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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

No Fit for Counterfeit

“And Hashem said to her (to Rivka about Esav and Yaakov), ‘Two regimes are in your womb...’” (25:23)

Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica by Isaac Newton forms the foundation of classical mechanics. In it, Newton expounds his laws of motion and the law of universal gravitation. The Principia is considered one of the most important works in the history of science. But Newton was not only a scientist. He was also responsible for supervising the minting of money and amassed a considerable fortune himself. D. T. Whiteside, who became the twentieth century’s preeminent scholar and shepherd of Newton’s mathematical work, could not help but remark: “Only too few have ever possessed the intellectual genius and surpassing capacity to stamp their image upon the thought of their age and that of centuries to follow. Watching over the minting of a nation’s coin, catching a few counterfeiters, increasing an already respectably-sized personal fortune, being a political figure, even dictating to one’s fellow scientists – it should all seem a crass and empty ambition once you have written a Principia.” (“Isaac Newton” by James Gleick)

Being a great scientist, it seems, does not necessarily make you a great person.

Almost certainly not coincidentally, there is another well-known work with the title Principia Mathematica. In 1910, Alfred North Whitehead and Bertrand Russell published a three-volume work on the foundations of mathematics also titled Principia Mathematica. Russell’s contributions to logic, epistemology, and the philosophy of

mathematics established him as one of the foremost philosophers of the 20th century.

Sadly, it seems that as a person he fared no better than Newton. During his tenure as a professor at Cambridge University in England, Russell was once giving a lecture in a large amphitheater. In the middle of his discourse, a young lady raised her hand to ask a question. Russell indicated that he would take the question and she began, “Doctor Russell, you are one of the preeminent philosophers of your day. I would like to ask you, please, how you manage to equate this with the fact that you are having an illicit affair with one of your students?” Russell looked at the young lady and without missing a beat replied, “Madam, as I am a mathematician, do you also expect me to be a triangle?”

In Judaism, you have to be a triangle.

“And Hashem said to her, ‘Two regimes are in your womb...’”

Nothing in Judaism is more despised and nothing creates a greater desecration of Hashem’s name than a Torah scholar who is corrupt. The regime of Esav allows and indulges in the foibles of the bright and the witty, but the regime of Torah allows no counterfeiting whatsoever.

Q & A

Questions

1. Why was it important that Yitzchak look like Avraham?
2. Why does the Torah stress that Rivka was Betuel's daughter and Lavan's sister?
3. What are the two differences between Tamar's pregnancy and Rivka's pregnancy?
4. Why was Esav named Esav?
5. Who gave Yaakov his name?
6. How did Esav deceive his father?
7. Why was Esav faint when he returned from the field?
8. Why are lentils a food for mourners?
9. What was the birthright that Yaakov bought from Esav?
10. Why was Yitzchak not permitted to go to Egypt?
11. Why did the Philistines plug up the wells?
12. Why did Yitzchak lose his sight? (three reasons)
13. At what age should one anticipate his own death?
14. Why did Rivka ask Yaakov to bring two kid goats?
15. Why did Esav leave his special garments with Rivka?
16. What fragrance did Yitzchak detect on Yaakov's garments?
17. What was the "fat of the land" promised to Esav?
18. When will Esav be freed from subjugation to Yaakov?
19. What inspired Esav to marry the daughter of Yishmael?
20. Knowing that Machalat was Yishmael's daughter, it's self-evident that she was the sister of Nevayot. Why, then, does the Torah state that Esav married "Yishmael's daughter, the sister of Nevayot"?

