

In My Opinion FAME
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

As the saying goes, fame is fleeting. However, most humans enjoy it when it exists. The problem with fame is that it is very temporary, fickle and has a very short shelf life. However, while it lasts it is intoxicating and delectable. The famous anecdote about the politician who learns that an investigative article regarding his nefarious behavior was about to be published in the local newspaper, responds, "I hope that they have spelled my name correctly."

This reveals the vanity that drives people towards fame at almost all costs. Yet, in retrospect out of the billions of people who inhabit our planet and make up our history, very very few have achieved lasting fame and notoriety, and even fewer are remembered fondly, especially with respect to later generations. Such is the nature of fame and the human condition. It is a combination of ludicrous comedy and oppressive sadness. Fame and folly apparently go hand in hand throughout human history.

I am motivated to write this article by an incident that happened to me recently when I flew to the United States on my favorite airline, El Al. Since the clientele on this airline is overwhelmingly Jewish and religious Jews are also a considerable part of the customer base, there were a number of people on the flight who recognized me. Since it was a very long flight, I imagine that some of them mentioned to their fellow passengers that they had seen me on the flight. I was however very surprised when, in the middle of the flight, a woman approached me that I did not know and brought me a copy of one of my parsha articles that she said her daughter really enjoyed. She asked me to please sign the article so she could send the autographed sheet back to her daughter and prove to her that she actually met me on the on the plane. I happily accommodated her wish and signed the paper.

The person I was sitting next to on the plane who until then treated me as the perfect stranger was apparently very impressed at my newly found fame. I became an instant celebrity among those sitting in my row in the airplane. Basking in my fame, I enjoyed the moment though I realized that in the long run of things, it really mattered very little. But a little fame is still intoxicating after all.

In our never-ending information bombardment, that currently marks our lifestyle, fame is more fleeting than ever before. Lasting fame and positive notoriety have become rarer than ever. Yet, we find that the Torah itself promotes the good and righteous people so that they may influence others to follow in their footsteps. The Lord promised our father Abraham that he would glorify his name and make it known throughout the world in human history. God naturally fulfilled that promise so that our father Abraham remains a model and teacher for all generations of mankind, even for those who are not adherents of Judaism. The Torah mentions many people, many of them positively while others are held up to criticism and shame. The Torah uses the fame of people as a teaching instrument. Positive traits create fame while negative ones only promote temporary notoriety.

The rabbis of the Talmud taught us that those who attempt to avoid fame and notice are destined to have that fame pursue them and eventually catch up to them. Both King Saul and King David initially attempted to avoid fame and power. The great Hillel also sought anonymity for himself before being elevated to be the head of the Sanhedrin. In later generations many great scholars wrote monumental works and did not identify themselves as being the authors. Eventually though, almost all were revealed, as fame, in the words of the Rabbis, caught up with them. The Chofetz Chaim and Chazon Ish are prime examples of this historical phenomenon.

It seems that lasting fame belongs to those who are the least self-promoting and who avoid pursuing public attention and praise. All of this certainly flies in the face of current practice. Jewish tradition was

unaware of media companies and public relations experts. Nevertheless, fame is one of the realities of the human existence, and as the saying goes: "It is like perfume that needs to be savored but not swallowed".

Shabbat Shalom.
Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha TOLDOT
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

In the competition between the brothers Esau and Jacob, Esau originally downplays any long-range view of the situation. He demands immediate gratification and is therefore more than willing to relinquish his birthright – which is only a long-range asset – in favor of an immediate bowl of hot lentils. As the Torah dutifully records for us in this week's reading, Esau will come to regret this youthful decision later in life. But, like almost all of us, he will put the blame for the mistake on others – on the shrewdness of Jacob taking advantage of him – rather than on his own error and weakness.

By blaming Jacob for what was his own short sidedness, Esau compounds the original error of judgment on his part. After having tasted all the immoral pleasures of life, and after a career of violence, Esau remains unfulfilled, unhappy and frustrated. He now longs for the blessing and approval of his old father, a person who he has long treated as being completely irrelevant to him. His shout of anguish, when he realizes that the spiritual blessings of his father have already been bestowed on his brother Jacob and that what is left for him are the fleeting blessings of temporal existence and power, reverberates throughout human history. He realizes that the blessings given to Jacob are those of eternity and lasting memory while all physical blessings in this world are merely temporary and always subject to revision. The Torah always deals with eternal standards and never bows to current themes and ideas no matter how attractive they may seem at the time.

