Himself to be entreated by Yitzhak's plea*. Rashi adds, נִתְפָּצֵר וְנִתְפָּתָה לוֹ G-d was *persuaded* by Yitzhak, and G-d granted Yitzhak children. Here, Rashi is stressing, that G-d allowed Himself to be persuaded to grant Yitzhak children, something He was not really ready, otherwise, to do. What does this mean?

We know that Yitzhak's son, Esav, on the day of his Bar Mitzvah, transgressed the cardinal sins. He came home, and found Yaakov busy brewing lentils, the food that is traditionally eaten by mourners. This is because Avraham had just passed away, and Yitzhak was in mourning.

The Midrash teaches that Avraham died on that day because G-d did not want him to see how his grandson, Esav, had left religion. This would not be a *שיבה טובה*, a happy ending, for Avraham. So Avraham actually had to die five years earlier than he was supposed to. He died at 175, instead of dying at the age of 180, like his son Yitzhak.

Now, the reason why he died five years earlier was because of his grandson Esav's misbehavior when Esav reached bar mitzvah. This means that if Esav would have come into the world on the day that he was supposed to, Avraham would have lived a full life of 180 years. So, why was Esav born five years before his time? Because Yitzhak prayed and prayed, so much, that G-d was persuaded, and gave him a son five years earlier than planned.

Of course, we need to pray for things that are important. But when G-d does not answer us as fast as we want to, every minute of a delay has a reason.

There is a wild story that happened with the Arizal. The story is cited in the Sefer Kav Hayashar. A forty-year-old man approached the Arizal, saying that he had not yet merited finding a wife. As much as he dated, it never bore results. Either she did not want him, or he did not want her. The man asked the Arizal for a bit of advice. Shockingly, the Arizal told him, "Your shidduch lives in Alexandria, in Egypt. Go there. Her name is so-and-so, and her father's name is so-and-so".

The man who believed the Arizal traveled the dangerous roads from Tzfat down to Egypt, and when he finally arrived in Alexandria, he asked if anyone knew the father. It turned out that the man was a well known member of the community, in charge of the taxes in town. When he asked about the daughter, he was told that she was of marriageable age and that a suitable husband was being sought for her. She was said to be a wonderful person, attractive, and only twenty years old.

He went to the shadchan in town and asked if it was possible to arrange him a meeting. The shadchan approached the father of the girl and said. "I have a nice, 40-year-old man, and he would like to meet your daughter. The father agreed, and the two met. They enjoyed each other's company, and after a few meetings, they agreed to get married a month later. The engagement worked out nicely, and the wedding was well attended by Rabbis and respected community members. They had a beautiful wedding.

The father of the girl gave a whopping 150 thousand dinars for the dowry. The man was very happy with his new wife, but not for very long. Three months later, the wife got sick. Her situation got so bad that she died within a few days. For him, this was, obviously, a huge shock and a great tragedy.

Broken, he went back to the Arizal in Tzfat, and asked, why the Rabbi had sent him to marry that girl. It would have been better, he said, if I would never have known her!

The Arizal told him to take a seat. He had a few questions to ask him. "Do you remember what you worked in 20 years ago?" The man responded that he had owned a bakery. The Arizal asked, "Do you remember who your partner was?" The man said, Yimah Shmo, that cursed man! That partner robbed me of all my money! Because of him, I lost out on 150 thousand dinar!

The Arizal told him that that was the answer. The woman you married – her soul, in her previous life, was that partner. He died shortly after he ran away with your money, and in Heaven it was decided that he would need to come back, in reincarnation,



to marry you, and bring you pleasure for three months, to rectify the pain that this Neshama caused you when you were partners in the bakery. So, after the three months, her Tikkun was done, and her Neshama returned to its Creator. And because the amount that you lost was 150 thousand dinar, you were paid back in the dowry. And this is the reason why your marriage was delayed until you were 40, for you needed to wait until she was ready to get married. Now, it is time for you to go and get married to the wife that you will remain with, happily ever after.

R' Yitzhak Fanger recently told a story that a certain woman had told him. The woman was doing laundry, while her six year old daughter was looking for sweets that were high up in the kitchen cabinets. The girl fell backwards, on her head. The loud noise of the fall startled the mother, and she lost herself when she saw her daughter on the floor, in a bad state. The ambulance came as fast as it could and took mother and daughter to Terem, where it was decided to rush the girl to the Emergency room in the hospital. Things looked much too serious for Terem. When they got to the hospital, a nurse came, looked at the child, and decided (something she was not allowed to, as she was not a doctor) that the child's condition was not an emergency and could wait. They waited 6 hours, from 8 pm until 2 am. The child was very hungry, so the mother searched in her purse, finding only a bag of raisins, which she gave her daughter. She waited impatiently until a doctor arrived, who

immediately decided that the child needed anesthesia, so that he would be able to begin complicated head surgery. The doctor asked why the mother had waited 6 hours to come after the child had fallen. The mother frowned and said that she was there earlier, but the nurse decided that it was not an emergency.

The doctor asked to make sure, before administering the anesthesia, that the child had not eaten anything for the last few hours. The mother felt horrible, because she did give her daughter some raisins, just a half an hour before! Sternly, the doctor said that she would need to wait another 6 hours without food, so that he could begin anesthesia and surgery.