Answers

1. 25:19 - So everyone would agree that Avraham was indeed his father.
2. 25:20 - To praise her, that even though her family was evil she was righteous.
3. 25:24 - Rivka gave birth at full term to two children, one righteous and one wicked. Tamar gave birth after seven months to two righteous children.
4. 25:25 - He was born fully developed. The name Esav is based on the Hebrew word for "made".
5. 25:26 - G-d.
6. 25:27 - Esav deceived Yitzchak by asking questions that suggested that he was very strict in mitzvah observance.
7. 25:29 - From having murdered.
8. 25:30 - They are round like a wheel and mourning is like a revolving wheel that eventually touches everyone.
9. 25:31 - The right to bring sacrifices.
10. 26:2 - Through the akeida he had attained the status of a korban and was forbidden to leave Eretz Canaan.
11. 26:15 - They felt that either marauders would attack to capture the wells, or, if attacking for other reasons, they would use the wells as a water supply.
12. 27:1 - a) From the smoke of the incense offered by Esav's wives to their idols; b) From the angels tears which fell into Yitzchak's eyes at the time of the akeida; c) In order for Yaakov to receive the blessings.
13. 27:2 - When he reaches five years from the age his parents were when they passed away, until five years after.
14. 27:9 - One for Yitzchak and the other to offer as a korban Pesach.
15. 27:15 - He suspected that his wives might steal them.
16. 27:27 - The scent of Gan Eden.
17. 27:36 - Italy.
18. 27:40 - When the Jewish People transgress the Torah.
19. 28:7 - Seeing that his father despised his current wives, he resolved to take a wife from his father's family.
20. 28:9 - To indicate that Yishmael died between her betrothal and her wedding, and that it was Nevayot who gave his sister in marriage to Esav. Knowing the date of Yishmael's death, we can determine the date of Esav's marriage and thus Yaakov's age, 63, at the time of his flight from Esav.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Disgraceful Disparagement

The word *vayivez* only appears twice in the entire Bible: After Esau sold his firstborn rights to Jacob, he then turned around and “disparaged” (*vayizev*) those birthrights (Gen. 25:34). Rashi explains this means that Esau mocked and repudiated the worship of G-d. Similarly, when Haman was incensed that Mordechai would not bow to him, he decided to kill all the Jews because he found it too “disgraceful” (*vayivez*) to just attack Mordechai (Esther 3:6). The word used in both cases is a cognate of *bizayon* – “disparagement.” Similarly, after introducing how G-d loves Jacob and hates Esau, the prophet Malachi lambasts certain Kohanim who act like Esau in disparaging (*bozei*) the worship of G-d by offering blemished animals as sacrifices (Mal. 1:1-8). The cycle is completed elsewhere in the Bible, when G-d Himself belittles Esau, saying via the prophet Obadiah (a prostyle who descended from Esau): “...you are very disgraceful (*baxui*)” (Ovadia 1:2) – again using a cognate of *bizayon*. This essay explores the word *bizayon* alongside three other Hebrew words for “disgrace”/“disparagement”– *kalon*, *zilzul*, and *genut*.

Let’s begin with the word *kalon*. This word appears many times in the Bible and variously refers to a “source of embarrassment/insult.” Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) understands that *kalon* derives from the biliteral root KUF-LAMMED, which he defines as “the opposite of heavy.” In other words, being *kal* means being “lightweight” in a physical sense (e.g., II Sam. 2:18, Isa. 19:1). It also refers to “lightening” a burden (e.g., Gen. 8:11, Ex. 18:22, and I Kings 12:4), which makes something “easier.” In Rabbinic Hebrew, the term *kal* appears in the phrase *kal va’chomer* to denote something more lenient or prosaic, as opposed to the *chomer* which denotes something more stringent.

Based on this, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that when one treats a person flippantly by besmirching them, one has essentially declared that person a “lightweight” and not worthy of honor. Verb cognates of this word appear when Hagar started to belittle Sarah after she became pregnant before her mistress (Gen. 16:4), when an officer of the court metes out too many lashes to a criminal (Deut. 25:3), and when a child slights his or her parents’ honor (Deut. 27:16). *Kalon* is thus the noun that describes the sort of disparagement and insult inherent in treating somebody as something less than they are.

Interestingly, Rabbi Pappenheim finds two more words that use the KUF-LAMMED string to be derivatives of this core meaning. Firstly, the word *kelalah* (“curse”) essentially refers to the act of dismissing another person as unimportant, thus taking him “lightly” – whether or not one actually utters a curse against them. To put it simply, when one hexes another person, he essentially declares that person as unimportant and undeserving of whatever good G-d has in store for him. Secondly, the word *kilkul/klokel* (“spoiled,” “rotten,” “damaged”) basically refers to the process by which something loses its value and is lowered in stature so much so that almost nothing is left.

