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From: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org> to: ravfrand@torah.org
date: Thu, Dec 1, 2016 at 3:18 PM subject: **Rav Frand - Don't Take "No" for an Answer / Two Different Blessings**

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #964 – The Non-Observant at Your Yom Tov Meal: Good Idea or Major Problem? Good Shabbos! Not Taking "No" For An Answer When It Comes To Praying To The Almighty For Our Needs

In this week's parsha, the Torah says that Yitzchak was forty years old when he married Rivka. Rivka Imeinu was barren – as was the case with Sarah Imeinu and as was the case with Rochel Imeinu (which is the subject of a discussion in Tractate Yevomos 64a). Yitzchak prayed to Hashem that his wife should be able to have children. The expression the Torah uses to express the nature of Yitzchak's prayer is "Va'Ye'etar Yitzchak l'Hashem..." [Yitzchak entreated Hashem] [Bereshis 25:21]. Rashi explains this to be "hirba v'hiftzir b'tefillah" [he importuned much through prayer]. This means, not only did Yitzchak daven for Rivka, but he was persistent in his davening. L'Haftzir means to persist and to do something over and over again.

Rav Shimshon Pincus, z"l, notes that the Talmud in fact comments [Brochos 32b] "If a person sees that his prayers are not being accepted, he should repeat them, as it is written 'Hope to Hashem, strengthen yourself and He will give you courage, and hope to Hashem.'" [Tehillim 27:14] This in fact is what Yitzchak did here.

However, we must ask, why is it like that? For example, if someone asks to borrow your car and for whatever reason you decline to lend your car, what is the appropriate approach for him to use in order to convince you to lend your car? It is certainly not to return ten minutes later and ask once again "Can I borrow your car?" It is not advisable to go back even the next day and say "Can I borrow your car? Can I please borrow your car? Can I 'pretty please' borrow your car?" Being a nudge is not the way to get somebody to lend you his car, after he has already refused to lend it to you.

When someone turns you down, perhaps you might ask a second time but not "hifziz" – not asking over and over again. It is not wise. It is not polite. A person does not do that. Yet, that pasuk teaches regarding the Master of

the World "Kaveh el Hashem" [express hope to G-d through prayer] and if you are not answered then the solution is "v'Kaveh el Hashem" [once again pray to the Almighty]. This is what Yitzchak did. Rivkah was barren for many years. They got married when Yitzchak was forty. Rivka did not give birth to Yaakov and Eisav until Yitzchak was sixty! Yitzchak davened and davened and davened. This is what Rashi is teaching us with the words "hirba v'hiftzir b'tefilla". So why is there such a difference between the way we should ask G-d and the way we should ask man?

The answer is very simple and very fundamental. When we ask someone to lend us his car or do some kind of favor for us and he declines, the whole issue is that we want the car or the money or the favor – some specific item that the other person does not want to give it to us or will not do for us. Period. We received our answer. Either he cannot or he does not want to satisfy the request and there is no point arguing about it.

Obviously, the Ribono shel Olam can do anything. He is never unable to do something. The Ribono shel Olam is not saying "no" because He is not capable of granting the request. The reason the Almighty wants us sometimes to daven over and over and over again is because He wants the relationship. He wants us to ask (sometimes multiple times) because He wants us to have a shaychus with Him.

The Talmud says that the Ribono shel Olam desires (mis'aveh) the prayers of the righteous. Our tendency is that if we have everything, we forget the Ribono shel Olam. When things are going well, He is not so much a part of our lives. When things are not going well, we all become a little more "religious" and we all daven a little more. This is what He wants – He wants that we should involve Him in our lives.

By human beings, if you receive a "no" once and certainly, if you receive a "no" twice, the prudent course is to stay away. On the contrary, it is just the opposite by the Master of the Universe: Kaveh el Hashem, chazak v'amez libecha, v'kaveh el Hashem [pray to G-d; strengthen your heart; and then – if necessary – keep praying further].

The Difference Between Yakov's Blessing and Eisav's Blessing

Our Sages say that on the fateful day that "Esav came home from the field tired" [Bereshis 25:29], Yaakov was cooking lentil soup, which is a dish for mourners, because their grandfather Avraham Avinu had just passed away. Chazal say that Avraham died five years earlier than he would have otherwise died so as not to live to see that his grandson Esav went off the path of morality that Avraham had hoped all his descendants would follow.

The sages say that on this very day, Esav transgressed five major sins. He raped a betrothed maiden; he murdered someone; he denied belief in resurrection of the dead, he denied the existence of G-d, and he mocked the status of being a firstborn (va'yivez Eisav es haBechorah [Bereshis 25:34]). Ironically, of all these sins enumerated by the Rabbis that Eisav committed that day, the only one explicitly recorded in the Chumash is what appears to be the most minor of the offenses – belittling the birthright. The Talmud learns out the other four sins the through hints and Biblical exegesis.

Everyone asks this question – of all the sins, why single out va'yivez Eisav es haBechorah for explicit indictment?

I saw an explanation in the name of Rav Aharon Kotler, zt"l, that va'yivez Eisav es haBechorah speaks to the type of person Eisav was. Someone who mocks the birthright – given what the birthright symbolized in those days – was in fact committing a grievous sin. Firstborns were designated to be in charge of the Divine Service in the Mishkan. Rejecting the Bechorah was in effect denying respect for and interest in a relationship to the Ribono shel Olam or to His Divine Service. Rav Aharon says that every other sin enumerated by the Rabbis in cataloging Esav's crimes flows from this attitude. This rejection of the opportunity for a relationship with G-d, speaks to the spiritual lowliness of the person and leads to a person becoming a rapist, murderer and a heretic. Spirituality means absolutely nothing to him.

This explains another problem in the parsha. Yitzchak Avinu gives the blessing to Yaakov: "And may G-d give you of the dew of the heavens and of the fatness of the earth, and abundant grain and wine..." [Bereshis 27:28]

Eisav comes in a few minutes later, realizes what happened, and says to Yitzchak "...Is there but one blessing to you, Father? Bless me too, Father!" The pasuk then continues, "And Esav raised his voice and wept." [Bereshis 27:38] Whereupon Yitzchak responds to Esav, "...Behold, of the fatness of the earth shall be your dwelling and of the dew of the heavens from above." [Bereshis 27:39].

If we consider these two blessings, they seem very similar. Yaakov received "the dew of the heavens and the fatness of the earth." Eisav is told that the fatness of the earth will be his dwelling and of the dew of the heavens from above. It almost seems like the same thing. What is the big difference?

The Shemen HaTov writes that there are two fundamental differences: The first difference is the priority. In the blessing to Yaakov, the dew of the heavens comes first and then the fatness of the earth. In other words, heavenly matters – spiritual things — come first by Yaakov. Yes, a person must acquire from "the fat of the land". A person needs parnasah [the ability to earn a livelihood]. However, the focus must be "the dew of the heaven", i.e. – a relationship with the Ribono shel Olam. The order is reversed by Eisav.

The second fundamental difference between the two blessings is that Yaakov was told "V'yiten lecha Elokim" [And may G-d give you] while in Eisav's bracha, there is no mention of G-d. Our Sages further point out that Yaakov's blessing begins with the conjunctive 'vov') v'Yiten "and He should give you", implying that He has previously given AND He will continue to give more. The message is that it is crucial to be constantly in touch with the Ribono shel Olam. Eisav's gift from G-d was "in the bank". He was blessed with the "fat of the land" and he did not need repeated gifts. Yaakov was given what he needed and given again and again as part of an ongoing relationship.

A father who wants to help his married son can do so in one of two ways. He can give him a one-time generous check and let the son use that to become self-supporting and never need to come back to the father again. This is like saying: "Here, have a nice life!" Alternatively, the father can give his son a monthly check, which will guarantee an ongoing relationship. There should be a constant chibuv [loving relationship] between father and son.

The implication of the blessing "V'yiten lecha" meaning, "Yiten, v'yachzor v'yiten" is that there must be a realization that there is an ongoing need. Esav had no interest in a relationship with the Almighty so he was given a "Here, have a nice life" blessing.

This idea is reminiscent of the question asked by the Chiddushei HaRim that the curse G-d gave to the Snake ("you shall eat dust all the days of your life" [Bereshis 3:14]) seems to be a blessing – if the snake can always eat dirt, it will never run out of food. The Chiddushei HaRim explains that this is indeed a curse. Since the snake always has dirt, it never needs to ask for anything and it does not need to have a relationship with a Higher Power. Such a setup, in which there is not a relationship with the Almighty, is really more of a curse than a blessing. This is what Eisav wanted, but from the perspective of a spiritual person, it is more curse than blessing. Yaakov's blessing was "And G-d will give... and give... and give..." – there will be an ongoing spiritual connection between Yaakov's descendants and their Father in Heaven.

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Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum - Parshas Toldos
And may G-d give you of the dew of the heavens and of the fatness of the earth. (27:28)

Behold, of the fatness of the earth shall be your dwelling and of the dew of the heaven above. (27:39)

Two blessings: Yaakov Avinu received the first one from his father, Yitzchak Avinu. Eisav received the second blessing after he discovered that Yaakov had preceded him in blessing. At face value, both blessings are material in nature and quite similar. Both sons were promised blessings from the fat of the land and dew from the Heavens above. Chazal, however, detect what appears on the surface to be a stylistic difference in the syntax of the pasuk. Being that verse (28) begins the text of the blessing, which is a new topic, the conjunction vov - v'yitein, and (may G-d) give, seems superfluous. Rashi quotes Chazal who interpret this as continuous blessing, occurring repeatedly. Furthermore, the definite article Hashem's Name, Elokim, underscores this blessing as emanating from Hashem when He acts in the role of Elokim, employing the Middah, Attribute, of Din, Strict Mercy, which is in contrast with the Name Hashem, implying Rachamim, Mercy. Thus, Yitzchak was intimating to Yaakov that his blessing was contingent upon his being worthy of the blessing. With regard to Eisav, however, the pasuk speaks unconditionally, implying that Eisav's minions will receive their material blessing regardless of their worthiness.

The Sefas Emes explains that the difference between Yaakov and Eisav's blessings lies in the vav of Yaakov's blessing. Eisav's blessing granted him immediate and unconditional material prosperity. The predominant aspect of Yaakov's blessing was that it gave him constant connection to the Source of brachah - Hashem. He gives, and then He gives again.

Our Patriarch received enough to sustain him - and no more. When that would run out, he would turn to Hashem in prayer and ask. This constant connection in not a punishment. It is a sign of the unabiding love that exists between Hashem and the Jewish People. This love must be earned, but ultimately engenders the greatest good - closeness with Hashem.

Horav Yaakov Moshe Charlap, zl, interprets the v'yitein as an admonition to Yaakov to always remember the Source of his blessing. Under no circumstances should Yaakov (or his descendants) think that what they receive is in their own merit. It is all a gift from Hashem. This is essentially how a Jew should think. Whatever he needs is provided by Hashem; whatever he wants - that is something altogether different.

Understandably, much commentary has been written to explain the concept of yitein v'yachzor v'yitein. When the Torah writes: And Hashem will give you, it already implies constant giving. Why, then, does Rashi feel it incumbent to write, "And then He will return and give you again." When a person blesses his friend with material abundance, he does not need to reiterate, "May G-d give you abundance and may He give you abundance again." It is obvious that consistency is part of the blessing.