Now, the mother was beside herself. She started asking G-d – why?. Why did the nurse say that it was not an emergency? Why did she make the foolish mistake of giving the girl the raisins, without asking the doctor first? And why does she have to wait another six hours to start the surgery? Doesn't G-d have mercy on her daughter?

When the 6 hours had passed, the doctor came, ready to start his medical procedures. He checked the child, and told the mother that now, it does not seem as though the child will have to go through head surgery. Something happened over those six hours.

Now all delays made sense.

## THE HOLY THIEF

Next to the grave of the Sabba of Shpoli is the famous tombstone that says, "Here lies Yossele, the Holy Thief".

The Hassidic masters tell that the Saba from Shpoli would spend a lot of his time with the Jewish thieves in town. "I can rely on my bandits. I trust in them." One day, the band of thieves planned to steal the treasures of the local church. The church was locked, triple locked. But the thieves learned about a narrow side window, which was close up to the roof of the church. Next to this window, on the inside of the church, was a ladder. The thieves turned to Yossele, who was thin and tall, flexible and swift, brave at heart and perfect for the

mission. Nimble as a cat, Yossele climbed up onto the slanted roof. He opened the window and slid down the ladder. A large tapestry served well to package golden idol trophies and silver coins that Yossele found. He tied a rope around his bundle of goods, climbed up the ladder, and pulled up the rope. From above, he called his band, but he did not know that, in the meantime, the police had shown up, and his friends had already fled in every direction. The police noticed Yossele calling up from the roof. They opened the front door of the church and escorted Yossele, from the top of the ladder straight to the bottom cell of the dungeon.

At his court case, Yossele defended his life to the judge with his story. "I saw that all the townsfolk would bring all different types of presents to the statues in the church. Gold and silver. I wanted to check if the statue was for real, or if the townsfolk were being fooled into giving their hard earned money to a hoax. I entered the church; I pinched the idol's nose, but he did not flinch. I started taking the idol's things right in front of his eyes, and he did not make a peep. I got so mad, I said, "This statue is a swindle! I will take all of the money from the statue and give it back to the good, hardworking townspeople."

The judge became enraged with fury and sentenced Yossele to death. Both for Yossele's thievery, and for Yossele's Chutzpah.

But before Yossele's execution, he was offered an ultimatum. "After you did such a brave act, it is a waste of your life that we execute you. If you convert to Christianity, we will make you into a Christian saint, and you will have a great life of glory and honor." Yossele responded, "Yossele is a thief, but Yossele will not rebel against his G-d!" He repeated this statement, again and again, each time they attempted to persuade him.

In front of the whole town, Yossele was brought to a pot of boiling tar. "Yossele, this is your last chance. Convert to Christianity, and you will have life of luxury!" And Yossele responded, "Yossele did a lot of bad things, but Yossele will not rebel against his G-d." They forced his hands into the boiling lead, and reminded him, "Last chance!" Yossele screamed, "Yossele stole, but Yossele won't rebel against his G-d". And those were his last words, as he repeated them, before his body was pushed brutally into the lead.

The Rebbe from Shpoli told his chassidim, before he died, "I want to be buried next to Yossele, the holy thief."

Yitzhak blessed Yaakov, but only after Yitzhak had smelled with his Ruach Hakodesh the Jewish evildoers of the generations that do Teshuvah. וירח He smelled the scent of Yaakov's

clothes, hints to בוגדיו את ריח, וירח את ריח בגדי, He scented the scent of Gan Eden that emanated from the rebels, the evildoers, who repented. Even the rebels of the Jewish Nation die with the smell of Gan Eden. He smelled Yossele, the holy thief, and he smelled Yosef Mashita.

As the Roman who attempted entering the Temple was struck by an angel, the Romans did not dare to loot it. They needed a Jew to initiate that move. They found the right man. Yosef Mashita. They told this *Rasha* that the first thing he would take out of the Temple would be his to keep. On each successive time, whatever he took out would belong to the Romans. Yosef Mashita had the audacity to enter the Temple and take out a golden Menorah! The Romans looked at it, and he was shocked when they said to him, "This is a candelabra that belongs in a palace, not in the home of a commoner, like you. Go into the Temple again, and the next thing you take out will be yours." Yosef did not go back in. He refused, saying, "It is enough that I have angered my Master once; I cannot do it again..." They offered him a three-year position of levying taxes (an important and lucrative office). He refused. They threatened him with a death of suffering and torture, but he adamantly refused to repeat his transgression. "It is enough that I angered my Master once; I cannot do it again..." They did not just kill him. They tortured him to death, inflicting upon him unspeakable suffering; but, with his waning strength, he said, over and over, "Woe is to me for I have angered my Maker". (Breishit Rabbah 65; 22) וירח את ריח בוגדיו, *And he smelled the scent of the rebels*. When Yitzhak smelled these descendants coming from Yaakov, he smelled the scent of Gan Eden, and he understood, intuitively, that we need this blessing of superhuman strength.

And then, Yitzhak blessed Yaakov with the blessing that Yaakov's descendants needed in order to stand strong and live their last breaths, sanctifying G-d's Name. And he said, ויתן לך האלקים. *And may He give you, the Elokim...* The blessing hints to the source from which the Jewish People got this superhuman strength. Listen



closely. *And may He give you the Elokim, ...* May G-d give us the G-dliness we need to stand up strong for a higher purpose. G-d's גבורה, G-d's Might, is His strength in allowing His Attribute of Mercy to override His Attribute of Judgement. We all have this G-dliness, this צלם אלוקים inside us. It is the ability to exercise self-discipline; it is the ability to have self-sacrifice. No matter how low a Jew has fallen, there is a point of self-sacrifice he can find from within, a blessing that we received from Yitzhak, לך האלוקים.