When discussing the word *bizayon*, Rabbi Pappenheim traces the term to the two-letter root BET-ZAYIN, which refers to something “considered totally worthless.” He stresses that *bizayon* is a stronger form of disparagement than *kalon*. When one disparages or insults something in this way, one considers the object of his disdain as something totally unworthy or valueless. Another word derived from this biliteral root is *bizah* (“loot,” “booty”) which refers to plundered property that one took without paying for, such that it is cheapened and worthless in one’s eyes.

What's fascinating is that Rabbi David Chaim Chelouche (1920-2016), the late Chief Rabbi of Netanya, contends that because of the interchangeability of ZAYIN and SHIN, the *bizayon* can be understood as a cognate of *bushah* ("embarrassment").

The term *zilzul* in the sense of "disparaging" or "insulting" does not appear in the Bible, but very similar words derived from the two-letter string ZAYIN-LAMMED do appear in the Bible. Rabbi Pappenheim explains that the core meaning of this root is "the inability of components to remain attached." Based on this, he explains that the word *zulat* ("except for," besides") derives from this core meaning because it denotes something not attached to or included in a given set. In a similar vein, the word *nozel* ("downward flow") refers to liquids' inability to remain one solid mass, as its components tend to drift away from each other – mostly common downwards (because of gravity). Another word derived from this root is *zal/zollel* which refers to "unbridled monetary spending" (see Isa. 46:4), as if one is unable to remain attached to his financial assets that just flow away from him. This is similar to the English term *liquidate*, which refers to selling things cheaper than they are worth.

When one sells low or engages in wasteful spending, he shows that his assets are not as valuable and important to him, so *zal/zollel* came to also refer to something that has a lowered value (for example, see Lam. 1:8). In that sense, the word *zalzal* (Isa. 18:5) refers to the unimportant shoots of a tree/vine that are pruned so that they do not adversely affect the more valuable fruits. In the same sense, the word *zol* in Rabbinic Hebrew means "cheap" because the price of a product goes down when it is supplied in abundance and people therefore do not view it as especially important. Parallel to all this is the Hebrew term *zilzul*, which refers to "disparaging/disgracing" something by cheapening its value. Indeed, Rabbi Eliyahu HaBachur (1469-1549) explicitly connects the word *zilzul* with this root, and also notes it is sometimes used by the Targumim to translate

cognates of *kalon* in Aramaic (see Iyov 40:4, Prov. 12:9).

The Hebrew term *gnai/genut* ("insult," "disgrace") also does not appear anywhere in the Bible, but it does appear in the Targumim and in the Mishnah. For example, the Mishna (*Shabbat* 6:4) reports that according to Rabbi Eliezer carrying a weapon is considered an adornment for a man, while the Sages maintain that carrying a weapon is considered a "disgrace" (*gnai*). Similarly, the Mishna (*Yoma* 3:11) applies the term *gnai* to insult the House of Garmu who refused to teach outsiders how to bake the Showbread, the House of Avtinas who refused to teach how to prepare the Temple's *ketoret* ("incense"), and others who similarly refused to teach their special skills that could enhance the Temple's services. Finally, the Mishna (*Pesachim* 10:4) teaches that in the Passover Haggadah one should "begin with *genut* and conclude with praise" – which refers to beginning the retelling of the Exodus story from a point in which the Jewish Nation were in utter disgrace (i.e., their pre-Abrahamic pagan origins or their enslavement in Egypt).

Maimonides (in his commentary to the Mishnah *Shabbat* 6:4 and *Yoma* 3:11) defines the word *gnai* as "the opposite of praise." The word *megunah* ("disgraceful/disgusting") is an adjective form of this word.