There is one brilliant homily from Horav Kalonymus Kalman Shapiro, zl, the Piascesner Rav, who presided in Warsaw during World War II, which is noteworthy, for it focuses on the matzav, the prevalent status, both physically and emotionally, of the Jewish population at the time. First, a bit of background.

The Piascesner's Eish Kodesh, from which this dvar Torah is gleaned, was written at a time of utter personal and communal devastation, after the Rebbe had lost most of his family. Indeed, it is the last work of Chassidic origin in Poland. The period of the Holocaust was not conducive to creative thought, certainly not religious thought which required deep thinking and lucid perception. While this tragic era has engendered a voluminous body of religious and philosophical writing, it was all generated in hindsight following the war. It was possible to look back and reflect - and then write. Thus, the Eish Kodesh is an extraordinary piece of work - which I use whenever pertinent. Not only is it an unparalleled example of personal

achievement, it is a singular testament to the ability of the Jews to think cogently even during moments of the most difficult travail. His words speak to us from amidst the heart of darkness itself. Now for the dvar Torah.

The Navi Yeshayah (28:13) says: U'va'u ha'ovdim b'erezt Ashur, v'ha'nidachim b'erezt Mitzrayim. "They will come, those who are lost in the land of Assyria and those who are outcast in the land of Egypt." The Rebbe explains that there are people who are really "lost," and there are those who are simply "outcast." The outcast person has merely been exiled from one location to another place, but he can still be seen and recognized. A person who is lost, however, is neither visible nor recognizable.

In his homily to Parashas Toldos (1940), the Rebbe applies the similes of "lost" and "outcast" to the psychic disintegration of the Ghetto Jews. "For now, the troubles are greatly increasing," the Rebbe says "Indeed, they are shearing the beards of Jews, so that they cannot be recognized by their external appearance. Furthermore, due to the many persecutions and unbearable, unimaginable torments, people even lose their inner identities. This process can digress so far that he loses himself (ehr farlitzich) and no longer recognizes himself. He no longer recalls his self-image as it was a year ago, on Shabbos, or even a weekday before prayer, during prayer and other such times. Now he is crushed and trampled, so much that he cannot discern if he is a Jew, a human being, or rather an animal who does not have the capacity for feeling. He is then 'lost' in the Scriptural sense."

The Rebbe concludes with a message of hope. In the Talmud Kiddushin, Chazal state, Baal aveidah machzir al aveidaso, "The loser (one who has lost an article) must return to search for his lost article." This is because a truly lost article cannot be seen nor recognized and so it is the owner who must go around looking for it in order to find it, to lift it up and bring it back to him. Thus, bearing in mind that Klal Yisrael is Hashem's "lost article" and we are His aveidah, it is Hashem Who is in search of His people. He will find us. He will give us everything good, returning to Him, redeem us, rescue our bodies and souls with great mercy.

This is the underlying (homiletic rendering) meaning of Yitzchak's brachah - yitein v'yachzor v'yitein. Hashem will give not only when the Jew is visible and recognizable (yitein), but also when he is lost, where he is neither recognizable nor visible as a Jew. At such times, Hashem will return (yachzor v'yitein) and give again. The Owner of the lost object will return to search for us and find us - and then bless us with His beneficence.

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TOLDOT Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The lives of our ancestors Yitzchak and Rivkah, the educational direction that they gave to their sons and their differing views of their household, are the subjects of biblical commentary throughout the ages. In our time a more intense psychological examination has dominated modern commentary, even traditional rabbinic commentary. The reason for this is the perplexing dichotomy of life and behavior represented by their twin sons, Yaakov and Eisav. There always exists a tendency to somehow visit the faults of the parents on the bad behavior of their progeny. This attitude has been reinforced by theories of psychiatry and psychology proposed over the last century. Because of this, there exists a somewhat distorted picture of the narrative that is recorded for us in this week's Torah reading. Over the ages, the lives, attitudes and words of Yitzchak and Rivkah have been thoroughly dissected and analyzed. But as is so often in life, the microcosm does not always reflect the macrocosm. And looking for the answer as to what made

Eisav, Eisav and Yaakov, Yaakov need not necessarily be found in the educational and family techniques of their parents. Individuals are individuals and are given free will. We are all born with certain natural tendencies and the task of our life is to exploit them if they are positive and to control them if they are otherwise. Just as the twins were born with different physical characteristics, their natural tendencies in life also differ from the moment of their very birth. The natural tendency of Eisav was to become a man of the field, a hunter, and a person given to physical strength and necessary violence. This natural tendency of virility, activity driven behavior and a narcissistic view combined to make Eisav the person that he was. He had many choices to control and direct his personality and activities into productive channels that would have benefited him and his society. Here is where freedom of choice and free will enters the picture and takes center stage. The world needs people of the field. Not everyone can or should be an exclusive tent dweller. However, being such a person of the field requires the ability to abstain from violence and not to injure others. It was in this respect that Eisav failed. It was not his parents will that enabled him but rather him himself, who was fully responsible for his choices and his behavior. King David was also a man of the field, a hunter and champion of wild animals and enemies. But his physical strength and active nature were entirely controlled by his moral powers and his search for spirituality and eternity. It could be that one's personal nature, which is implanted within us from the moment of birth, is difficult if not impossible to change. However every person's nature can be controlled and directed towards positive goals. In that path lies the great difference between the twins who dominate the narrative of this week's Torah reading. Shabbat shalom Rabbi Berel Wein

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More on Chinuch By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: His own Lulav? "Am I required to purchase for my son his own lulav?"

Question #2: Three-year old Tzitzis? "At what age should my son start wearing tzitzis?"

Question #3: Minor Kohanim "I know that one must be very careful that a kohen, even an infant, does not become contaminated with the tumah of a meis. Yet I rarely see a child under bar mitzvah duchen. Is this consistent?"

Question #4: Kiruv Kohanim "We are in the process of being mekarev a fellow who is a kohen. He enjoys joining us for our family outings, and we love to visit museums. Could this present potential halachic issues?"

Answer: In the beginning of parshas Tolados, the Torah mentions the birth and upbringing of Yaakov and Eisav. In what many consider the most controversial passage in his commentary on Chumash, Rav Hirsch criticizes the education that Eisav received. This provides an opportunity to continue our discussion on some of the aspects of the mitzvot of chinuch that we began a few weeks ago.

In this context, we find the following passage of Gemara: "A minor who knows how to shake a lulav in the way that halachah requires is obligated to fulfill the mitzvah of lulav; one old enough to put on a talis properly is obligated in tzitzis; if he is old enough to protect his tefillin, his father must purchase for him tefillin; when he knows how to talk, his father teaches him Torah and the Shma" (Sukkah 42a; see also Arachin 2b and Tosefta, Chagigah Chapter 1).

We see from the Gemara that we should begin teaching a child Torah and training him to observe mitzvos at the earliest age possible for him to perform the mitzvah correctly. One of the first lessons of mitzvas chinuch that we see here is that the mitzvah is not simply to demonstrate to a child a few times before his bar mitzvah how the mitzvah is performed. The mitzvah is to train him from when he begins to be able to perform the mitzvah properly, and we then begin to encourage him to observe the mitzvos. Thus, as soon as he begins to speak, we should have him recite pesukim. When old enough to wear a talis properly, we should train him in the mitzvah of tzitzis, and when old enough to perform the mitzvah of lulav properly, we should train him to observe that mitzvah.

Why are tefillin different? When the Gemara mentions that a child should begin to observe mitzvos, it teaches that his father is obligated to purchase tefillin for his son, but it does not say that the father is required to buy either tzitzis or a lulav for his son. This implies that only in the case of tefillin is the father required to make a purchase, but not for the mitzvos of tzitzis or lulav. Why are tefillin different?

The answer is that someone cannot observe the mitzvah of tefillin properly without owning his own pair, and it is obvious that a child would not have the means with which to purchase tefillin. Therefore, the mitzvah of chinuch requires the boy's father to purchase a pair of tefillin for him.

However, Chazal did not require the father to purchase the four species or tzitzis for his son. Why not? In the case of the four species, the son should be able to perform the mitzvah by using his father's, and it is therefore unnecessary to require the father to purchase his son a set (Tosafos, Arachin 2b).

What about tzitzis? Regarding the mitzvah of tzitzis, Tosafos rules that, even for adults, Chazal did not require one to purchase a four-cornered garment in order to fulfill the mitzvah. Rather, someone wishing to wear a four-cornered garment is required to have tzitzis attached to it. In the days of Chazal, one did not purchase a garment with tzitzis, or even purchase tzitzis threads to place on a garment. Clothing was made at home, and tzitzis threads, which require being manufactured for the sake of fulfilling the mitzvah, were spun at home. Therefore, there was no requirement to purchase tzitzis for a child, but, that when the household provided all its members with home-made clothing, it provided the men-folk, including those under bar mitzvah, with four-cornered garments and spun tzitzis to attach to them (Tosafos, Arachin 2b).

"Protecting" tefillin The Gemara rules that when a child is old enough to "protect his tefillin," we should purchase for him a pair of tefillin. What does it mean that he is old enough to "protect his tefillin"? Some understand this to mean that he understands that he should not bring his tefillin into the bathroom (Rashi, Sukkah 42a). Others understand this to mean that he can keep a *guf naki*, meaning that he is old enough to be careful not to release flatulence while wearing tefillin, which is prohibited because of *bizuy mitzvah*, treating mitzvos with disdain (Rashi, Brachos 5b; Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 37:2). There is obviously a major difference between these two approaches: A fairly young child can be entrusted not to bring tefillin into a bathroom, whereas someone considerably older may still have difficulty maintaining control and awareness to remove his tefillin when he feels that his stomach is somewhat unsettled.

Contemporary practice Following the second approach mentioned above, which is the conclusion of the Shulchan Aruch, common practice today is that we do not have a child wear tefillin until he is almost the age of bar mitzvah. This is because we are concerned that he will be unable to keep a *guf naki*. Therefore, we wait until the child is almost the age that he is required *min haTorah* to wear tefillin, and only then do we train him how to wear tefillin.

Minor kohanim At this point, let us address one of our opening questions. "I know that one must be very careful that a kohen, even an infant, does not become contaminated with the *tumah* of a *meis*. Yet I rarely see a child under bar mitzvah *duchen*. Is this consistent?"

This question needs to be dealt with as two different headings. The first topic is the prohibition of causing someone to violate a *halachah*. The second topic is understanding how the mitzvah of chinuch applies to the specific mitzvah of *birkas kohanim*. I will first discuss the topic of causing a minor kohen child to become *tamei*.

Causing someone to violate the Torah It is prohibited *min haTorah* to be the direct cause of a child violating a prohibition of the Torah (Ye'evamos 114a). For example, providing a child with non-kosher food or bringing a minor kohen into a house that contains *tumas meis* causes the child to violate what the Torah says. The Torah prohibits doing this, even when the child himself is too young to be responsible to fulfill the mitzvah and is not commanded to observe it. As a matter of fact, this law applies *min hatorah* even to a newborn (Magen Avraham 343:2). It also applies even when a child is, unfortunately, being raised in a non-observant way. Therefore, it is forbidden for someone who has a babysitting job to feed a Jewish child non-kosher food, or to serve non-kosher food to a Jewish child in a school cafeteria. Similarly, it is prohibited to dress a baby in a blanket or clothes made of *shatnez* (Shu"t Beis Yehudah, Yoreh Deah #45).