Every generation feels that it discovers new ways to propel humanity and civilization forward. Somehow, we always feel ourselves to be wiser than our elders, smarter than our ancestors. But, if one makes an honest review of human history, it becomes clear that the true principles of civilization – morality, kindness, education and individual freedom – remain constant throughout the story of humankind. Deviations from these principles, in the hope of achieving a utopian society, have always resulted in tragedy and destruction.

The cry of Esau reverberates through the halls of world history. And, what makes it most pathetic is that what Esau is searching for can easily be found in what he himself has previously discarded and denigrated. But, it is always the egotistical hubris of humankind that prevents it from seriously and logically examining its situation and thoughts. One has to admit to past errors and to restore oneself to the path of goodness and righteousness, which alone can lead to a lasting feeling of happiness and accomplishment in this world.

Esau would like to be Jacob, but without having to behave with the restraint and outlook on life that is the most central point of reference in the life and behavior of Jacob. It is as Justice Brandeis once put it: "I would like to have the serenity and peace of the Sabbath but without its restraints." It is dealing with that fallacy of thought that makes Jacob Jacob and Esau Esau.

Shabbat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

The Courage of Persistence (Toldot 5779)
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

There is a strange passage in the life of Isaac, ominous in its foreshadowing of much of later Jewish history. Like Abraham, Isaac finds

himself forced by famine to go to Gerar, in the land of the Philistines. There, like Abraham, he senses that his life may be in danger because he is married to a beautiful woman. He fears that he will be killed so that Rebecca can be taken into the harem of king Avimelekh. The couple pass themselves off as brother and sister. The deception is discovered, Avimelekh is indignant, explanations are made, and the moment passes. Genesis 26 reads almost like a replay of Genesis 20, a generation later.

In both cases Avimelekh promises the patriarchs security. To Abraham he said, "My land is before you; live wherever you like" (Gen. 20:15). About Isaac, he commands, "Anyone who molests this man or his wife shall surely be put to death" (Gen. 26:11). Yet in both cases, there is a troubled aftermath. In Genesis 21 we read about an argument that arose over a well that Abraham had dug: "Then Abraham complained to Avimelekh about a well of water that Avimelekh's servants had seized" (Gen. 21:25). The two men make a treaty. Yet, as we now discover, this was not sufficient to prevent further difficulties in the days of Isaac:

Isaac planted crops in that land and the same year reaped a hundredfold, because the Lord blessed him. The man became rich, and his wealth continued to grow until he became very wealthy. He had so many flocks and herds and servants that the Philistines envied him. So all the wells that his father's servants had dug in the time of his father Abraham, the Philistines stopped up, filling them with earth.

Then Avimelekh said to Isaac, "Move away from us; you have become too powerful for us."

So Isaac moved away from there and encamped in the Valley of Gerar and settled there. Isaac reopened the wells that had been dug in the time of his father Abraham, which the Philistines had stopped up after Abraham died, and he gave them the same names his father had given them.

Isaac's servants dug in the valley and discovered a well of fresh water there. But the herdsmen of Gerar quarrelled with Isaac's herdsmen and said, "The water is ours!" So he named the well Esek, because they disputed with him. Then they dug another well, but they quarrelled over that one also; so he named it Sitnah. He moved on from there and dug another well, and no one quarrelled over it. He named it Rehovot, saying, "Now the Lord has given us room and we will flourish in the land." (26:12–22)

There are three aspects of this passage worthy of careful attention. The first is the intimation it gives us of what will later be the turning point of the fate of the Israelites in Egypt. Avimelekh says, "you have become too powerful for us." Centuries later, Pharaoh says, at the beginning of the book of Exodus, "Behold, the people of the children of Israel are greater in number and power than we are. Come on, let us deal wisely with them, lest they multiply and it come to pass, when there befall any war, that they join also with our enemies and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land" (1:9–10). The same word, *atzum*, "power/powerful," appears in both cases. Our passage signals the birth of one of the deadliest of human phenomena, antisemitism.

Antisemitism is in some respects unique. It is, in Robert Wistrich's phrase, the world's longest hatred.¹ No other prejudice has lasted so long, mutated so persistently, attracted such demonic myths, or had such devastating effects. But in other respects it is not unique, and we must try to understand it as best we can.