In his lexicon of Targumic Aramaic aptly titled *Meturgaman*, Rabbi Eliyahu HaBachur lists the word *gnai* word under its own quadriliteral root (GIMMEL-NUN-ALEPH-YOD). Interestingly, Rabbi Dr. Ernest Klein (1899-1983) traces the etymology of this word to the Aramaic root GIMMEL-NUN-YOD which means "to be within shade." Perhaps this might be related to the English expression "to cast a shadow" over something which means to present it in a less-than-positive light, that is, to essentially defame or disgrace it. This Aramaic root evidently goes back to the biliteral Hebrew root GIMMEL-NUN ("protection"), which Rabbi Pappenheim explains

yields words like *gan* (“garden,” a patch of land that is guarded and protected), *niggun* (“melody,” which includes a variety of musical sounds that mimics the variety of flora that grows in a garden), and *magen* (“shield”). Rabbi Dr. Klein also connects *gnai/genut* term to the Arabic word *janyya* (“crime”).

Although not of an etymological nature, Rabbi Yisroel Hopstein (1737-1814), also known as the

Maggid of Kozhnitz, offers a Hassidic insight based on the connection between *gnai* and *gan*. He explains that in order for a garden to thrive and demonstrate fecundity, it requires large amounts of manure to fertilize its flora. In fact, the more one adds such “disgraceful” (*gnai*) things, the more it enhances the garden’s (*gan*’s) ability to grow. In light of this, Rabbi Hopstein explains that the same is true of a person: the more a person humbles himself before G-d and understands his own disgracefulness, the more a person has the potential to grow and reap the fruits of his efforts.

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COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

THE BLESSINGS OF THE SHEMA (PART 6)

*“The most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched
– they must be felt with the heart.”
(Helen Keller)*

The second blessing continues: “And unify our hearts to love and fear Your Name, and may we not feel shame for eternity.”

G-d’s love for us and our love for G-d are the central theme of the second blessing before the Shema. Mutual love is so fundamental that the saintly Chofetz Chaim, in his commentary on the command to love G-d, avers that even if a person were to repeat the words “You should love the Lord, your G-d” over and over again, it would not be enough unless they cause their heart to love G-d! For this reason the Chofetz Chaim gives a homiletic twist to the understanding of the phrase “and unify our hearts to love [You]” by explaining that we are asking G-d that our hearts be filled with only one overwhelming feeling of love for Him. That there should be no room for any other kind of love or desire that might lead us to forbidden actions. Rather, we should be filled with a pure and unadulterated love for G-d.

Rabbi Raphael HaKohen was the Chief Rabbi of Altona-Hamburg-Wandsbeck in the eighteenth century. Aside from being the revered mentor of the Jewish communities under his jurisdiction, he was also held in the highest esteem by the monarchy of Denmark. He authored several books that displayed his erudition and his mastery over the Written and the Oral Torah. In his classic *Marpeh Lashon*, Rabbi Raphael HaKohen writes that very often there is a marked difference between how we behave and how we think. He writes that the Torah first commands us to fear G-d and only afterward comes the command to

love Him. This is the most effective way of approaching our service of G-d. We begin by serving G-d out of fear – fear of the punishment we might receive if we do not serve Him correctly. But, as we grow closer to G-d, and as our knowledge of G-d’s existence matures, we begin to serve Him out of love. Subsequently, love of G-d is the higher level of serving G-d, but without the healthy foundation of fear of G-d it is almost impossible to reach. If so, asks Rabbi Raphael HaKohen: “Why does our blessing mention first love and only afterward fear? Surely, it should follow the Torah’s sequence, and fear should precede love!” He answers that our prayers are an expression of our aspirations, because our prayers reflect our thoughts and what is in our hearts. Therefore, we first ask that our hearts be filled with love for G-d, because that is our focus and our ultimate ambition.

Perhaps this is why our blessing uses the Hebrew word “*b’libeinu*,” which actually means “hearts” in the plural. It as if we are being told that we have two hearts – one heart that loves G-d and another heart that fears G-d. Some may fear G-d but not love Him, and others may love G-d but not fear Him. Our goal is to unify our “two hearts” as one to serve G-d in the most complete way possible. However, because love and fear are contradictory emotions, we must entreat G-d to assist us in unifying the two together.

And this clarifies why the verse ends with the words, “and may we not be shamed for eternity.” Rabbi Shimon Schwab explains that “eternity” is a

reference to the World to Come. If we live our lives in a way that reflects the intensity of our relationship with G-d, after leaving this world and ascending to the spiritual realms we will have nothing to be ashamed of. We will be able to attest to the fact that we tried our best to live lives that comprised both fear of G-d and love of G-d.