Tumah is worse In the particular instance of causing a kohen to become *tamei*, there is an additional violation, specific to this mitzvah. The Rambam rules that it is forbidden for someone to make an adult kohen *tamei* and, at times, this may involve violating a prohibition *min haTorah* (Rambam, Hilchos Aveil 3:5). The Rambam rules: "If the kohen is unaware that what he did is forbidden, and the person who made him *tamei* knows that it is, then that person violates the *lo saaseh*. If the kohen knows that it is forbidden, then the other person violates only *lifnei iver lo satein michshol*, do not place a stumbling block before a blind person (Vayikra 19:14)." Chazal interpret this *pasuk* to mean that one may not give someone bad advice, nor cause him to violate a prohibition.

Kiruv kohanim Thus, we can now also address another of our opening questions. "We are in the process of being *mekarev* a fellow who is a kohen. He enjoys joining us for our family outings, and we love to visit museums. Could this present potential halachic issues?"

In a different article published in this column many years ago, I discussed at length the *shaylos* that exist concerning whether a kohen may visit a museum. (A copy of that

article, entitled Finding a Compatible Place for an Extended Family Outing, is available on the website RabbiKaganoff.com.) Based on our current discussion, we are now aware that the same issues exist if I cause a kohen to enter a museum. Thus, taking a nephew who is a kohen on a family trip to a museum may involve the same halachic problem, and I should consult my *rav* or *posek*. Bringing our friend the kohen involves the same halachic issues, notwithstanding the fact that he, himself, has no concerns about the matter. As we saw above in the Rambam, it is actually a more serious problem for me when I know that the kohen is not concerned about the prohibition.

What if the child does it on his own? The Gemara (Ye'evamos 113b-114a) relates that Rav Yitzchak bar Bisna lost the keys of the *beis medrash* in a *reshus harabim*, an area into and from which it is prohibited *min haTorah* to carry on Shabbos. Thus, there was no way to unlock the doors and use the *beis medrash* on Shabbos. Rabbi Pidas suggested that Rav Yitzchak bar Bisna bring some children to play in the area where the keys were lost, hoping that one of them might find the keys and bring them to the *beis medrash*. According to Rabbi Pidas, one is not obligated to prevent a child from violating a mitzvah of the Torah, provided that one does not ask or enable the child to do so. In other words, although it is prohibited to cause a child to violate a mitzvah, we have no obligation to prevent the child from violating a mitzvah, nor are we prohibited from placing a child in a place where he may choose to violate a mitzvah on his own.

The *rishonim* ask why the mitzvah of chinuch does not require preventing the child from violating Shabbos. Here I will present three widely-held approaches to answering this question.

Under age One answer is that Rabbi Pidas' rule that we are not required to prevent children from choosing to violate prohibitions applies only when they are very young -- meaning that the child is below the age of chinuch, when we are required to educate him about the mitzvah (Tosafos, Shabbos 121a, s.v. *shema*). Thus, Rav Yitzchak bar Bisna brought only fairly young children to play in the area where the keys were lost. It would be prohibited, according to this approach, to cause older children who understand that we do not carry on Shabbos to carry the keys in a *reshus harabim*. This approach is quoted by the Rema (Orach Chayim 343).

Mitzvos Asei A second approach to answer this question is more lenient, contending that the mitzvah of chinuch applies only to positive mitzvos, but does not apply to prohibitions (Rabbi Eliezer miMetz, the author of the *Sefer Yerei'im*, quoted by Tosafos Yeshanim, Yoma 82a; the same position is quoted by several *rishonim* to Ye'evamos 114a). According to this understanding, there are three levels:

1. We are prohibited *min haTorah* from directly causing a child to violate a prohibition.
2. We are required *miderabbanan* to train a child to perform mitzvos.
3. There is no requirement at all to prevent a child from performing violations of the Torah that a child is doing on his own.

Isn't this counterintuitive? Is this approach not counterintuitive? In general, prohibitions are treated more strictly than positive mitzvos, and the punishments for violating them are usually more severe (Terumas Hadeshen #94). Why, in this instance, is the positive mitzvah being treated more stringently than the prohibition?

Some explain that the reason is because performance of a positive mitzvah usually requires more effort, and these mitzvos will be more difficult for him to observe when he becomes an adult. Therefore Chazal required the father to make certain that his child is habituated to perform mitzvos. They did not require chinuch on *lo saaseh* prohibitions, since they are passive (Terumas Hadeshen #94).

Only the father I promised that I would share with you three approaches to explain how Rabbi Pidas permitted placing children somewhere where they will likely end up performing *melachah* activity on Shabbos. Is there not a mitzvah of chinuch?

A third approach to answer this question understands that when Chazal introduced the mitzvah of chinuch, they obligated the father, but no one else, to train a child to perform mitzvos. Since other people have no obligation of training a child to perform mitzvos, they are permitted to place a child somewhere where he may, of his own volition, violate a prohibition (Tosafos Yeshanim, Yoma 82a; Rambam, Hilchos Maachalos Asuros 17:28). This last approach is the one followed by the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 343:1), who writes: "If a child is eating non-kosher, *beis din* is not commanded to prevent him, but his father is commanded to rebuke him and prevent him." The Rema cites this opinion also.

Remember, as we taught above, that all opinions prohibit directing a child to violate a prohibition. What is permitted is placing him in a position where he will, of his own volition, violate a prohibited activity.

In conclusion, we are prohibited from causing a male child to become *tamei* from contact with a corpse. According to the conclusion of the Shulchan Aruch, you are not obligated to prevent a child from making himself *tamei*, unless the child in question is your son.

What about *duchening*? At this point, let us return to the question raised above: "I know that one must be very careful that a kohen, even an infant, does not become contaminated with the *tumah* of a *meis*. Yet I rarely see a child under bar mitzvah

duchen. Is this consistent?" Now, that we have explained the background to the first part of the question, let us discuss the second part: Our questioner reports not seeing many minor kohanim perform the duchening.

The Mishnah (Megillah 24a) states that a child does not duchen, which Rashi explains is because it is not respectable for a congregation to have a child bless them. Our question is whether the Mishnah means that a child should never duchen, or does it mean that he should not duchen when he is unaccompanied by an adult kohen? The issue being debated is whether the lack of dignity for the tzibur is any time a child is blessing the congregation or only when he does so by himself.

This issue is the subject of a dispute among early rishonim. Rashi (Sukkah 42a) rules that a child should never duchen, whereas Tosafos contends that it is fine for a child to duchen, as long as he does so together with adult kohanim (Tosafos, Megillah 24a s.v. Ve'ein). According to the latter opinion, it would follow that there is a mitzvah to train a minor kohen to duchen, just as there is a mitzvah to train him to perform other mitzvos. However, according to Rashi, since Chazal ruled that it is not a kavod to have a child duchen, then, clearly, there is no mitzvah of chinuch to train him to duchen. There were many places in Europe where the custom was to follow Rashi in this law. This is why our questioner has rarely seen a minor duchen. However, this is by far not a universally held practice. I have been in many places where I have seen kohanim who are under bar mitzvah duchen alongside adult kohanim.

Conclusion - Avraham and chinuch We now know that there are specific halachic rules directing us how to educate and train children in the observance of mitzvos, and also about our interactions that might cause an adult to violate a prohibition of the Torah. It is interesting to note that the only verse in the Torah that uses the word chinuch in relation to people is in parshas Lech Lecha, and there the verse refers to training and teaching adults to perform mitzvos. There the Torah teaches about Avraham that, in order to save his nephew Lot, vayarek es chanichav, literally, he emptied out those whom he had trained. As Rav Hirsch points out, the situation of saving Lot required Avraham to change direction from what he had been doing heretofore to develop his following to serve Hashem. Prior to this point, Avraham had taken his following, his disciples, and moved them away from civilization, into the mountains, so that they would not be influenced by the nearby social environment of Canaan, which was antithetical to proper values. Avraham's previous chinuch had involved isolationism to grow the spirituality of his students. At this moment, serving Hashem required Avraham to expose his following to improper mores, albeit only temporarily, for the sake of saving Lot.

from: Aish.com <newsletterserver@aish.com> via em.secureserver.net date: Wed, Nov 30, 2016 at 4:30 PM subject: Aish.com Parsha - Toldot

Rabbi Kalman Packouz

Toldot (Genesis 25:19-28:9)

The Torah commands us, "Bind [these commandments] as a sign on your arm, and as totafot between your eyes" (Deut. 6:8). This refers to special black boxes containing passages from the Torah that are worn primarily during the morning prayer service. For several years I have been studying Inside Stam, (Stam -- acronym: Sifrei Torah, Tefillin and Mezuzos) a fascinating book on the laws pertaining to Tefillin, Mezuzos, Sifrei Torah by Reuvain Mendlowitz. I was very excited to have my tefillin checked by him on a recent trip to Israel. Much to my surprise, Rabbi Mendlowitz told me that I needed to replace the "fake straps." Fake straps? Straps on tefillin must be made from kosher animals and painted black. It seems that an unscrupulous individual had sold counterfeit straps made in the Far East from horse hide bonded with black plastic and passed them off as kosher! What this meant to me is that I, and hundreds if not thousands of others, unknowingly were not fulfilling the mitzvah of wearing tefillin! To a Torah observant Jew, this is devastating. Tefillin is a very special mitzvah. As Shraga Simmons so aptly wrote in "Tefillin: A Primer" on Aish.com, "The word mitzvah, commandment, relates at its root to the word 'to bind.' As such, every mitzvah is an act of love that binds us to God. But Tefillin is the paradigm mitzvah, in that we literally bind ourselves to the will of God. Tefillin represents a total dedication and union with the Almighty." Tefillin is a powerful daily mitzvah of connection and reminder. Kosher tefillin means that both the batim, the boxes and the parshiot, the scrolls of Torah passages inside of the batim, are kosher -- made correctly. There are many laws on what they are made from, how they are made, the intention of the

person who makes them. Tefillin are hand-crafted and must be made with the intention of creating holy tefillin. Through the physical act of binding tefillin upon the arm we remind ourselves to dedicate our actions to the will of the Almighty; by wearing the tefillin above the hairline -- or where the hairline used to be -- we remind ourselves to dedicate our thoughts to the will of the Almighty. Knowing that one has kosher tefillin and puts them on properly is very important to a Torah observant Jew. One feels a spiritual connection to the Almighty. There are those who might say, "It's OK. God understands. It's what's you wanted to accomplish and whether the tefillin were kosher or not doesn't really matter." It is presumptuous to assume that we know what God "understands." If the Almighty "went to all of the trouble" to convey so many specific details on how tefillin are made and how they should be worn, then perhaps there is much more to the mitzvah than one's intentions. When the Hubble telescope was launched into space in 1990, the photographs were not as clear as expected. Upon investigation it was found that the mirror was ground with an error from the prescribed curve of only 10 nanometers -- but resulted in creating a "catastrophic spherical aberration" in the images. Some things have to be perfect to work. In life and in performing mitzvot, we must strive for perfection of service, not lackadaisical service. It is upon us to have kosher tefillin and mezzuzos -- and to have them checked by competent, God-fearing sofrim, scribes. And what about my fake straps? My competent and God-fearing sofer (scribe) unknowingly purchased counterfeit straps. Now, knowing his mistake, he is replacing those straps free of charge. How does one know if his straps are fake? One can go to an expert scribe -- or boil water, pour it into a hot cup, place the end of a strap into the water and if it has a top plasticized layer which separates, then it is time to replace those straps!