What is the secret that separates Yaakov from Esav? It all boils down to self-talk, allowing this voice of G-dliness to take over the inner conversation. The midrash tells us the difference between the Tzaddik and the Rasha. The Tzaddik speaks **לב** or **אל לב** *to his heart* or *on his heart*, ויאמר דוד אל לבו, (חנה מדברת על לבה), while the Rasha speaks **בלבו**, *in his heart*. ((ויאמר המן בלבו)) *It is being confined to the thinking of one's heart that makes all the difference.* (M. Rabbah Esther 10)

There is not much written in the Torah about Yitzhak's life, in comparison to the amount written on Avraham and Yaakov, who needed to deal with people. Why? Because Yitzhak's life was about

גבורה, overcoming inner battles. Akeidat Yitzhak, self-sacrifice. Yitzhak needed to concentrate on striving to be the best possible father for a son like Esav. And when he saw Esav's Gehinom, when Esav entered his room at the time of the Berachot, it was an even greater Akeidah for Yitzhak than the Akeidah, itself. (ויחרד חרדה גדולה) *Maybe I am accountable for this? Maybe my approach as a father was faulty?* These were all internal struggles of גבורה, of how to behave with his son.

When Yaakov entered, Yitzhak smelled that same smell (of Gan Eden) that he had smelled at the Akeidah. For Yaakov to listen to his mother, and to risk even the one beracha that was meant for him, and to go against his nature, was an Akeidah for Yaakov. That Akeidah, going against your nature to serve G-d, is the secret path to Gan Eden. The Ben Ish Chai explains that this is the concept of Fear of Heaven. Why not Fear of G-d? Because Heaven, שמים, is made up of אש ומים, fire and water. Fire's nature is to make water evaporate, and water's nature is to put out fire. Fear of Heaven is about going against one's nature when it is necessary, just as fire and water dwell together, to serve G-d. That is what Gan Eden is all about. It is all about the Akeidahs that you go through in life.

## THE FULLY CHARGED LIFE

Everyone who walks ארץ, the land, has a רצון, a will. Ask anyone you meet what would be the greatest thing that he could achieve over the next 5 years. You will always get some sort of answer, of some sort of dream, hope, or aspiration. When someone has a clear, laser-beam Ratzon, then he is רץ, he runs! Because he is living the "Charged" Life, a life full of energy, motivation, alacrity, excitement, etc.

But there are two types of "C" lives that all the rest of the people in the world fall under. There is the Caged Life. The life where people are manipulated by fear, or are "stuck". *I wish I could achieve x, but this person, or that circumstance, or*

*some other manipulation or excuse, is stopping me from reaching my dreams.*

The third life is the Comfortable life, where people give up their dreams, their hopes, their destiny, because they prefer the comfortable lifestyle they are in. Their comfort zone is too precious. They talk the talk – they talk about what is important, they talk about what would be amazing in life. But they don't walk the walk – they don't want to pay the price for the lifestyle they wish for, they don't want to get out of their comfort zones, they don't want to take responsibility. The lifestyle they live is diametrically opposed to the life of their dreams. They are not willing to get uncomfortable for the sake of their ambitions.



Baruch Hashem, we live in a time where there are so many yeshivot, seminaries, Shuls, organizations, etc. Ken Yirbu. Unfortunately, though, so many people in our Frum system have some sort of spiritual aspiration, but very little motivation. Low battery. This is because they are living either the Caged life, or the Comfortable life. They don't want to pay the price of being more spiritual. Of taking that responsibility of bringing G-d into their everyday lives, as much as possible.

Esav sold his rights as a firstborn to Yaakov for nothing more than a bowl of lentils. The word the Torah uses is יָבַן עֵשָׂו אֶת הַבְּכֹרָה And Esav scorned the rights to the firstborn. R Wolbe asks, How can a person either buy or sell the rights of a firstborn? Isn't that something spiritual? R Wolbe explains how Esav sold his spirituality, his firstborn rights. Spirituality *can* be sold, according to how much you don't value it. And on the flip side, spirituality can be "bought" according to how much you are willing to give up for it. Spirituality is something that is not tangible, so its price, whatever you are willing to invest in it or risk for it, is its value. This explains how the deal of the firstborn sale went through...Don't we have a rule of מִשְׁתָּהּ יוֹתֵר הַנָּאָה that something cannot be sold for a price that is much greater, or much lower, than its real value? How, then, could the sale of the firstborn rights go through for such a low price? The answer is that spirituality is worth whatever you are willing to barter for it. For a hungry Esav, the bowl of lentils had the same worth as the firstborn birthrights, which were of inestimable value to Ya'akov.

This can also explain why it is considered that Esav "scorned" his firstborn rights, by selling them. Didn't Rashi mention earlier that Esav was afraid to keep his firstborn rights, because of the responsibilities they entailed? Esav was afraid that if he would retain those firstborn rights, he would have the status, legally, of a Kohen. That was the law in his times. Being a Kohen meant being the one to serve G-d, bring sacrifices, be G-d's representative to the people of the world, and representative of the people to G-d. Esav was ready

to give up the privileges that come along with the responsibility, not because he belittled being the Firstborn, but because he was afraid of the punishments he would receive for not keeping the strict laws that only the Kohen needs to keep! If he wanted to be absolved of them because of fear of the responsibilities, because he did not want to take any chances, why does the Torah call that "scorning"?