One of the best books about antisemitism, is in fact not about antisemitism at all, but about similar phenomena in other contexts, Amy Chua's *World on Fire*.² Her thesis is that any conspicuously successful minority will attract envy that may deepen into hate and provoke violence. All three conditions are essential. The hated group must be conspicuous, for otherwise it would not be singled out. It must be successful, for otherwise it would not be envied. And it must be a minority, for otherwise it would not be attacked.

All three conditions were present in the case of Isaac. He was conspicuous: he was not a Philistine, he was different from the local population as an outsider, a stranger, someone with a different faith. He was successful: his crops had succeeded a hundredfold, his flocks and herds were large, and the people envied him. And he was a minority: a

single family in the midst of the local population. All the ingredients were present for the distillation of hostility and hate.

There is more. Another profound insight into the conditions that give rise to antisemitism was given by Hannah Arendt in her book *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (the section has been published separately as *Anti-Semitism*).³ Hostility to Jews becomes dangerous, she argued, not when Jews are strong, but when they are weak.

This is deeply paradoxical because, on the face of it, the opposite is true. A single thread runs from the Philistines' reaction to Isaac and Pharaoh's to the Israelites, to the myth concocted in the late nineteenth century, known as *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.⁴ It says that Jews are powerful, too powerful. They control resources. They are a threat. They must be removed.

Yet, says Arendt, antisemitism did not become dangerous until they had lost the power they had once had:

When Hitler came to power, the German banks were already almost *Judenrein* (and it was here that Jews had held key positions for more than a hundred years) and German Jewry as a whole, after a long steady growth in social status and numbers, was declining so rapidly that statisticians predicted its disappearance in a few decades.⁵

The same was true in France:

The Dreyfus affair exploded not under the Second Empire, when French Jewry was at the height of its prosperity and influence, but under the Third Republic when Jews had all but vanished from important positions.⁶

Antisemitism is a complex, protean phenomenon because antisemites must be able to hold together two beliefs that seem to contradict one another: Jews are so powerful that they should be feared, and at the same time so powerless that they can be attacked without fear.

It would seem that no one could be so irrational as to believe both of these things simultaneously. But emotions are not rational, despite the fact that they are often rationalised, for there is a world of difference between rationality and rationalisation (the attempt to give rational justification for irrational beliefs).

So, for example, in the twenty-first century we can find that (a) Western media are almost universally hostile to Israel, and (b) otherwise intelligent people claim that the media are controlled by Jews who support Israel: the same inner contradiction of perceived powerlessness and ascribed power.

Arendt summarises her thesis in a single, telling phrase which links her analysis to that of Amy Chua. What gives rise to antisemitism is, she says, the phenomenon of "wealth without power." That was precisely the position of Isaac among the Philistines.

There is a second aspect of our passage that has had reverberations through the centuries: the self-destructive nature of hate. The Philistines did not ask Isaac to share his water with them. They did not ask him to teach them how he (and his father) had discovered a source of water that they – residents of the place – had not. They did not even simply ask him to move on. They "stopped up" the wells, "filling them with earth." This act harmed them more than it harmed Isaac. It robbed them of a resource that would, in any case, have become theirs, once the famine had ended and Isaac had returned home.

More than hate destroys the hated, it destroys the hater. In this case too, Isaac and the Philistines were a portent of what would eventually happen to the Israelites in Egypt. By the time of the plague of locusts, we read:

Pharaoh's officials said to him, "How long will this man be a snare to us? Let the people go, so that they may worship the Lord their God. Do you not yet realise that Egypt is ruined?" (Exodus 10:7)

In effect they said to Pharaoh: you may think you are harming the Israelites. In fact you are harming us.

Both love and hate, said Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, "upset the natural order" (*mekalkalet et hashurah*).⁷ They are irrational. They make us do things we would not do otherwise. In today's Middle East, as so often before, those intent on destroying their enemies end by doing great harm to their own interests, their own people.

Third, Isaac's response remains the correct one today. Defeated once, he tries again. He digs another well; this too yields opposition. So he moves on and tries again, and eventually finds peace.