Shabat Shalom Rabbi Kalman Packouz

From: Shabbat Shalom shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org subject: Shabbat Shalom from the OU www.ou.org/torah/parsha/rabbi-sacks-on-parsha Britain's Former **Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks** "**Why Did Isaac Love Esau?**", **Rabbi Sacks' Covenant & Conversation 5777 for Toldot**

Even before they were born, Jacob and Esau struggled in the womb. They were destined, it seems, to be eternal adversaries. Not only were they different in character and appearance. They also held different places in their parents' affections:

The boys grew up, and Esau became a skilful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was a quiet man, staying among the tents. Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob. (Gen. 25:27-28)

We know why Rebekah loved Jacob. Before the twins were born, the pains Rebekah felt were so great that "she went to inquire of the Lord." This is what she was told:

"Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger." (Gen. 25:23)

It seemed as if God were saying that the younger would prevail and carry forward the burden of history, so it was the younger, Jacob, whom she loved.

But why, in that case, did Isaac love Esau? Did he not know about Rebekah's oracle? Had she not told him about it? Besides, did he not know that Esau was wild and impetuous? Can we really take literally the proposition that Isaac loved Esau because "he had a taste for wild game," as if his affections were determined by his stomach, by the fact that his elder son brought him food he loved? Surely not, when the very future of the covenant was at stake.

The classic answer, given by Rashi, listens closely to the literal text. Esau, says the Torah, "knew how to trap [yode'a tzayid]." Isaac loved him "because entrapment was in his mouth [ki tzayid befiv]." Esau, says Rashi,

trapped Isaac by his mouth. Here is Rashi's comment on the phrase "knew how to trap":

He knew how to trap and deceive his father with his mouth. He would ask him, "Father, how should one tithe salt and straw?" Consequently his father believed him to be strict in observing the commands. (Rashi to 25:27)

Esau knew full well that salt and straw do not require tithes, but he asked so as to give the impression that he was strictly religious. And here it is Rashi's comment on the phrase that Isaac loved him "because entrapment was in his mouth":

The midrashic explanation is that there was entrapment in the mouth of Esau, who trapped his father and deceived him by his words. (Rashi 25:28)

The Maggid of Dubnow adds a perceptive comment as to why Isaac, but not Rebekah, was deceived. Rebekah grew up with the wily Laban. She knew deception when she saw it. Isaac, by contrast, had grown up with Abraham and Sarah. He only knew total honesty and was thus easily deceived.

(Bertrand Russell once commented on the philosopher G. E. Moore, that he only once heard Moore tell a lie, when he asked Moore if he had ever told a lie, and Moore replied, "Yes").

So the classic answer is that Isaac loved Esau because he simply did not know who or what Esau was. But there is another possible answer: that Isaac loved Esau precisely because he did know what Esau was.

In the early twentieth century someone brought to the great Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Kook, first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of pre-state Israel, the following dilemma. He had given his son a good Jewish education. He had always kept the commands at home. Now however the son had drifted far from Judaism. He no longer kept the commandments. He did not even identify as a Jew. What should the father do? "Did you love him when he was religious?" asked Rav Kook. "Of course," replied the father. "Well then," Rav Kook replied, "Now love him even more."

Sometimes love can do what rebuke cannot. It may be that the Torah is telling us that Isaac was anything but blind as to his elder son's true nature. But if you have two children, one well behaved, the other liable to turn out badly, to whom should you devote greater attention? With whom should you spend more time?

It may be that Isaac loved Esau not blindly but with open eyes, knowing that there would be times when his elder son would give him grief, but knowing too that the moral responsibility of parenthood demands that we do not despair of or disown a wayward son.

Did Isaac's love have an effect on Esau? Yes and no. It is clear that there was a special bond of connection between Esau and Isaac. This was recognised by the sages:

Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel said: No man ever honoured his father as I honoured my father, but I found that Esau honoured his father even more. (Devarim Rabbah 1:15)

Rabbi Shimon derives this from the fact that usually people serve their parents wearing ordinary clothes while they reserve their best for going out. Esau, however, had kept his best clothes in readiness to serve his father the food he had gone out to hunt. That is why Jacob was able to wear them while Esau was still out hunting (27:14).

We find, much later in the Torah, that God forbids the Israelites to wage war against Esau's descendants. He tells Moses:

Give the people these orders: "You are about to pass through the territory of your brothers the descendants of Esau, who live in Seir. They will be afraid of you, but be very careful. Do not provoke them to war, for I will not give you any of their land, not even enough to put your foot on. I have given Esau the hill country of Seir as his own." (Deut. 2:4-5)

And later still Moses commands the Israelites:

Do not abhor an Edomite [i.e. a descendant of Esau], for he is your brother. (Deut. 23:8)

The sages saw these provisions as an enduring reward to Esau for the way he honoured his father.

So, was Isaac right or wrong to love Esau? Esau reciprocated the love, but remained Esau, the hunter, the man of the field, not the man to carry forward the demanding covenant with the invisible God and the spiritual sacrifices it called for. Not all children follow the path of their parents. If it was Isaac's intent that Esau should do so, he failed.

But there are some failures that are honourable. Loving your children, whatever they become, is one, for surely that is how God loves us.

From: Rabbi Yochanan Zweig <genesis@torah.org> to: rabbizweig@torah.org subject: Rabbi Zweig

FAILING FORWARD Rav Yochanan Zweig

Because Avraham obeyed My voice and observed my safeguards, my commandments my statutes, and my Torahs (26:5). In this week's parsha, Hashem appears to Yitzchak, reaffirms the promises that He made to Avraham, and assures Yitzchak that they will come to pass. Interestingly, Hashem also tells Yitzchak the reason for this commitment to Avraham; Because Avraham obeyed My voice and observed my safeguards, my commandments my statutes, and my Torahs. The Gemara (Nedarim 32a) uses this verse to teach us a remarkable piece of information about Avraham Avinu's life. "Said R' Ami son of Abba - 'Avraham was three years old when he recognized his creator, as the verse says: Because (Eikev) obeyed my voice...The numerical value of the word "Eikev" is 172. Avraham lived until the age of 175; subtract 172 from 175 and you're left with three. The verse is therefore teaching us that at the age of 3 Avraham first recognized Hashem." Raavad uses this Gemara to ask a devastating question on Rambam. In Hilchos Avodah Zara Maimonides gives a lengthy introduction as to the history of idol worship. He explains how idol worship came to be and how the earlier generations erred and came to literally worship the stars and constellations (with some minor but notable exceptions such as Mesushelach, Noach, Shem, Ever, etc). This continued until the birth of the "pillar of the world" - Avraham Avinu. Rambam explains that in his youth Avraham actually worshipped idols with his family; yet he always wondered who was really causing the earth to continuously revolve, and his heart was exploring and gaining understanding. Ultimately, he realized that there was one God who created everything, and that there is no other God among all the other entities. He also knew that the entire world was making a mistake: "Abraham was forty years old when he became aware of his Creator. When he recognized and knew Him, he began to debate with others, telling them that they were not following a proper path..." (Hilchos Avodah Zara 1:3). Rambam states outright that Avraham was forty when he became aware of his creator. So, asks Ravaad (ad loc), how can Rambam write that Avraham was forty when the Gemara so clearly states that he was three? The answer is that at the age of three Avraham began his quest to find the real truth. In reality, it took many years and many missteps to arrive at the truth. Avraham was forty when he finally crystallized the proper philosophical theology and began to preach it to the world. Rambam fully agrees that this process began when Avraham was three. According to Rambam, the Talmud is making a remarkable statement; even though in his teens he may have worshipped idols and made other mistakes, since these were all part of his honest process to arrive at the truth it is considered as if he followed Hashem from the age of three. In other words, when at the age of forty he began his mission to bring God into this world, he was bringing forward all his experiences, and everything he learned from his youth. Since he had experienced the enlightenment process himself, he could now show others the true and proper path. Often, Ba'alei Teshuvah (and others that have made a significant turnaround in their lives), try to suppress their prior life and actions, and pretend like they never happened. We see from here that this is not the right approach. Rather, Hashem wants us to utilize those experiences to help others, in that way one elevates the entire process of one's earlier life. We must remember that this is the reason given to Yitzchak as to why Hashem

will fulfill the promises made to Avraham - this process of growth to enlightenment and sharing it with others.

FAMILIAL AMBIVALENCE

It was told to Rifkah the words of her older son, Eisav. She sent for her younger son Yaakov and said to him, 'Behold your brother Eisav is consoling himself with thoughts of killing you' (27:42). The end of this week's parsha recounts the episode of Yaakov taking Eisav's bracha which caused Eisav to feel hatred toward Yaakov. Their concerned mother, Rifkah, warns Yaakov of Eisav's murderous thoughts and counsels him to escape the country and take refuge with her brother Lavan in Charan. Rashi (ad loc) quotes the Midrash Rabbah's interpretation of the word "misnachem - consoling": "You are already dead in his eyes, and he has drunk a cup of consolation over you." This Midrash seems a little difficult to understand; if Eisav has murderous intentions and wants to kill Yaakov why does he need to drink a cup of consolation; what is there to be consoled about? We find a similarly strange incident which is recounted by Rashi in next week's parsha (29:11). Elifaz was ordered by his father Eisav to pursue Yaakov and kill him. Upon finding Yaakov, Elifaz - who had grown up in the "close embrace of his grandfather Yitzchak" - was hesitant to follow his father's command. On the other hand, he was also very reluctant to disobey his father. This was quite a quandary. Thereupon, Yaakov suggested that Elifaz confiscate all of his wealth as, Chazal teach, a poor man is considered like a dead person. Elifaz was able to fulfill both of his conflicting desires by following Yaakov's suggestion; thus Yaakov arrived at Lavan's house utterly destitute, and Elifaz returned home feeling that he had honored his father's wishes. But in reality this seems to be an untenable solution. After all, the truth that Yaakov was alive and well would eventually come out. At some point Eisav would find out that his son Elifaz disobeyed him and let Yaakov live. How does Chazal's dictum of a poor man being considered like a dead person fulfill what Eisav intended? Sigmund Freud, father of the field of psychoanalysis, once said, "An intimate friend and a hated enemy have always been indispensable requirements for my emotional life; I have always been able to create them anew, and not infrequently my childish ideal has been so closely approached that friend and enemy coincided in the same person." Notwithstanding the obviously complicated mind and seemingly confused emotional state of Freud, he was articulating the phenomena of a love-hate relationship. We often find this ambivalence of feelings in situations where there are emotional ties which are complicated by personal commitments that are frustrating to fulfill - which inevitably leads to resentment. Fascinatingly, in Hebrew the word for lover, "ohev," and the word for enemy, "oyev," are almost identical. The reason is obvious, they are really one and the same emotion. In both instances one desires to become "one" with the other. In love one wants to merge together, while in hate one desires to swallow the other and incorporate the enemy into himself. Eisav has very conflicting emotions about Yaakov, after all they are not only brothers, but twins who share almost exactly the same DNA. In essence they are forever tied together (interestingly enough, Chazal point out that they were both buried together on the same day). Eisav has expectations of Yaakov and feels betrayed by him; therefore he both hates and loves him. This is the conflict that rages within Eisav. We see this most clearly when they actually meet in Parshas Vayishlach; Eisav hugs and kisses and then, according to Chazal, tries to bite the neck of Yaakov. Elifaz senses this conflict within his father. He knows that while Eisav wants Yaakov hunted down he still loves his brother. Elifaz hopes that eliminating Yaakov as a threat by taking away his money but not killing him, will satisfy both feelings within Eisav - that of love and that of hate.