The answer is that to acquire a level of greatness, you need to "pay" – to accept the responsibilities that go along with it. That is its "uncomfortable" price tag. If you do not want to pay the price, *it means that you do not want that level of greatness*. It means you are not ready to sacrifice, to make your effort to reach that level. It means that you do not really value, what you are not willing to take responsibility for.

This is such a simple, black and white, belief. If you don't want to practice shooting baskets in the dark, you don't want to play basketball like Michael Jordan. If you don't want to learn something again, and again, and again, then you do not want the memory of R' Ovadia Yosef. If you don't want to take the chance of losing a game, you are not ready to win. If you are not willing to get "no"s, you are not ready to make a sale. If you are not ready to learn mussar and look your mistakes in the face, you are not ready to become the great person you can become. It means that these goals are not important enough to you. If your holiness is important, you are willing to give up more internet access, a cooler phone, a better deal, and a more exotic vacation. But, if to save a couple of dollars, you go to places where you see unholy sites, that means that all your holiness is worth to you is a couple of dollars.

What value in life that you live by, will cause you to live a fully charged life? Are you living a charged life, a caged life, or a comfortable life? What comfortable habits or lifestyles are causing you to stay away from that awesome life you truly deserve? How much are you willing to pay, what are you willing to give up in order for you to achieve the life of your dreams?





The more we ask ourselves these questions, the more passionate, real, and charged, our lives will be.

## ABSOLUTE PARENTING

Yitzhak was criticized by the sages for not rebuking Eisav enough. The Midrash tells about some other “parenting mistakes”. Avraham did not rebuke Yishmael enough, and King David did not admonish Avshalom, or Adoniah, and that is why they became who they became. On the other hand, Avraham reproved Yitzhak, and Yitzhak reproved Yaakov. That’s why they became who they became. (Midrash R. Shemot 1;1)

This is odd. For the Talmud tells us that in the end of days, G-d will approach each of the Patriarchs. “Avraham, your sons have sinned!” And Avraham will respond, “Let them be wiped out to sanctify Your Name.” But Yitzhak will find merit for the Nation. ” I, also, had a son that sinned. Still and all, I loved him and I forgave him, despite my being flesh and blood. You , the Master of the World, Merciful and Compassionate King, Merciful Father, certainly you can love and have pity on your Sons, despite the fact that they sinned wantonly. ( Shabbat 89a, *see Iyun Yaakov*)

So, was Yitzhak a good parent or a bad one? Was it his fault? Did he make some parenting mistake by loving Esav a lot, or not?

And, if Yishmael and all Hagar’s other children came from him, was Avraham a good parent or a bad one? How about Yaakov’s parenting mistake, favoring Yosef and causing the tribes to be jealous, which the Rabbis criticize and say that because of it we are still in exile today. Does this make Yaakov a good parent or a bad one? How about King David?

I believe that there is no contraction here. Good parenting is no guarantee for having a good child. And, parenting is not absolute. There is no one good parenting approach. A person cannot be an absolutely good parent or an absolutely bad one, because people are not absolute in these traits; furthermore, there are at least two people involved in parenting, parent and child. Even the best parent

can have a problematic child, something comparable to a seasoned chef using inferior ingredients in a cake: despite his experience and ability, the end product will certainly not be up to his usual standard.

A parent has tough decisions to make. Sometimes, deciding between what is in the child’s best interest now, and what is in the child’s best interest in the future. Many times, a parent, who is only a human being, just can’t know what is best . Or just can’t relate to the child’s problem... There are so many questions that have no absolute answers. “If I show him love, it might give him the feeling that I accept him, which will give him self esteem and self confidence. Or, it might let him feel that that I approve of his misbehavior.”

When Yitzhak displayed abundant love for Esav, he felt that this was the only way to parent him. It might be that the right way, also, had its own downside, but it was still the right thing to do, in Yitzhak’s view. (According to one explanation, Yitzhak behaved this way with Eisav, in order to be the one who could find merit at the End of Days, when G-d will approach the Patriarchs about the sins of the Nation.” *And Yitzhak loved Esav, for he had game in his mouth*” then means, that *Yitzhak* had game, or merit, in his mouth, for the End of Days.) Those that the Midrash mentions did not fail in their parenting. It seems that there was a decree that these great people needed to deal with such children, and they decided to deal with them in line with their Ruach HaKodesh.

We even find that Esav was born to be a Rasha. Rivka fell off her camel the first time she saw Yitzhak, for she saw a frightening prophecy that an Esav would come from her marriage to Yitzhak. She also had this prophecy while Esav was in her womb. So, Esav was going to be somewhat of an Esav, either way. The question was just how to deal with a difficult child. Still, in the opinion of



the Rabbis, the Esav he became was an outcome of insufficient rebuke.

Nowadays, we do not know how to rebuke, for we do not know how to love. The passuk tells us that Hagar stood at a distance, in order not to see her 27-year-old son, Yishmael, die. She was an arrow's shot away, from Yishmael, who was lying in a faint, under a bush in the desert. "And she raised her voice, and she cried. And G-d heard the voice of the lad, and the angel of G-d called out to Hagar from Heaven and said to her, ... 'Do not fear, for G-d has listened to the voice of the lad, at that moment.'" Why does the Torah stress that G-d heard the cry of Yishmael and not the cry of his mother, Hagar? Rashi explains that G-d listens first to the prayers of the sick, before listening to others who pray for them. But still, why does the Torah stress this, twice?