Rabbi Shalom Noach Berezovsky (1911-2000), the Chassidic Rebbe of Slonim (more commonly referred to as the *Netivot Shalom*, the name of the series of brilliant Torah thoughts he published) pointed out to his students that our Sages teach that the Giving of the Torah was not a one-time event that took place over three thousand years ago

at Mount Sinai. Rather, the Torah is always accessible and waiting to be given to us anew. "At which moment does the 'Receiving of the Torah' take place?" he asked them. One student answered that it happens at dawn on the Festival of Shavuot. A second student suggested that it happens when the Ten Commandments are read during the Shavuot Torah reading. A third student had a different theory, and so on, with each student coming up with yet another possibility. After everyone had tried to find the solution, the Rebbe answered his own question, telling them, "Each person receives the Torah when they are ready to accept the yoke of Torah!"

To be continued...

PARSHA OVERVIEW

After 20 years of marriage, Yitzchak's prayers are answered and Rivka conceives twins. The pregnancy is extremely painful. Hashem reveals to Rivka that the suffering is a microcosmic prelude to the worldwide conflict that will rage between the two great nations descended from these twins, Rome and Israel. Esav is born, and then Yaakov, holding on to Esav's heel. They grow, and Esav becomes a hunter, a man of the physical world, whereas Yaakov sits in the tents of Torah, developing his soul.

On the day of their grandfather Avraham's funeral, Yaakov is cooking lentils, the traditional mourner's meal. Esav rushes in, ravenous from a hard day's hunting, and sells his birthright (and its concomitant spiritual responsibilities) for a bowl of lentils, demonstrating his unworthiness for the position of firstborn.

A famine strikes Canaan and Yitzchak thinks of escaping to Egypt, but Hashem tells him that

because he was bound as a sacrifice, he has become holy and must remain in the Holy Land. He relocates to Gerar in the land of the Philistines, where, to protect Rivka, he has to say she is his sister. The Philistines grow jealous of Yitzchak when he becomes immensely wealthy, and Avimelech the king asks him to leave. Yitzchak redigs three wells that were dug by his father, prophetically alluding to the three future Temples. Avimelech, seeing that Yitzchak is blessed by Hashem, makes a treaty with him.

When Yitzchak senses his end approaching, he summons Esav to give him his blessings. Rivka, acting on a prophetic command that the blessings must go to Yaakov, arranges for Yaakov to impersonate Esav and receive the blessings. When Esav in frustration reveals to his father that Yaakov has bought the birthright, Yitzchak realizes that the birthright has been bestowed correctly on Yaakov and confirms the blessings he has given Yaakov. Esav vows to kill Yaakov, and so Rivka sends Yaakov to her brother Lavan where he could find a suitable wife.

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Rosh Hashana 16-22

Signed and Sealed for Life

We have learned in a *beraita*, “Rabbi Meir says: Everything is judged on Rosh Hashana and their judgment is sealed on Yom Kippur. Rabbi Yehuda says: All are judged on Rosh Hashana and the judgment for each category is sealed at the suitable time – on Pesach for grain produce, on Shavuot for tree fruits and on Succot for water. And a person is judged on Rosh Hashana and his judgment is sealed on Yom Kippur; Rabbi Yossi says that a person is judged every day, as the verse *Iyov* 7:18 states: “That You should visit him every morning.” Rabbi Natan says that a person is judged every second, as the same verse in *Iyov* states, “and try him every moment.”

Later in the *sugya* we learn a different opinion on this matter from another Tana. Rabbi Kruspedai writes that the righteous (whose merits outweigh their demerits in Divine judgment) are written and sealed for life on Rosh Hashana. The wicked (whose demerits outweigh their merits) are written and sealed for death on Rosh Hashana. Those whose merits and demerits are equal (called *beinonim*) are written on Yom Kippur in the appropriate Book (of Life or Death), depending on their final balance of merits and demerits.