From: Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu> to: weekly@ohr.edu
Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Toldot For the week ending 3
December 2016 / 3 Kislev 5777 Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair -
www.seasonsofthemoon.com **Insights The Calculus to Multiply** "The

children (Esav and Yaakov) agitated within her (Rivka), and she said, 'If so, why am I thus?'..." (25:22)

King Chizkiahu refused to procreate because, through prophetic insight, he saw evil people amongst his offspring.

Yishayahu the Prophet criticized him, telling him he had no business entering into the calculations of Heaven: "What the Torah requires from you, that is what you do." (Talmud Bavli, Berachot 11a)

Therefore, if it not for a direct command from G-d, "Be fruitful and multiply," Chizkiahu's reckoning was correct. If you know that amongst your progeny there will be evil offspring, better not to have any at all.

However, this only applies to the male of the species. Women have no Torah commandment to procreate.

"If so, why am I thus?"

With this we can understand Rivka's question.

Rashi tells us that whenever Rivka passed by the doors of a house of idol worship she felt her unborn fetus struggle to emerge. She knew that her child was destined to be an idol worshipper. "Why am I thus? Why should I labor to give birth to a child who will be evil; I am not Yitzchak. I am a woman, and I have no obligation to reproduce."

Source: **Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Soloveichik** © 2016 Ohr Somayach Int'l

http://www.ou.org/torah/author/Rabbi_Dr_Tzvi_Hersh_Weinreb from: Shabbat Shalom <shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org> reply-to: shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb **OU Torah Toldot: Different Forms of Power Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb**

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

I learned a lot from him, and kept notes of his lectures for many years. Some years after I took the course, I came across a book he had written, based upon those lectures, and discarded my notes in favor of his text. The title of the book was Power: Its Forms, Bases, and Uses. It was in his course that I began to appreciate that "power" need not involve physical coercion. There are many ways to exert power, ways that are much more effective than brute force. This insight has proven helpful to me in many areas of my personal and professional life. It has even helped me come to grips with a problem that is related to this week's Torah portion, Parshat Toldot (Genesis 25:19-28:9).

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

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

For example, Isaac was never involved in a war. He was decidedly pacifist in every conflict that he encountered. This is in stark contrast not only to the other patriarchs but to almost every other biblical hero. Abraham, for example, courageously pursued the combined armies of four kings in order to rescue his nephew Lot. Jacob wrestled with an angel and boasted of his conquest of a portion of land which he "wrested from the Amorites with my sword and bow." (Genesis 48:22) Moses slayed an Egyptian tormentor and waged war against Sichon and the giant Og. Joshua is the quintessential general, and the first kings of Israel, Saul and David, led their people in battle.

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

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

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

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

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

The Sages memorialize Isaac's paradigm in an unforgettable passage in the beginning of the fourth chapter of Pirkei Avot, Ethics of the Fathers. There we read, "Ben Zoma said... Who is strong? One who masters his evil impulse, as it is written, 'He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules over his spirit is better than he who conquers the city.' (Proverbs 16:32)" Rabbi Israel Salanter, the brilliant ethicist who lived in the latter half of the 19th century, explains that besides physical strength there are two models of gevura. One way is to "master the evil impulse" and become "slow to anger." But, insists Rabbi Salanter, such an approach suppresses but does not totally eliminate the evil impulse. A person who chooses this way may be "slow to anger," but anger still resides within him.

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

Throughout our history, resorting to struggle and even war was often necessary. Certainly Abraham and Jacob, and even Moses, had to follow that route.

But it is so comforting to know that there is another way, Isaac's way. It is a way which avoids battle and heroically persists in the search for paths to blessings and roads to peace. © 2016 Orthodox Union

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Rabbi Daniel Stein A Responsibility to Succeed

Eisav decided to sell his birthright to Yaakov because he reasoned, "behold, I am going to die, so why do I need this birthright?" (Bereishis 25:32). Rashi writes that before relinquishing the birthright, Eisav initially questioned Yaakov regarding the nature of the responsibilities and the avodahservice that would be incumbent upon him as the first born. Yaakov explained to him, "there are many prohibitions, punishments, even punishments by death that are involved with it," leading Eisav to conclude, "I will eventually die as a result of my birthright, if so, why should I desire it." Therefore, Eisav chose to trade away the birthright rather than risk suffering his possible demise as a result of a flawed performance. However, the Torah closes the discussion by stating that Eisav offended the birthright by trading it away, as the pasuk says "And Yaakov gave Eisav bread and a pottage of lentils, and he ate and drank and arose and left, and Eisav disparaged the birthright" (25:34).

Rav Moshe Feinstein (Darash Moshe) asks, how did Eisav disparage the birthright by abdicating and being unwilling to serve? He was understandably afraid of the grave consequences of not being able to adequately discharge this sacred duty. Rav Moshe explains that Eisav was not motivated primarily by a fear of the penalties he might incur, but rather by an aversion to assuming the responsibilities of the post in the first place. In that sense, Eisav's visceral reaction, to recoil and retreat in the face of this hallowed responsibility, was itself a tacit insult to the very institution. His refusal to assume this obligation and responsibility revealed a fundamental lack of appreciation for the cosmic significance of representing humanity in serving Hashem.

It emerges that one of the principle differences between Eisav and Yaakov was in their attitude towards accepting responsibility, or achrayus, for others. While Eisav was busy fleeing from the burden of representing others in serving Hashem, Yaakov was bargaining for more. Perhaps this was not only because Yaakov had a greater understanding of the significance of serving Hashem, but also because he recognized that accepting achrayus, responsibility for others, is a transformative undertaking which endows one with the strength and capabilities necessary to succeed despite the risks and dangers involved. Yaakov knew that assuming responsibility for others itself engenders and breeds success, making failure no longer a concern.

Perhaps we find this notion expressed most poignantly with regards to Yehoshua ben Gamla. The Gemara (Yoma 18a) records that, regrettably, during the period of the second Beis Hamikdash the selection process to fill the position of kohein gadol had been corrupted. Instead of appointing the worthiest candidate, the position was often awarded to the highest bidder. The Gemara continues that the most egregious and disgraceful example of an undeserving layman who unceremoniously purchased the position of kohen gadol, was Yehoshua ben Gamla who acquired the position from Yannai the King. However, the Gemara (Bava Basra 21a) elsewhere presents us with an entirely different narrative regarding the identity and personality of Yehoshua ben Gamla. The Gemara ascribes the establishment of the entire system of yeshivos and Jewish schooling to the efforts and initiative of Yehoshua ben Gamla. How could the same individual who epitomized religious corruption also be the seminal figure accredited with the perpetuation of Torah learning in Klal Yisrael?

In fact, this tension and apparent inconsistency in the chronicling of the activities of Yehoshua ben Gamla led the Ritva to conclude that there were two different individuals, both coincidentally bearing the name Yehoshua

ben Gamla. However, the Sfas Emes explains that in fact they were one in the same. Even though prior to his appointment Yehoshua ben Gamla was nothing more than a fraudulent ignoramus, upon being appointed as kohein gadol a personal transformation occurred. The yolk of responsibility for others and for the nation awakened within Yehoshua ben Gamla reservoirs of untapped potential enabling him to become a champion of the mesorah and a visionary hero in the annals of Jewish history.

Similarly, in Parshas Mikeitz, the Torah tells us that Yaakov was initially reluctant to send Binyamin down to Mitzrayim with the other shevatim because travelling was inherently dangerous and "lest misfortune befall him" (Breishis 42:4) along the way. Even after Shimon was taken captive and Yosef demanded to have an audience with Binyamin, Yaakov remained steadfast in his refusal to allow Binyamin to go. It wasn't until Yehudah accepted responsibility for Binyamin when he stated "I will guarantee him; from my hand you can demand him. If I do not bring him to you and stand him up before you, I will have sinned against you forever" (43:9) that Yaakov finally relented. What changed when Yehudah accepted achrayus, responsibility for Binyamin? Travelling was still perilous and an accidental tragedy could still occur. Why did Yaakov change his mind and allow Binyamin to go?

The Shem Mishmuel explains that Yaakov was afraid that in the absence of an absolute responsibility and obligation to succeed, any impediment or difficulty experienced by the shevatim in securing Binyamin's safety could be confused with an "accident". When we enjoy impunity to attribute our failures to circumstances beyond our control, failure becomes all the more likely. However, when Yehudah accepted the achrayus, that under all circumstances he would be held accountable for ensuring Binyamin's wellbeing, Yaakov knew that the very obligation and responsibility to succeed would transform Yehudah and endow him with the resolve and the strength necessary to ultimately be successful.

In our own lives, we should seek to emulate the example of Yaakov Avinu. We should eagerly undertake additional responsibility for others, in each of the three primary realms of Torah, avodah, and chesed. Only in that way will we be able to discover and achieve our individual potential and collectively realize our national destiny. By virtue of a Divine command as well as a historical imperative, we have an obligation to succeed, and we can only attain our goal by joining together and realizing our mutual responsibility to avodas Hashem and to each other. In other words, to fulfill our responsibility to succeed we must take responsibility for one another.

Rav Ephraim Shapiro from Miami Beach once explained that the letters of the Hebrew word for taking responsibility for others, achrayus, - aleph, ches, reish, yud, vuv, and tuf - instruct us in the proper progression we should follow in assuming responsibility for one another. The first letter is an aleph representing the number one and the notion that before looking to help others, we must first make sure that we have taken responsibility for our own actions and needs. The following letter is ches which together with aleph spells the word ach or "brother". Only after we been successful in taking care of ourselves can we begin to take responsibility for our brothers, families, and relatives. The next letter is reish, which together with the first two letters spells acheir, or "other". Once our families are secure we can use that stability as a platform to aid and help others as well. The following letter is yud, which turns the word acheir in to acharai or "behind me" or "follow me", because one who takes responsibility for others becomes a natural role model and leader within the community. The next letter is vuv which added to the previous letters changes acharai to acharavor "after him", since a role model who takes responsibility for others will inspire people to follow their example. Finally, the letter tuf, because achrayus begins with aleph, the first letter in the alphabet, and ends with tuf, the last letter in the alphabet. This symbolizes that taking responsibility for others should occupy us constantly, and that it has the ability to embolden, enrich, and uplift every aspect of our lives all the way from aleph to tuf! Copyright © 2016 by TorahWeb.org

www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/Rabbi-Shmuel-Rabinowitz Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites **The Jerusalem Post Parashat Toldot: Spirit defeated strength Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz 12.01.2016 | 1 Kislev, 5777**

Spirit defeated strength In this week's parasha, we meet Isaac's and Rebekah's sons: Jacob and Esau, the famous twins that were so different from one another that there was a difficult rivalry between them.

From the time of their birth, they were different.

"And the first one emerged ruddy; he was completely like a coat of hair, and they named him Esau," while Jacob attested that he himself was smooth.

Their occupations were very different as well: "And the youths grew up, and Esau was a man who understood hunting, a man of the field, whereas Jacob was an innocent man, dwelling in tents" (Genesis 25:27).