Rabbi Shimshon R. Hirsch explains that Hagar did not pray *for the sake of her son*. She could not bear to see her son die, so she prayed so that *she* would not see him die. The Torah records that Hagar left him under the bush, and did not stay at his side. That type of mother is not the mother whose prayers pierce the Heavens for a dying son. And this is why G-d did not answer her prayers, but heard her son's.

This is a great lesson in parenting, because it shows how one's actions can be 'sliced and diced'. The same prayer, 'Save my son,' can be for the sake of the son, or the sake of the parent. Likewise, so many actions of a parent, so many responsibilities that he shoulders, so many prayers, so many gifts, so many religious family guidelines, can be put

into two different categories: for the child's sake, or for parent's sake. The reason why rebuke needs caution, nowadays, is because in our cold-hearted century, it is so hard to love that child's-sake love.

Many times, parents view their children's successes, or their children's failures, as their own. They look at their children as "their children", not as people. Your child has *his own* responsibilities. Social responsibilities, scholastic responsibilities, family responsibilities, and, believe it or not, religious responsibilities. Effective parenting is letting go of control on your child's responsibilities as soon as he is able to take care of them himself, delegating your child's responsibilities to him. If you take responsibility for your child's behavior, religious level, successes or failures, when you are not supposed to, you form a manipulative situation. Yitzhak knew not to take responsibility for someone else's – in this case, Esav's – actions.

As a coach, I look at parenting as performance, not as a bunch of parenting rules and regulations. The latter approach springboards the negative questions that the parent asks himself, or says aloud, "Am I a bad parent? What have I done to make me a bad parent?" This is a dead end question, and one that is not precise. Good or bad is relative, not measurable. The effective question is, "What is my best option to respond in this present situation, for the sake of my child's future?" The good/ bad parent questions flood the mind when the whole issue of parenting is focused on the parent, not on the best interests of the child. Instead, I ask, "What is the best option for the child's future?", and I always come out with better performance that way.

## WORDS FROM MY HEART

Imagine how your life would be if you had a behavior technique that would make you the greatest negotiator you know. Imagine how great it would be if you had in your hands a way to smooth out all the rocky relationships you have with the people it is hard for you to get along with. Imagine you had at your disposal the tool that separates

between the righteous and the wicked, the one that empowers you to become a tzaddik. Well, stop imagining. After this article, you will be in possession of that tool. After you will have finished reading, the only thing you'll need in order to become successful, will be to take action. Because ALL success, always boils down to *two things*.



Knowing *what to do* and DOING IT.  
Knowing *what not to do*, and STOP DOING IT.  
Simple.

Picture to yourself the person that you do not get along with. The person that, excuse me for saying so, gets on your nerves. What do you feel when you see that person's face is in your mind's eye? WRITE IT DOWN. *Now, get out of yourself.* Picture yourself going into that person, into his face, into his values, into his clothes. For a minute, change your name to his name. And, while you are being him, but *really* being him, what comes to his mind about you? What are you thinking, while being him, about you? *Write it all down.* Once you do this properly, you will be able to see the things from that person's perspective, and it will be easier for you to communicate effectively and deal with that person. Step two, using the same technique, get yourself into a third person: think, now, that you are a third person, an outsider, an impartial observer. What would you, the neutral, outside third party, advise you to do in this situation to improve this relationship? Can you see both sides, and the pity that they are both not getting along? When we change perspectives like this, we begin to realize that it is not that those people are *difficult*. They are just *different*.

If you have to *negotiate* with someone, the best way to go about it is to get out of yourself, out of your interests, and see things from the other person's perspective. If you can't use this technique, do whatever you can to learn the person's perspective. Then, think of what you can do to satisfy the other person's interests and needs, while at the same time, making it work for you. It takes some thought, but it can get you far.

And, this is all learnt from the midrash. (M. Rabbah Esther 10) The midrash tells us the difference between the Tzaddik and the Rasha. The Tzaddik speaks *אל לבו* or *לבו* *to his heart* or *on his heart*, while the Rasha speaks *בלבו*, *in his heart*. *It is being confined to the thinking of one's heart that makes all the difference.*

For instance, in our parasha, when Esav was angry at his brother Yaakov for taking the blessings from Yitshak that he, Esav, believed were his, he said *in his heart*, "*The days of my father's mourning will get closer and I will kill Yaakov, my brother.*" (27; 41) He knew that he could not hurt his brother Yaakov while Yaakov was learning Torah. Yaakov would not stop learning Torah for anything. The only thing that could make Yaakov stop was his being an *אבל*, a mourner. "Once Yitshak dies, and Yaakov is mourning, I can kill him..." And Esav kept thinking in his heart... *If I kill Yaakov only, then I will be summoned to the court of Shem V' Ever. Instead, I will go and marry Uncle Yishmael's daughter. I will get Yishmael so angry at Yitzhak for getting the blessings from Avraham, that he, Yishmael, will kill Yitzhak. Then, I will kill Yaakov, and then kill Yishmael, since I am the Go'el Hadam (closest blood relative to the murdered that has the right and even obligation to avenge murder) for my father, and I will get all the blessings from Avraham for myself.* (Breishit Rabbah 66) These are the thoughts that Esav said to himself. How did he say it? *ויאמר בלבו*, *in his heart*. Not to his heart, and not on his heart. All these outrageous thoughts and feelings going on inside, even though they were unthinkable for a man who was from the greatest ever at honoring and respecting his father. *Just get someone to kill Dad, and then kill your brother and uncle.*

The Midrash tells us about another Rasha who spoke to himself in his heart. *ויאמר המן בלבו*, Haman said *in his heart*. When Achashverosh asked Haman "*what could be done for the man whom the king wishes to honor?*" Haman thought to himself, *Achashverosh wants to honor me and is asking me what he could do to show me honor.* How outrageous. Why would the king ask Haman how to honor Haman? Another thought *in the heart*. A thought of the Rasha.