The commentaries ask numerous questions regarding the nature of the procedure of this Divine judgment on these specific days for the various categories of people. One question concerns our prayers between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. We pray to Hashem during these days that He “write us in the Book of Life.” According to Rabbi Yehuda it appears that the result of judgment on Rosh Hashana was *already written* for everyone on Rosh Hashana and all that remains is for a sealing of the judgment to occur on Yom Kippur. So what “writing” are we praying for during these days? And even according to Rabbi Kruspedai the prayer for writing seems unclear. The judgment for both the righteous and the wicked was already written and even sealed on Yom Kippur, and the *beinonim* are actually awaiting the sealing of their judgment on Yom Kippur – and should be praying for sealing and not for writing.

The key to understanding an answer to this question is in contemplating the nature of the days between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. These days are

known as the *Aseret Y’mei Teshuva* – “The Ten Days of Repentance” – an auspicious period of time in the calendar year for introspection, improvement and repentance, which we pray will increase our merits and draw us as close to Hashem as possible.

Therefore, according to Rabbi Yehuda, we pray to be written in the Book of Life in case we were *not* judged on Rosh Hashana to be in the Book of Life, and that Hashem will *now* write us in the Book of Life as a result of our new merits of giving charity, prayer, repentance and more. And according to Rabbi Kruspedai, the prayer is on behalf of the *beinonim* – whose judgment had not been sealed on Rosh Hashana – to now *at least be written* in the Book of Life, and then sealed there on Yom Kippur. Some commentaries explain that the prayer is even for the wicked, whose judgment for death was both written and sealed on Rosh Hashana. However, Hashem in His great mercy continues to consider their prayers and merits and may decide to now write them in the Book of Life. (Obviously, the topic of this *sugya* is of such vital importance and complexity that it is the topic of countless teachings from Chazal and great Rabbis throughout history – to this very day. For example, I suggest learning the Zohar Hakadosh on this topic for Vayechi, and the writings of the Gaon from Vilna in Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 582.)

I would be remiss in not noting how Tosefot understands the significance of the judgments taught in our *gemara*. From a “simple reading” of our

gemara, it would perhaps seem that the concept of judgment on Rosh Hashana refers to the worthiness of the person to continue to live *in this world*. However, Tosefot notes that we can witness incongruities to this premise. Many righteous people suffer in this world and live relatively short lives, while many wicked seem to happily thrive in this

world and live long lives. Therefore, explains Tosefot, the judgment on Rosh Hashana is for the World to Come. (The need to judge a person's status for the World to Come on Rosh Hashana – while the person is still living in this world – is elaborated upon by many commentaries, including Rabbeinu Asher.)

▪ *Rosh Hashana 16a*

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman

Misleading Deception

The blessing ruse recorded in this week's Torah portion unsettles us with a barrage of questions.

To review the story: Yitzchak, blind in his old age, calls for his son Esav in order to bless him. He instructs Esav to prepare food according to his liking so that he may bless him. Rivka overhears the conversation and instructs Yaakov to pose as Esav. She assuages Yaakov's concerns that he will be discovered and that the sham will only bring curse upon him, and she accepts full responsibility, including any curse. Upon Rivka's bidding, Yaakov brings her the animals and she prepares them. She dresses him in Esav's clothing, and adorns his neck and arms with goat skin, so that Yitzchak may perceive him as the hairy Esav.

Yaakov beats Esav to the scene and presents the dish to his father. Yitzchak is confused – his senses give him different clues: it is the voice of Yaakov, the language of Yaakov, but the hands and smell of Esav. Ultimately, he gives the blessing to the son before him, a blessing of material bounty and political strength.

Moments later, Esav returns, eager to accept his blessing. When Yitzchak realizes he was duped, a

very great terror seizes him. When Esav understands what happened, he shrieks a loud and

bitter cry, and begs his father for any blessing that has been reserved for him. But Yitzchak can no longer bless him – he has already blessed Yaakov to be a master over Esav with all the necessary material provisions. With more prodding, Yitzchak carves out a new blessing for Esav: he too will enjoy the fat of the land and material blessing, but gaining political advantage will depend on Yaakov's spiritual strength and Esav's submissive spirit. Raging with fury, Esav plots to kill Yaakov. Rivka instructs Yaakov to flee to the house of Lavan. Only then does Yitzchak bless Yaakov with the spiritual blessing of Avraham – to be a fruitful nation and inherit the Land.