How fitting it is that the town that today carries the name Isaac gave the site of this third well, is the home of the Weizmann Institute of Science, the Faculty of Agriculture of the Hebrew University, and the Kaplan hospital, allied to the Medical School of the Hebrew University. Israel Belkind, one of the founders of the settlement in 1890, called it Rehovot precisely because of the verse in our parsha: "He named it Rehovot, saying, Now the Lord has given us room and we will flourish in the land."

Isaac is the least original of the three patriarchs. His life lacks the drama of Abraham or the struggles of Jacob. We see in this passage that Isaac himself did not strive to be original. The text is unusually emphatic on the point: Isaac "reopened the wells that had been dug in the time of his father Abraham, which the Philistines had stopped up after Abraham died, and he gave them the same names his father had given them." Normally we strive to individuate ourselves by differentiating ourselves from our parents. We do things differently, or even if we don't, we give them different names. Isaac was not like this. He was content to be a link in the chain of generations, faithful to what his father had started. Isaac represents the faith of persistence, the courage of continuity. He was the first Jewish child, and he represents the single greatest challenge of being a Jewish child: to continue the journey our ancestors began, rather than drifting from it, thereby bringing the journey to an end before it has reached its destination. And Isaac, because of that faith, was able to achieve the most elusive of goals, namely peace – because he never gave up. When one effort failed, he began again. So it is with all great achievements: one part originality, nine parts persistence.

I find it moving that Isaac, who underwent so many trials, from the binding when he was young, to the rivalry between his sons when he was old and blind, carries a name that means, "He will laugh." Perhaps the name – given to him by God Himself before Isaac was born – means what the Psalm means when it says, "Those who sow in tears will reap with joy" (Ps. 126:5). Faith means the courage to persist through all the setbacks, all the grief, never giving up, never accepting defeat. For at the end, despite the opposition, the envy and the hate, lie the broad spaces, Rehovot, and the laughter, Isaac: the serenity of the destination after the storms along the way.

Shabbat Shalom: Parshat Toldot (Genesis 25:19 – 28:9)

By Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – "And Rebecca spoke to her son Jacob, saying... And now, my son, obey my voice according to which I command you..." (Genesis 27:5,7)

One of the many glories of the Bible is that it recognizes the complex personality especially of great individuals, and the fact that strength and weakness, virtue and vice, can sometimes both reside in the very same soul. Even more significantly, that which may superficially appear to be dishonest – an act of deception – may very well provide the necessary ingredient which ultimately creates grandeur. It is this understanding which supplies the real motivation for what appears to be Rebecca's deception according to the profound interpretations of the Malbim and Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch.

The most obvious question which strikes us, as we read the Torah portion, is why Rebecca had to deceive her husband by dressing her younger son Jacob in the garb and in the skins of her older son Esau? Why could she not merely have explained to her husband that Esau, although he was the elder brother, was simply not worthy of the birthright? From a textual perspective, this doesn't seem to have been a difficult task at all. After all, right before Isaac summons Esau requesting venison meat as the hors d'oeuvre of the blessing, the Bible specifically records that Esau had committed the one great sin of the patriarchal period: he married two Hittite women, which was 'a bitterness of spirit to Isaac and to Rebecca' (Gen. 26:35). Moreover,

Rebecca could certainly have argued that the son who had been willing to sell his birthright to Jacob for a mere bowl of lentil soup, could not possibly be worthy of the mantle of Abrahamic leadership. Furthermore, Rebecca had heard from the Almighty during her frighteningly difficult pregnancy that 'the elder son would serve the younger' (Gen. 25:23) during her frighteningly difficult pregnancy. So why didn't she make her convincing case to her husband after coffee one evening rather than resort to an act of trickery?

Malbim suggests that indeed such a conversation between husband and wife did take place. And after Rebecca marshaled her arguments, Isaac then explained to his wife that he was as aware of Esau's shortcomings as she was. In fact, he understood that the spiritual blessing of family leadership, the blessing of Abraham which we know as the birthright, must certainly go to Jacob; indeed when Jacob is later forced by the wrath of his deceived brother Esau to leave his home and go into exile with Laban, after his father warns him not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan, he is blessed with the messianic dream of becoming a congregation of nations and he is given the blessing of Abraham, to inherit the land of Israel (Gen. 28:3,4). But, argues Isaac, he must make a split between the birthright of spiritual leadership which rightfully belongs to Jacob and the physical blessing of material prosperity and political domination which he has decided to give to Esau:

May the Lord give you from the dew of the heavens and the fat [oil] of the land and much grain and wine...Be the political master over your brother and may the daughters of your mother bow down to you.