But when tzaddikim talk to themselves, as when Chana was endlessly praying to G-d for a child, and *she needed to stay focused in her prayers*, (see Radak) despite her dashed hopes, it says *הנה מדברת*



על לב, she was speaking **on** her heart. When David Hamelech was musing to himself that perhaps, he should run from Shaul with his 600 men to Eretz Plishtim despite Shaul's heartfelt apology, it says **ויאמר דוד אל לבו**. (Shmuel a 27) *Because the Tzaddikim have their hearts in their control. And, in contrast, the Reshaim are in the control of their hearts.* It all has to do with how one speaks to himself, the way one manages inner thoughts. This Midrash needs explanation. Bear with me.

One of the basic tenets of the Jewish religion is that a person comes to this world to sanctify G-d's Name. Surprisingly, the Vilna Gaon (in the beginning of Even Sh'leima ) says that the purpose of a person's visit to the Universe is to break a Middah, a negative character trait. How can we reconcile the seeming contradiction?

The answer is that most people know what they can do to serve G-d better, what they can do that will sanctify G-d's Name. The problem is that we sometimes have a middah that is holding us back. Laziness, anger, haughtiness, materialistic drives, jealousy ,etc. If one breaks the Middah in order to serve G-d, he shows that G-d and His Will are very, very, important to him. People do not change themselves for most things in life. They put the effort to change their character only for things that are very important to them. By working hard to remove a middah that is preventing him from doing G-d's Will, one demonstrates that the Will of G-d is so important to him. And this is how that person becomes a living, walking Kiddush Hashem.

If one serves G-d only as long as it fits in with the parameters of his character, or does only what is convenient and easy for him – only if it goes along with how he perceives himself, then although those mitzvot are important, still, the person has not yet fulfilled his mission. He has not yet transformed himself into a walking, talking, Kiddush Hashem. One needs to first break a characteristic in order for him to really sanctify G-d's Name.

Although it sounds strange, but the Torah mentions in numerous places that a person thinks in his heart. There are two types of thoughts. There are thoughts from the head, and thoughts from the heart. The thoughts of the heart are beliefs, emotions, desires and the like, while the thoughts of the head are the intellectual ,rational and cognitive thoughts. The tzaddikim use the following formula: they let the thoughts of the **head** control the thoughts of the **heart**. When G-d sets down a way for us to behave, and that way goes against the Tzaddik's beliefs, emotions, and/or desires, the Tzaddik exercises control over those thoughts from the heart. Tzaddikim need to break a middah, something in their nature, when it goes against G-d's Torah and Mitzvot. So, they align their actions with G-d's Will, and do not remain confined to their habitual thoughts, emotions or life beliefs. Even if their hearts dictate a certain behavior, if it is contrary to what they know should be done, they overcome that impulse. They are able to see things from a perspective outside of their own "hearts". They transcend the self and follow what is right, from the Torah's point of view. The Reshaim don't. They believe it is not in their control, that they just can't. They see the world from the point of view of the heart, from their desires and emotions, and their personal perspectives and beliefs. They persist in thinking in such a way, even if it sounds ridiculous. *Because to the Reshaim, the perspective of the heart is the only perspective.*

This is how we can understand how the head of Esav merited to be buried in the Ma'arat Hamachpela. (Baal Haturim says that this is hinted to in the first letters of the words **שדה עפרון** that spell Esav.) He thought, in his head, like a Tzaddik. His body was not buried there, for his body did not follow the thoughts of his head! This is what can decide if one is a Tzaddik or a Rasha . It all depends on if you are willing to go out of your beliefs, desires, and emotions, *to do what you know* is the right thing in life.





## THE CHALLENGES OF THE FFB (*FRUM FROM BIRTH*)

Both Yitzchak and Rivkah had to pray hard until G-d granted them children. But a close look at the beginning of our *parashah* reveals that G-d actually answered the prayers of Yitzchak, not the prayers of Rivkah (*Yevamot* 64a). What was the reason for this? The Talmud explains that Yitzchak had an advantage over his wife: He was the righteous child of a righteous father, whereas Rivkah was the righteous child of a wicked father. The rule is that the prayers of a *tzaddik* descending from a *tzaddik* are more effective than those of a *tzaddik* descending from a *rasha* (wicked person).

Now, we may wonder about this rule since the Torah earlier indicates that Rivkah came from a family and community of evildoers (at least in some ways) in order to emphasize her greatness: although she was surrounded by evil influences, she did not allow herself to be tainted by them. Furthermore, we are all familiar with the statement of our Sages that *baalei teshuvah* (penitents, returnees to Torah Judaism) “stand in a place where even full-fledged *tzaddikim* do not stand.” That is, they are on a higher spiritual level. If so, why should the prayers of Yitzchak have been more effective than those of Rivkah simply because Yitzchak was “religious” from birth?