But it was not just these differences that created the rivalry. It stemmed mainly from what is described in the following verse: "And Isaac loved Esau because [his] game was in his mouth, but Rebekah loved Jacob."

This is the story of twins born after years of anticipation, but there was a tear in their background.

Their father loved one of them while their mother loved the other.

We tend not to look upon the nation's leaders as standard people. Isaac's love for Esau, Rebekah's love for Jacob – neither stemmed from simple feelings, but rather from a deep and ideological concept of Abraham's family's great purpose.

Abraham and Sarah, Jacob's and Esau's grandparents, merited a promise that a nation would come of them. They knew, and Isaac and Rebekah knew as well, that this nation would need to represent justice and lawfulness as the father of the nation – Abraham – had done. When Jacob and Esau were born, it was clear that one of them would be the ideological heir to God's path, and from whom the nation would come.

But which one? Who was more suitable and worthy? Isaac and Rebekah could not agree on this. Isaac understood that in order to form a nation, one needed strength, the ability to act, to create, to conquer and to build.

Rebekah understood that in order to create a nation one needs spirit, depth, the ability to observe, to dream, to believe and to hope. The problem was that neither of the twins had all these qualities. Isaac saw Esau as the one who could create a nation while Rebekah saw Jacob as the one with the spiritual capability to provide significance and spiritual content to a nation.

Ultimately, a decision was made. Isaac was about to bless Esau, but Jacob, sent by his mother, tricked Isaac into blessing him instead. The blessings were not just a way to express love, but acted as a prophecy and determination of who would carry the torch forward. The fact that Jacob got the blessings taught Isaac that he had been mistaken, that God wanted Jacob and not Esau to continue Abraham's path. Isaac internalized the message and blessed Jacob again, this time willingly: "And may the Almighty God bless you... And may He give you the blessing of Abraham..." (Genesis 28:3-4) The message was clear – spirit defeated strength. God does not want a nation which is strong and successful yet devoid of values. He wants a nation which is ideological and faithful even if at times it lacks strength.

It might mean that the path is harder, the route more winding, but the aim would be reached: Jacob would father a nation with faith at its core, and based on that faith, it would build a way of life and inner strength.

For thousands of years, the Jewish nation has treasured Abraham's values, Isaac's blessings, and Jacob's spirit. The writer is the rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites. Copyright © 2016 Jpost Inc.

From: Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu> date: Thu, Nov 24, 2016 at 5:20 AM
subject: Insights into Halacha - **Mayim Acharonim, Chova?**

ohr.edu Mayim Acharonim, Chova? Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

In Parshas Lech Lecha, we are introduced to an interesting personality named Bera, Melech S'dom, the King of S'dom. While he was certainly not known for his morality

and impeccable character, nonetheless, his title, as well as the destruction of his hometown using salt, described in Parshas Vayera[1], seemingly references a catalyst to a Mitzvah that many are wholly unfamiliar with: its homonym, 'Melach S'domis' or S'dom Salt. The Mitzva I am referring to is Mayim Acharonim, the handwashing before Birchas HaMazon[2]. Mitzva?!

I am sure that many readers are shaking their heads in disbelief, wondering how I can call this known chumra a Mitzva. This common, but slightly mistaken, belief was made evident to this author when a neighborhood housewife recently asked an interesting sheilah. Apparently, after hosting several friends and relatives for a Shabbos Seudah, she washed Mayim Acharonim along with the men, earning her much scorn and ridicule. The incredulous men commented that their washing Mayim Acharonim was only a chumra, and there obviously was no basis for a woman to do it as well. Our distraught domestic denizen wanted to know who acted correctly, and was astounded when I replied that technically speaking they both were. A Bit of Background
Mayim Acharonim has an interesting background, as it actually has two entirely different sources and rationales mandating it. The first, in Gemara Brachos[3], discussing the source for ritual handwashing, explains that one can not make a bracha with dirty hands, and cites the pasuk in Parshas Kedoshim[4] "V'hiskadeeshtem, V'heyisem Kedoshim", "And you shall sanctify yourselves, and be holy". The Gemara clarifies that "And you shall sanctify yourselves" refers to washing the hands before the meal, Mayim Rishonim, and "and be holy" refers to washing the hands after the meal, Mayim Acharonim. In other words, by washing our hands before making a bracha (in this case before Bentching), we are properly sanctifying ourselves. The second source, Gemara Chullin[5], on the other hand, refers to Mayim Acharonim as a "chova", an outright obligation. The Gemara elucidates that there is a certain type of salt in the world, called 'Melach S'domis', (actually one of the additions needed to make the Ketores properly[6]) that is so caustic that if it gets into a person's eyes, it can cause blindness r"l. Since one is supposed to have salt at his table at every meal[7], Chazal were worried that this specific type of salt may have found its way onto our tables and consequently could cause someone to become blind if he rubs his eyes after eating. Therefore, as a way to mitigate this salt's potentially devastating effects, they mandated handwashing after eating, known colloquially as Mayim Acharonim.

In fact, the Gemara's words are codified as halacha by the Tur and Shulchan Aruch[8], stating simply "Mayim Acharonim Chova". The Rambam as well writes that it is an obligation due to the potential Sakana involved[9]. As an aside, the Ben Ish Chai[10] posits that when eating, one should say this three word formula, and that way fulfill the halacha of speaking Divrei Torah at a meal[11].

Chova?

Well, if the Gemara, and even the Shulchan Aruch, consider washing Mayim Acharonim an actual obligation, then why do many treat it as a mere stringency? Furthermore, there are those (many of Germanic origin) who claim that their custom is to specifically **not** wash Mayim Acharonim! Additionally, if it is a binding halacha, why don't women generally observe this washing? The answer lies in the commentary of the Ba'alei Tosafos to both aforementioned Gemaras[12]. Tosafos comments that 'nowadays, when 'Melach S'domis' is no longer found amongst us, we no longer are accustomed to washing Mayim Acharonim, and one may Bentsch without first washing his hands'. In other words, Tosafos maintains that although washing Mayim Acharonim used to be an obligation, since the problematic S'dom Salt was no longer prevalent already in their days, one is no longer required to wash Mayim Acharonim. In fact, not washing for Mayim Acharonim is cited as the common minhag by several Ashkenazic Rishonim, as well as the Levush and the Rema[13].

An additional rationale for leniency is put forward by the famed Rav Yaakov Emden[14]. He points out that ever since the advent of cutlery, most civilized people (hopefully) do not do the bulk of their eating with their hands, rather with a fork and spoon. Therefore, he explains, one who eats with silverware (or even plasticware) and did not actually touch his food, has no need to wash Mayim Acharonim. Interestingly, the Shulchan Aruch[15] cites Tosafos' lenient view as well, at the end of the very same siman where he rules that "Mayim Acharonim Chova"! Several authorities explain his seemingly contradictory intent that indeed nowadays one is **no longer mandated** to wash Mayim Acharonim. Yet, the Shulchan Aruch is telling us that, nevertheless, we still should strive to do this important Mitzvah[16]. This view is cited by many halachic decisors including the Chayei Adam, Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, Aruch Hashulchan, and Mishna Berura, who relate that although Mayim Acharonim may no longer be obligated by the strict letter of the law, nonetheless, one still should be very stringent with its adherence[17]. Other authorities cite Kabbalistic reasons to be strict with its observance[18]. The Vilna Gaon was known to be extremely makpid on this halacha, referring to it as both a "Chova" and a "Mitzva", even nowadays[19].

Wash This Way!

Interestingly, authorities debate the proper way to perform washing Mayim Acharonim. One machlokes involves how much water to use. The basic halacha is that this

handwashing has no set limit or minimum; rather even a small amount of water is sufficient[20]. However, the Kabbalistic approach mandates using only a small amount of water[21]. Conversely, the Vilna Gaon was makpid to use a full Reviis of water, as he considered Mayim Acharonim a full washing, akin to the Netillas Yadayim required before eating bread (Mayim Rishonim)[22].

Another machlokes revolves around how much of the hand must be washed by Mayim Acharonim. Although the basic halacha only requires from the finger tips to the second knuckle[23], nevertheless, Kabbalistically speaking, one should wash the entire fingers[24]. A third opinion, that of the Vilna Gaon, is that the whole hand should be washed, as he considered Mayim Acharonim a full Netillas Yadayim[25]. The unifying thread of these disparate shittos is their mandating adherence to the strict performance of Mayim Acharonim. Women's Role

Yet, so far, none of this explains why women commonly do not wash Mayim Acharonim. This "custom" seems to be an anomaly, as, technically, women and men share the same obligation in this Mitzvah, and we do not find a halachic codifier making such a distinction.

Several contemporary authorities, including Rav Shmuel HaLevi Wosner and Rav Moshe Sternbuch[26] offer a possible justification. They explain that although women and men were both equally obligated in this Mitzvah, nevertheless, since it is no longer mandated as a strict requirement due to the dearth of 'Melach S'domis', but rather as a proper "minhag", it is entirely possible that women collectively never accepted this stringency upon themselves. Therefore, nowadays they are not required to wash Mayim Acharonim[27]. Indeed, Rav Yonah Merzbach (pronounced Mertzbach; Founder and Rosh Yeshivas Kol Torah) was quoted as stating that the common minhag for women in Ashkenaz, even among 'Chareidim L'Dvar Hashem', was **not** to wash Mayim Acharonim[28].

However, many other contemporary halachic decisors, including Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, Rav Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg, Rav Ovadia Yosef, Rav Mordechai Elyahu, Rav Moshe Sternbuch, the Rivevos Efraim, and the Shevet HaKehasi[29], all rule that regardless of the rationale, women still should be vigilant with washing Mayim Acharonim.

To Wash or Not to Wash?

Back to our dilemma. This background is why I informed that harried housewife that technically speaking both she and her relatives were correct. She undeniably had what to rely upon not to wash Mayim Acharonim. Yet, she was definitely correct in making sure to do so anyway. As the Pele Yoetz explains, even if there no longer is a danger posed from salt that blinds our eyes, nevertheless, we still have an obligation to listen to the words of our Chachamim, and not blind ourselves to their wisdom[30].

Postscript: Although the Vilna Gaon is the machmir shitta in the three separate Mayim Acharonim related machlokasim cited above, there is one regarding Mayim Acharonim where he is quoted as being the lenient opinion: talking between Mayim Acharonim and Bentching. This issue of talking before Bentching is a large topic in its own right. The Gemara Brachos (42a) writes that one may not be mafsik (make a separation) between the washing and the Birchas Hamazon. There is a machlokes Rishonim how to understand the Gemara. Rashi (ad loc.), as well as the Rambam (Hilchos Brachos Ch. 6, 20) understand that this means that one may not eat [there is a whole separate machlokes Rishonim whether or not this includes drinking] and this is how the Tur and Shulchan Aruch cite the halacha as well (Orach Chaim 179, 1). According to the Kesef Mishna (on Rambam ad loc.) - this understanding excludes talking - meaning the only problematic hefsek is eating and / or drinking; ergo talking would be permitted.

Yet, the Rosh (in Brachos ad loc.) understands the Gemara's rule as meaning that once one performs Mayim Acharonim, it is as if he answered the zimun (i.e. akin to have started Bentching). If so, then talking would be proscribed as well. Other Rishonim seem to accept the Rosh as well.