Rav Hirsch prefaces his discussion with two qualifications: He does not see his role as apologetic, but will not refrain from conclusions that may appear to others as apologetic. Further, he plainly concedes that even after analysis, much may still appear unjustified, especially when measured by the nation whose name of honor – “*yeshurun*” – attests to the virtue of straightforward integrity.

Of the three main actors, Yaakov's behavior is the most clear and transparent. He obeys his mother's command. She never expects him to act for his own interest – Rivka knows that he will resist the ruse. She silences objection by taking full responsibility and appealing to his duty to obey her.

But what could Rivka have been thinking? How could a blessing won by wile bring any true benefit from the G-d of Truth? And if she had in mind some concrete benefit such as priority in inheritance, then such grant would be null and void after the deception was inevitably discovered! Moreover, the whole masquerade seems rather clumsy. Who would really be fooled by goatskins wrapped around neck and hands?

The only thing she could have hoped to achieve was the masquerade itself! She hoped, and knew, that the truth would be discovered. Esav, a “hunter with his mouth,” knew well how to disguise his true character. He had succeeded – despite his marriage to two idolatrous Hittite women – in convincing his father that he was a befitting heir to guide the House of Avraham. Until now, Rivka had stalled Yitzchak from blessing Esav, hoping to bring about his disillusionment. But when all else failed, her plan was this: *Demonstrate to Yitzchak how easily he can be deceived!* If even Yaakov, the wholesome one (*ish tam*), could pose before him as the warrior, how much easier could Esav pose before him as righteous. She succeeded. When Yitzchak understood what happened, our Sages describe his terror as seeing Gehenom open before him – he saw how his whole life he had been deceived. Now aware, he affirmed the blessing to Yaakov, “*he shall be blessed.*”

As for Yitzchak, his intention was to bless Esav materially and Yaakov spiritually. When Esav pleads for any “reserved blessing,” he understands that two blessings were considered, and asks for the one intended for Yaakov. But this blessing for spiritual power is inappropriate for Esav, and indeed Yaakov receives this blessing as he sets off to Lavan’s house to marry. Yitzchak envisioned a partnership where Esav, with his material power, and Yaakov, with his spiritual power, would, in harmony, build the House of Avraham. But Rivka understood, from her own childhood, that material things only bring blessing when guided by the spirit of Avraham, and that the blessings must be bestowed on the one son so moved by that spirit.

Misleading Yitzchak, in fact, led to the correction of a grave deception, and ensured that material and spiritual might be entrusted to the only son capable of forming a nation which would lead the world to the service of G-d.

- Source: Commentary, Bereishet 26:1

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Perek Shira: The Song of Existence

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

THE SONG OF GEHINNOM

Gehinnom says: "For He has satisfied a lustful soul, and a hungry soul He has filled with goodness." (Tehillim 107:9)

After the soul completes its mission in this world, it is hungry for its portion in the World to Come. However, it must first be cleansed in Gehinnom, which is a tremendous kindness since the soul would otherwise be tainted and imperfect forever. This is the sole purpose of Gehinnom, and it yearns only to fulfill it.

For this reason, Gehinnom sings, "For He has satisfied a lustful soul" – Hashem satisfies Gehinnom's lust for the wicked. "And a hungry soul He has filled with goodness" – after the sullied souls are willingly cleansed in Gehinnom, Hashem satiates them with their deserved goodness in Gan Eden, forever.

Gehinnom's song sheds welcome light on the gloom of all suffering in this world, which functions similarly to Gehinnom. One should realize that any suffering experienced in this world is surely well-deserved, decreed by the merciful and just G-d. This realization removes much of the brunt of the suffering. Moreover, the perception of all of Hashem's deeds as being for a singular, good purpose reveals His unity in His universe. The righteous see reason to praise Hashem with all their hearts every day of their lives. For indeed, all of creation – including Gehinnom and suffering – was created for the sake of Hashem's glory.

- Sources: Tractate Shabbos (104a), Chasam Sofer, and Yitzchak Yeranen; cf. Malbim, Pi Eliyahu and Peh David

**In loving memory of Harav Zeev Shlomo ben Zecharia Leib*

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