The explanation is that although Rivkah came from an irreligious – actually, idolatrous – home, she was not the *baal teshuvah* our Sages were referring to. They were referring to someone born into a religious family who sinned, and then returned to the fold by repenting (doing *teshuvah*). Let us understand this idea, which may strike us as counterintuitive. Why should someone who was able to withstand the temptations of the lifestyle of his or her family and community be less effective in prayer than a “*tzaddik ben tzaddik*,” a person who did not have to struggle with all of this?

One answer is almost obvious if we think about it. When the righteous child of righteous parents prays, he can draw on *zechut avot* – the merits of his righteous parents and ancestors. This explains why there are families whose prayers are especially

powerful (and why many people turn to righteous present-day members of these families for “prayer assistance” in times of need).

I would like to suggest a second answer as well. No-one would deny the great achievement of those who took it upon themselves to become religious when they had to leave the comfort of their social setting – and sometimes endure opposition from family when it came to kosher foods, Shabbat, and similar issues. These people struggled tremendously for the sake of truth, and their reward is enormous. This is what Rivkah had to go through.

But apparently, in the eyes of our Sages, this does not compare with the difficulties one who was born religious faces in keeping on track. One who is born in a house where the surrounding culture and beliefs run against the culture and beliefs they have been raised on, may have to struggle to withstand many temptations all around, and to accept the reassurance of parents that they are missing nothing. In contrast, someone who came from a shallow world in which there is no ultimate meaning or goal in life, and family life revolves around entertainment and vacations, knows that he is not really missing out on anything. He has experienced it all, and knows just how shallow all of these “pleasures” really are. This is not so for the religious. They have to take it on faith, so to speak, and sometimes labor to ignore the allurements of cheap thrills and worldly pleasures.

And this is exactly what Yitzchak did. He grew up in a home without such influences and allurements (after his brother Yishmael was sent away). He never experienced any of the outside world’s so-called pleasures, yet he did not feel deprived. For this alone, he had greater merit than Rivkah.

### Four Contemporary Challenges

\* Religious Jews sometimes convince themselves that they will not be influenced by having significant contact with secular Jews or gentiles. I



can tell you from what I have observed over the years that this is far from the truth. It is just possible, by the way, that there is a Biblical precedent for this. It seems to me that the slight spiritual decline experienced by Yehudah (the son of Yaakov, our Patriarch) – as described in *Parashat VaYeishev* – might be connected with the business partnership he made with one of the townspeople.

\* Religious Jewish parents – especially in Western societies – sometimes convince themselves that the open-mindedness of the surrounding culture is also good policy at home. What they forget of course, is that they are opening a Pandora's Box which may explode in their face. While children should be given the power to make certain decisions, we believe that the alternatives we allow them to choose between must all be acceptable from a Torah standpoint.

\* The religious student often sees the student from a non-religious or less Orthodox home taking his prayers and studies more seriously than himself or

herself. In the girls' seminaries, an FFB student might not understand why she has difficulty keeping to the standards of a friend or acquaintance who observes a modest dress code that is stricter than her own. Instead of giving in to the temptation to keep away from the friend or acquaintance, she should seriously consider re-evaluating her own standards.

\* Finally, FFB's should meditate on the reward they will receive in the World-to-Come for living a lifetime without looking around outside the Torah world to see if they are missing out on anything. This is a major test for some – especially in Israel, where there is an organized movement to get religious people to become non-religious. I strongly recommend to any FFB who finds this temptation getting the better of him or her, to speak with people who were seduced by this insidious movement, but had the inner strength and wisdom to return to the fold.

## SEEING THROUGH THE SKIES

*And it was when Yitzchak became advanced in age and his eyes dimmed from seeing... (27:1). Rashi explains why Yitzchak had lost his eyesight: when Yitzchak was on the altar and his father was about to slaughter him, the Heavens opened up, the Angels were crying and their tears fell into the eyes of Yitzchak, so that they were dimmed.*

R' Shmuel Birnbaum asks: What does this mean? That the skies were opened for the angels to see what was happening? Couldn't the angels see everything just perfectly from their place in the heavens *without the skies opening up*?

He answered that up in the heavens, everything is clear. There are no questions. There are no doubts. All the things that we humans go through, all the tests that we endure due to being unable to fathom G-d's plan, are crystal clear when seen from up there.

The angels were able to see how Avraham was going through the test; they saw that he would be

asked – *at the last second* – to put the knife down. They knew that G-d would explain that He had requested from Avraham only to bring up his son on the Altar, *not to slaughter but to place him there and then take him down*. Knowing all they knew, from the point of view of the upper world, there was no reason for tears. *There was no emotion*. It was simply a test.

But then, G-d opened the Heavens. The angels were able to see things from the point of view of *this world*. *What Avraham felt*. What was going through Avraham's mind. *How could he do this to his son? How could he face his wife, Sarah? How could he face the world and explain what he did?* The tears spilled from the eyes of the angels as they were able to perceive the thoughts and feelings surging through the mind and heart of our Patriarch.

When people cry, when tears emerge, it is a result of emotions that cannot be expressed by words.



When emotions are too much to hold in, they emerge as tears. The tests that we go through in this world bring us to tears. The tests of others bring us to tears. But in the world up high, everything is understood, and everything can be explained. And therefore, up there, there are no tears.