What is interesting is that in his Beis Yosef commentary (Orach Chaim 179 s.v. yesh lidakdek), the Kesef Mishna retracted his opinion, ruling akin to the Rosh - that even speaking in between Mayim Acharonim and Bentching is prohibited.

On that, the Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim 181, 1) takes him to task for his retraction, and seemingly ruling like the Kesef Mishna that talking between Mayim Acharonim and Bentching is permitted. Yet, there is some confusion as to whether or not this was his actual maskana lemaaseh. In fact, that is how the Ba'er Heitiv (Orach Chaim 179, 1) cites the Magen Avraham - as ruling leniently; yet, the Mishna Berura (Shaar Hatziyun 179, 1) argues, maintaining that the Magen Avraham's conclusion was truly like the Beis Yosef, to be machmir - like the Rosh, and not like what he wrote in Kesef Mishna like the Rambam.

Most poskim in fact rule this way, that is therefore assur to talk between Mayim Acharonim and Bentching, including the Bach (Orach Chaim 181, 4), Elya Rabba (ad loc. 9), Chayei Adam (vol. 1, 44, 1), Ben Ish Chai (Year 1, Parshas Shelach 15), Mishna Berura (179, 1 and 181, 24), and Kaf Hachaim (Orach Chaim 179, 1 and 181, 20). In fact, the Mishna Berura implies (Shaar Hatziyun 179, 7) that talking might be

considered a bigger problem that eating - as if one eats - we seem to follow the synthesis opinion of the Pri Megadim (Orach Chaim 179, Eshel Avraham 1) that it cancelled out the first Mayim Acharonim - but we can simply wash again before Bentshing; whereas since it is not so clear cut that talking is a hefsek, it is unclear whether one is allowed to wash again to Bentsh - he might now not be allowed to Bentsh! [Although it is important to note that this is not the normative halacha.] The Mishna Berura also seems to hold that talking after Mayim Acharonim is more strict than talking after Mayim Rishonim (for Hamotzie).

An additional factor is that the Arizal (Shaar Hamitzvos, Parshas Eikev) was machmir with this and drove the point home with an interesting tale about one who had unexplained shoulder pain. The Arizal instructed him not to talk between Mayim Acharonim and Bentshing and the pain subsequently went away. He explained that “Netilla **Teikef** L’Bracha” (washing immediately prior to Bentshing), is connected to Katef and therefore one should be stringent. The Chida (Birkei Yosef, Orach Chaim 181, 3), quoting his ancestor, Rav Avraham Azulai, citing the Yeushalmi) avers that regarding one who is makpid on reciting Bentshing immediately after Mayim Acharonim, the Satan will not have the ability to level accusations against him during that meal.

A middle-ground opinion is found in the Shulchan Aruch HaRav (Orach Chaim 181, 6), who writes that a few necessary words are permitted, as ‘Hefsek’ is only referring to only Divrei Torah or a conversation.

So where does the Gr”a fit in? In Biur HaGr”a (Orach Chaim 179, 2) he cites the whole background to the machlokes, citing the many Rishonim and the shakla v’tarya. Yet, he concludes simply that in Chullin (Ch. 6, 2 s.v. d’amar) the Rosh seems to have been chozer from his stringent position and concludes that “v’chein daas kol haposkim”. In other words, the Vilna Gaon held that since there is a seeming contradiction in the Rosh, and all of the machmir opinions are based on his shitta, one need not be machmir with the no talking before Bentshing rule. However, and although the Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 181, 1) seems to rule this way and declares that talking is not the hefsek that the Rishonim were debating, he nevertheless concludes (Orach Chaim 181, 9) that “lechatchilla aino kedai lehafsik” as “Teikif L’Netilla Bracha” and therefore “mikol makom aino kedai laasos kein”, it is not worthwhile to do so.

This article was written L’Iluy Nishmas R’ Chaim Baruch Yehuda ben Dovid Tzvi, L’Refuah Sheleimah for R’ Shlomo Yoel ben Chaya Leah, Rochel Miriam bas Dreiza Liba and l’Zechus Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam v’chol yotzei chalatzeha for a yeshua sheleimah! **For any questions, comments or for the full Mareh Mekomos / sources, please email the author:** yspitz@ohr.edu. **Rabbi Yehuda Spitz, author of MiShulchan Yehuda on Inyanei Yoreh Deah, serves as the Sho’el U’ Meishiv and Rosh Chabura of the Ohr Lagolah Halacha Kollel at Yeshivas Ohr Somayach in Yerushalayim. He also currently writes a contemporary halacha column for the Ohr Somayach website titled “Insights Into Halacha”.**

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[1] See Parshas Vayera (Bereishis Ch. 19, verses 24 & 25) and Parshas Nitzavim (Devarim Ch. 29, verse 22), which, as part of the tochacha Moshe Rabbeinu gives Bnei Yisrael warning them of the dire consequences of not listening to the word of Hashem, states “gafris v’melach sereifah kol artzah...k’ mahpeichas S’dom”, “Sulfur and salt will burn your whole land... just as (it did) in the turning over (destruction) of S’dom”. According to the author of the Zera Gad on the Haggada, Rav Tzvi Hirsch of Horodna, in his glosses to Targum Rav Yosef on Divrei HaYamim (II, Ch. 13, 5; as cited by the Mareh Yehoshua on the Maaseh Rav - 84), who explains Dovid HaMelech’s eternal ‘Bris Melach’ with Hashem as parallel to the salty seas never becoming sweet, this is the true source of Melach S’domis. Rav Tzvi Hirsch explains that the current Yam HaMelach (Dead Sea) sits upon the former site of S’dom and its sister cities. Since all of the seas and oceans are connected, the salty destruction of S’dom is what turned them all salty. Accordingly, ‘Melach S’domis’ is still extant, if highly diluted. He therefore maintains that washing Mayim Acharonim is still actually obligatory nowadays, akin to the opinion of the Vilna Gaon (see footnote 19). The wording of the Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 181, 5) implies that he concurs with this understanding as well. [2] While Bera’s personal connection to the Mitzva of Mayim Acharonim is tenuous at best, relying on homonyms and clever wordplay, on the other hand and quite interestingly, due to Avraham Avinu’s famous “thread and shoelace” rebuttal to his “largesse”, Bera unwittingly became the catalyst for the Mitzvos of Tzitzis and Tefillin. See Gemara Sota (17a) and Chullin (89a). [3] Gemara Brachos (53b). [4] Vayikra (Chapter 20, verse 7). [5] Gemara Chullin (105a-b) and Gemara Eruvin (17b). [6] See Gemara Krisus (6a) and Rambam (Hilchos Klei HaMikdash Ch. 2, 3). [7] There is a Mitzvah to have salt on the table when having a meal, which is directly based on the requirement to have salt on every Korban (Vayikra Ch. 2, verse 13), as our tables are compared to the Mizbe’ach (Altar) and our food to a sacrifice. See Gemara Brachos (55a), Tosafos (ad loc. s.v. haba), Beis Yosef (Orach Chaim 167, quoting the Shibolei Leket 141), Shulchan Aruch and Rema (Orach Chaim 167, 5), Magen Avraham (ad loc. 15), Machatzis Hashekel (ad loc. 15), Ba’er Heitiv (ad loc. 7; citing the Arizal), Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 12), Mishna Berura (ad loc. 30), and Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. 40). See also Shla”h (Shaar HaOsiyos, Eimek Bracha 66), Kiryas Chana Dovid (49), and Halachic World (vol. 2, pg. 151, “Table Salt”). L’maaseh, although nowadays our bread is considered ‘nekiya’ and would not have a requirement to dip it into salt me’ikar hadin, nevertheless, due to Chazal’s comparison of our tables to the Mizbe’ach, one should still have salt on the table while eating. Additionally, Kabbalistically speaking, one should still dip their bread into salt three times. See also R’ Zvi Ryzman’s recent Ratz KaTzvi on Maagalei HaShana (vol. 1, 3, Ch. 2, 10) who adds a

potential reason based on the Baal HaTurim (Vayikra Ch. 2, verse 13) regarding the three times that salt is mentioned in said pasuk. For more on this topic, see previous article titled “Salting With Sugar?!” [8] Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 181, 1), based on the opinions of many Rishonim, including the Rif (Chullin 37b), Sefer HaChinuch (Parshas Eikev, Mitzva 430 s.v. mayim), and Tur (Orach Chaim 181). [9] Rambam (Hilchos Brachos Ch. 6, 3). The Rambam implies that he holds that ‘Melach S’domis’ is still extant. [10] Ben Ish Chai (Year 1, Parshas Shelach 7), quoting his esteemed father and grandfather. [11] See Pirkei Avos (Ch. 3, Mishna 3). [12] Tosafos (Brachos 53b s.v. v’heyisem; Chullin 105a s.v. mayim; Eruvin 17b s.v. Mayim Acharonim). [13] Including the Rosh (Brachos Ch. 8, 6), the Ohr Zarua (vol. 1, 72), the Agur (235), the SMA”G (Positive Mitzva 27), the Levush (Orach Chaim 181, 9) and the Rema in his Darchei Moshe glosses on the Tur (ad loc. 2). See also Shu”t Hisorerus Teshuva (vol. 1, 63), who defends the “common custom” of not washing Mayim Acharonim. [14] Mor U’Ketzia (end 181 s.v. daf). This is l’shitaso, as the Ya’avetz rules similarly by the handwashing requirements of a davar hateebulo b’mashkeh – as explained in a previous article titled ‘The Coffee Dipping Conundrum’. However, the Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. 27) cites several authorities who do not agree with the Ya’avetz’s leniency and concludes that even if one ate exclusively with utensils, he must still wash Mayim Acharonim. Similarly, regarding a different halacha related to handwashing, we find that although according to the letter of the law it need not be required, nevertheless, many authorities rule that one should still wash his hands, as hand washing does not usually entail too much effort - see previous article titled ‘The Halachic Power of a Diyuk’. [15] Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 181, 10). [16] Shu”t Nepoch B’Kessef (vol. 1, pg. 154, 4th column), Yalkut Yosef (vol. 8, 181, footnotes 1 and 2), Halichos Olam (Parshas Shelach, 1), Halacha Berura (vol. 8, Orach Chaim 181, Birur Halacha 1 s.v. v’hinei). [17] Chayei Adam (46, 1), Shulchan Aruch HaRav (Orach Chaim 181, 9), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (44, 1), Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 181, 5), Mishna Berura (181, 22). Other poskim who rule this way include the Rashal (Yam Shel Shlomo, Chullin Ch. 8, 10), Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim 181, 10), Elyah Rabbah (Orach Chaim 181, 9), Pri Megadim (Orach Chaim 181, Mishbetzos Zahav 1, citing several reasons for stringency), Maharsham (Daas Torah, Orach Chaim 181, 10; quoting the Toras Chaim), Ben Ish Chai (Year 1, Parshas Shelach 6), Shoneh Halachos (vol. 1, 181, 1), Shu”t Ohr L’Tzion (vol. 2, pg. 303), Yalkut Yosef (ibid.) and Halacha Berura (ibid.). Many of these authorities suspect that even though actual ‘Melach S’domis’ might no longer be prevalent, still other types of common salt that would be harmful if rubbed into eyes nonetheless are. [This chashash was first mentioned by Talmidei Rabbeinu Yonah (Brachos 40b in the dapei HaRif) in the name of the Rambam (ibid.), ‘shema yesh bo Melach S’domis oh melach sheteva k’Melach S’domis’.] Additionally, even if salt was no longer an issue, still, one fulfills the Mitzvah of “V’heyisem Kedoshim” by washing Mayim Acharonim. [18] The Kaf Hachaim (Orach Chaim 181, 1) states that the words of Chazal are really “Sod” wrapped in “Peshat”. Therefore even if the “Peshat” is no longer relevant, the hidden meanings still are. He then cites that the Zohar (Parshas Terumah pg. 154b and Parshas Pinchas pg. 246a) and the Arizal (Shaar Hamitzvos, Parshas Eikev) write that one should be extremely vigilant with Mayim Acharonim due to Kabbalistic reasons. This zehirus with Mayim Acharonim based on Kabbalistic reasons is also cited by the Shlah (Shaar HaOsiyos, Os Kuf s.v. u’ksheim), the Magen Avraham (ibid.), the Chida (Birkei Yosef, Orach Chaim 181, 7), the Pele Yo’etz (Os Nun, Netillas Yadayim s.v. v’yeish), Shulchan HaTahor (181, 1 and footnote, who calls it a ‘chova gamur’), Rav Chaim Falaj’ji (Kaf Hachaim 25, 2, 8 & 9, quoting the Yalkut Ruveini on Vayikra), the Matteh Moshe (vol. 2, 306), Ben Ish Chai (ibid.), and in Shu”t Min Hashamayim (57). See mv”r Rav Yosef Yitzchok Lerner’s classic Shemiras HaGuf VeHanefesh (vol. 1, Ch. 56) at length. [19] See Biur HaGr”a (Orach Chaim 181, 12) who was extremely stringent with this halacha, as he rejects the common leniencies offered by Tosafos and the Rosh. Additionally, Maaseh Rav (84) and Piskei HaGr”a (Orach Chaim 181, 10) mutually in the Gr”a’s name, refer to Mayim Acharonim as both a “Chova” and a “Mitzva”, even nowadays. This is also how it is cited in Kesser Rosh (82, 1), as how the Gr”a’s prime talmid, Rav Chaim Volozhiner, held as well. See also Mishna Berura (Orach Chaim 181, 22) who explains that according to the Gr”a the sakana of ‘Melach S’domis’ still applies nowadays. This also seems to be the Rambam’s understanding (Hilchos Brachos Ch. 6, 3), and is cited by the Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 181, 5) as well, that those who use sea salt should still be wary of ‘Melach S’domis’, which would fit in with the explanation of the Zera Gad (see footnote 1). [20] The Kol Bo (23), quoting the Raavad, as well as the Beis Yosef (Orach Chaim 181 s.v. mashma) citing the opinion of Rabbeinu Bachya (Shulchan Shel Arba, Shaar 1 s.v. v’yesh hefesh), ruled that there is no shiur for the amount of water needed for Mayim Acharonim, and even a small amount will do. The Elyah Rabbah (ad loc. 3) and Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 8) wrote that this is indeed the halacha. This seems to be the common custom - see Mishna Berura (ad loc. 19). Similarly, several contemporary authorities, including the Chazon Ish (cited in Orchos Rabbeinu vol. 1, 70), Rav Yosef Elyahu Henkin (Shu”t Gevuros Eliyahu vol. 1, 53, 4), and Rav Shmuel HaLevi Vosner (Kovetz M’Bais Levi vol. 17, pg. 22, 3) wrote that the prevalent minhag is that one only needs to use a small amount of water. [21] See Ben Ish Chai (Year 1, Parshas Shelach 8), Kaf Hachaim (Falaj’ji; 25, 2), and Kaf Hachaim (Orach Chaim 181, 6). See next footnote. [22] Maaseh Rav (84), cited by the Mishna Berura (Orach Chaim 181, 19). This is also how it is cited in Kesser Rosh (82, 1), as how the Gr”a’s prime talmid, Rav Chaim Volozhiner, held as well. The Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 8) notes that many Gedolim washed with a full Reviis, and he personally does not see any reason to be makpid on only using a small amount of water. However, the Chazon Ish is quoted (Orchos Rabbeinu vol. 1, 70; citing the Steipler Gaon; and in the new print of Maaseh Rav, Weinreb edition; Miluim pg. 320, s.v. u’l’inyan; quoting Rav Chaim Kanievsky) as not believing that the Gr”a was actually makpid on a shiur Reviis for Mayim Acharonim. However, see Shu”t Teshuvos V’Hanhagos (vol. 1, 173 s.v. v’achshav) who writes that this shemua is tzarich iyun gadol, as why should this rule in Maaseh Rav be any less reliable as to the Gr”a’s personal hanhaga than any other one in the sefer, especially as his talmidim were known to be stringent for washing this way. He attempts to answer that perhaps the Chazon Ish was referring to washing only to the second knuckle (as opposed to the whole hand) with a Reviis, that he did not believe was the Gr”a’s true shitta. However, he reiterates, washing the whole hand with a Reviis (meaning a full Netillas Yadayim) was indeed the Gr”a’s opinion. [23] Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 181, 4), quoting the Tur (ad loc.) and Rashba (Toras HaBayis, Bayis 6, Shaar

1, Ch. 9), Levush (ad loc.), Magen Avraham (ad loc. 4), Pri Megadim (ad loc. Eishel Avraham 4), Chayei Adam (vol. 1, 46, 1), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (44, 1), and Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 7). Indeed, in his Beis Yosef commentary (ad loc. 4), the Shulchan Aruch explicitly rules against Rabbeinu Bachya's opinion (Shulchan Shel Arba pg. 466) of mandating whole finger washing. Several contemporary authorities, including Rav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin (Shu"t Gevuros Eliyahu vol. 1, 53, 4), and Rav Shmuel HaLevi Wosner (Kovetz M'Bais Levi vol. 17, pg 22, 3) wrote that the prevalent minhag is that one only needs to wash until the second knuckle. The Mishna Berura (ibid. end 10) writes that he sees people who are scrupulous with washing Mayim Acharonim, yet only wash the tips of their fingers, not realizing that they must wash until the second knuckle to fulfill the Mitzva. He calls this minute washing a 'Maaseh Ra', and exhorts everyone to wash at least until the second knuckle. [24] The Arizal (Shaar HaKavannos pg. 72b) and the Siddur HaRashash maintain that Kabbalistically, the entire fingers must be washed during Mayim Acharonim. The Kaf Hachaim (Orach Chaim 181, 17) rules this way as well. [In Orach Chaim 157, 22 the Kaf Hachaim explains the Arizal's reasoning for this.] He adds a rule, that anytime a halacha is not specifically mentioned in the Gemara, but its practical application is debated by Poskim, we should follow the practice of the Kabbalists. He adds that certainly, if the Shulchan Aruch would have seen the ruling of the Arizal, he would have mandated whole finger washing as well. As mentioned in a previous footnote, requiring the whole fingers to be washed was also the opinion of Rabbeinu Bachya (Shulchan Shel Arba pg. 466). The Mishna Berura (181, 4, Biur Halacha s.v. ad) concludes that lechatchilla one should try to be machmir for this opinion. [Interestingly, he refers to it as the Gr"a's shitta. On this, see Shu"t Teshuvos V'Hanhagos (vol. 1, 173) who explains that the Gr"a's true shitta was washing the full hand. See next footnote.] [25] See Biur HaGr"a (Orach Chaim 181, 12, s.v. yesh), Chidushei HaGr"a Imrei Noam (on Brachos 15a and 53b), Maaseh Rav (84), and in many glosses on the Maaseh Rav, including Damesek Eliezer, Ohr Chodosh, and Biurei Rav Naftali Hertz HaLevi. This was also attested to by the Gr"a's talmid, Rav Zundel Salant (HaTzaddik Ri"Z M'Salant pg. 115), and was the personal hanhaga of the Brisker Rav [see Shu"t Teshuvos V'Hanhagos (vol. 1, 173) at length on the Gr"a's shitta of Mayim Acharonim]. [26] Shu"t Shevet HaLevi (vol. 3, 23, 3 s.v. l'inyan) and Shu"t Teshuvos V'Hanhagos (vol. 1, 174). However, Rav Sternbuch concludes that nevertheless women still should wash Mayim Acharonim. He notes that certainly according to the Gr"a and others who maintain that even nowadays that Mayim Acharonim is obligatory, there would be no difference between men and women in this aspect. He adds that he has seen many 'Chassidim and Anshei Maaseh' whose wives were careful to wash Mayim Acharonim. He concludes that while women should do so, it is preferable that they should wash unobtrusively to not fall into the category of 'giving an impression of showing off' (mechezi k'yuhara). [27] There are several other possible justifications for women's general lackadaisicalness with Mayim Acharonim: The Ya'avetz (Mor U'Ketziyah ibid.) posits that since women are generally more rigorous regarding hygiene and cleanliness they certainly would make sure not to eat with their hands, and l'shitaso not be required in Mayim Acharonim [however, he concludes that barring that, women and men have equal obligation in this Mitzvah]. Others [see Shu"t VaYevarech Dovid (vol. 1, Orach Chaim 30) and Yalkut Yosef (ibid.)] opine that since men are only makpid due to Kabbalistic reasons and not because of actual halachic concerns, women are not beholden to keep it. [28] Cited in Halichos Bas Yisrael (pg. 58, end of footnote 11). [29] Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld (Shu"t Salmas Chaim, new print, Orach Chaim 174), Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (cited in Halichos Bas Yisrael Ch. 3, footnote 11), Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv (Ha'aros B'Maseches Chullin 105b), Rav Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg (cited in the Artscroll Ohel Sarah Siddur, endnote 105), Rav Ovadia Yosef (Halichos Olam vol. 2, Parshas Shlach 1), Rav Mordechai Eliyahu (Darchei Halacha glosses to Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 44, 1), Rav Moshe Sternbuch (Shu"t Teshuvos V'Hanhagos vol. 1, 174), the Rivevos Efraim (Shu"t vol. 1, 140, 3), and the Shevet HaKehasi (Shu"t vol. 1, 94). Others contemporary sefarim who rule that women should wash Mayim Acharonim include Halichos Baysa (Ch. 12, 2), Yalkut Yosef (ibid. and his Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 181, 2), and Halacha Berura (ibid.). In fact, the Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 181, end 5) already mentioned that one should make sure that 'kol bnei baiso' wash Mayim Acharonim. [30] Pele Yo'etz (Os Nun, Netillas Yadayim s.v. v'yeish). There are several additional reasons to be vigilant with Mayim Acharonim. In Shu"t Min HaShamayim (ibid; cited by the Aruch Hashulchan ibid.) he explains that 'kol hameikil b'Mayim Acharonim mekilim lo mezonosav min HaShmayim'. Additionally, the Chida (Birkei Yosef idid.) cites that his saintly grandfather was told in a She'elas Chalom that 'hameikil b'Mayim Acharonim mekilin lo yamav u'shnosav'! Definitely excellent reasons to observe this washing. For more on the topic of She'elos Chalomos in general, see Rabbi Eliezer Brodt's Lekutei Eliezer (ppg. 59 - 63).

Disclaimer: This is not a comprehensive guide, rather a brief summary to raise awareness of the issues. In any real case one should ask a competent Halachic authority. L'iluy Nishmas the Rosh HaYeshiva - Rav Chonoh Menachem Mendel ben R' Yechezkel Shraga, Rav Yaakov Yeshaya ben R' Boruch Yehuda, and I'zchus for Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam and her children for a yeshua teikef u'miyad!