When we see others going through trials, we sometimes see a solution, or a different perspective from that seen by the person who is suffering. When we attempt to tell them of our idea, offer suggestions or propose a different perspective...the person suddenly gets frustrated, or, perhaps, feels that he is not understood. And the truth is that if we make our suggestions, then it is more than likely that we did not even listen to what he had been

telling us. A person has so many things going on in his life story, with so many past emotions, *that a second person would have to listen to him for a very long time in order to really understand what he is going through.* He would have to ask a lot of questions. Something like breaking down the barrier that exists between people. There were more than a few times that I experienced this in coaching. I would listen for a few hours, just asking questions to understand what the person was going through, and then I wanted to cry. I knew then, when I felt a tear on my own cheek, that I had listened well. I knew that I had broken the barrier between us. *Something like what happened when the angels cried, after they saw through the Heavens.*

## VOICE LESSONS

A person I was coaching wanted to change his behavior: he wanted to stop getting angry. This person did not realize that his voice was very deep and had something threatening about it. When he talked, it sounded as if he was in charge of everything, giving commands. It even sounded as if he was straining himself to talk deeply and loudly. I noticed this and introduced him to a voice teacher that I knew. In one session, the voice teacher showed this fellow that he could speak with a more relaxed voice, a higher pitch, and more softly. He worked on changing his voice, and he stopped getting angry! People who would usually avoid him, including his children, now found it pleasant to speak to him. I, myself, couldn't believe how much this tactic worked. So far, this fellow has gone two weeks without getting angry even once. He used to get angry twice a day.

The way we speak has so much to do with how we behave. The tone and color of voice has a massive effect on us. The way we say things influences what we feel as much as it expresses what is inside us. We see this in Yaakov Avinu. When Yitzchak heard his son Yaakov's voice and felt the hairy touch of Esav, he said, *הקול קול יעקב והידיים ידי עשו*. The voice is the voice of Yaakov, and the hands

are the hands of Esav. Rashi explains this that "the voice of Yaakov" means the manner in which Yaakov spoke. When Yaakov wanted his father to stand, he would request, *קום נא*. Please stand. When Esav would ask his father to stand, he would tell him *יקום אבי*, Stand up, Father. Yitzchak was in tuned to this difference, and this is how he had a feeling that it might not be Esav, but Yaakov, standing before him.

The question is, if Yaakov changed everything about himself, his clothes, his name and whatever else was connected to his identity, why didn't he change the way he spoke, as well? Why couldn't he just have said, "Get up Father," just as his brother Esav would say?

The answer is that Yaakov was willing to change almost everything about himself. But to speak like a man of the fields, like his brother, Esav, without gentleness, without politeness and respect – *that*, he was not willing to change. Even for a minute. Why didn't he change his voice? After all, using his regular style of speech could make him seem a trickster in his Father's eyes. And, what's more, he could lose the blessings. But changing his "voice" – the way he spoke to people – meant changing his



true identity. That was something that he would just not do.

*It is not only what we say that tells others about us. It is how we say it.*

## DEALING WITH A WAYWARD CHILD

*Yitzchak loved Esav because game was in his mouth... (Bereishit 25:28)*

But why? Why did Yitzchak favor Esav more than his righteous son Yaakov? The *Ben Ish Chai* explains that if we look closely, we will see in this verse two reasons for Yitzchak's surprising preference. The first reason is that Esav "trapped" his father with his smooth and misleading talk. He slyly presented himself as a righteous person by asking his father questions which gave the impression that he adhered to Jewish Law scrupulously. For example, he asked about tithing salt. Yitzchak, however, did not fall for his son's pretensions. But he showed Esav love outwardly in order that his son should not continue in his wicked ways and go off the religious path entirely. Yitzchak believed that by building such a relationship with his son, Esav would – out of respect for his father – refrain from the sort of behavior that would embarrass his prestigious family.

The second reason why Yitzchak loved Esav is given at the end of the verse: "*and Rivkah loved Yaakov.*" Since Rivkah outwardly portrayed her love to Yaakov, and Yitzchak himself loved Yaakov inwardly, Yitzchak feared that Esav's jealousy would get the better of him. Yitzchak felt it appropriate to show love for his son Esav in order that Esav should not feel jealous of Rivkah's

love toward Yaakov. He hoped that Esav would suffice with the love of his father.

There is a very important lesson here for parents of the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Let's be honest: One of the wonders of the modern world is a family where the children really have respect for their parents. What is the secret of such families? More often than not, the answer is that these children were respected as people by their parents. By being respected, they were taught what respect means. If we want our children to respect us, we have to first respect them. This is something that even an Esav was able to pick up.

Another important lesson in parenting that emerges from the *parashah* is this: a key reason why a child from a religious family leaves his parents' path is because he feels that he has no relationship with his father. A father must remember this at all times, and learn from Yitzchak. In the merit of dealing with his son Esav with love, and not throwing him out of the house, Yitzchak became our defender in Heaven. Through his example, he beseeches G-d to let His wayward children come back home to Torah and Mitzvot. Indeed, if we ourselves follow Yitzchak's example when faced with children who stray from the Torah path, this may well help generate the merit which will bring the Final Redemption.

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**IN LOVING MEMORY OF SONNY AND IRENE GINDI A"H**

Refuah Shelemah

AVRAHAM BEN MAZAL