The more spiritual brother must receive the religious-spiritual birthright (bekhora) and the more physical brother must receive the material-political blessing (berakha). After all, argues Isaac, the bookish, naive, and spiritual Jacob (ish tam, yoshev ohalim) would not begin to know how to maneuver in an economically driven, militaristically guided society. Give Esau the oil and the sword; give Jacob the books and the Temple.

Rebecca strongly disagrees. She understands that the world at large and the human nature of individuals dare not be so simplistically divided between the spiritual and the material, God and Caesar. If religious leadership is to emerge supreme, it requires the infrastructure of economic stability; in an imperfect world of aggression and duplicity, even leading spiritual personalities must sometimes reluctantly wage war against evil in order for the good to triumph. Rebecca understands the world of reality; after all, she comes from the house of Laban and Bethuel, two masters of deceit and treachery.

We should also remember that the King David, the progenitor of the Messiah of Peace, is both the sweet singer of Psalms with a voice of Jacob as well as the great warrior of Israel with hands of Esau. King David's strength as well as his weakness apparently was derived from that aspect of Esau which was also part of his personality. Every Jacob must learn to utilize, tame and ultimately sanctify the necessary hands of Esau, without which it is impossible to triumph.

But the profound complexity of our Torah continues its lessons. Yes, Jacob justifiably received both blessing and birthright (berakha and bekhora) from his father, but we cannot – and he cannot – forget that this occurred as a result of his act of deception. Jacob, therefore, has to pay a heavy price. He must flee from his parents' home in order to escape Esau's wrath, and is thrust into exile with the treacherous Laban. And in addition to all of the problems faced by someone on the run, Jacob has the added dilemma of looking at himself in the mirror. His deception was orchestrated by his mother, perhaps even ordained by God, but, nonetheless, something inside him has been forever tainted. This feeling of guilt never leaves him. Twenty years later, when Jacob is about to return to his birthplace as a mature older man – as a husband and a father – he realizes that unfinished business between Esau and himself still remains.

Conscience-stricken, he acts totally subservient and obsequious, beseeching his brother, 'kah na et birkhati' (Gen. 33:11) which literally means 'take my blessing,' as he hands over a large portion of his material acquisitions. After all these years, Jacob wishes to make amends by

returning the very blessings he undeservedly had received from his father. ‘And one must restore the stolen object which one has taken’ (Lev. 5:23), demands biblical morality.

However, ultimately – and even in our days – the unified dream of Rebecca is truly coming to pass, when Israel has been miraculously restored to its homeland as a result of its military victories over the aggressive Palestinian forces. Indeed, the true mother of the Yeshivat Hesder of Modern Orthodoxy in Israel is none other than Mother Rebecca, whose vision of sanctifying the hands of Esau has proven successful in our blessed period of the beginning of the sprouting of our redemption.

Shabbat Shalom

Toldot: Abraham Kept Mitzvot

Rav Kook Torah

Why are practical mitzvot so central to Judaism? Why is it not enough just to believe in the Torah’s central tenets and teachings?

When famine struck, Isaac considered leaving the Land of Israel. But God commanded him to remain in Israel. God allayed Isaac’s fears, promising him:

“I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars of the sky, and grant them all these lands... Because Abraham obeyed My voice; and he kept My charge, My commandments, My decrees, and My laws.” (Gen. 26:4-5)

Abraham kept God’s commandments?

Indeed, the Sages interpreted this verse literally. They wrote that the Patriarchs fulfilled the precepts of the Torah, even before their revelation at Sinai centuries later.

Fifth-century scholar Rav Ashi made an even more audacious claim. He asserted that Abraham even observed the mitzvah of eiruv tavshilin - a rabbinically ordained ritual which enables one to prepare food and lights for the Sabbath when a holiday falls out on a Friday (Yoma 28b). (Ordinarily, it is forbidden to cook on a holiday if the meal is intended to be served after the holiday is over.)

Observing Eiruv Tavshilin

A certain scholar once commented to Rav Kook that Rav Ashi’s statement clearly cannot be taken at face value. How could Abraham know what the rabbinical courts would decree a thousand years in the future? The Sages must have intended to convey a subtler message: Abraham’s philosophical mastery of the Torah was so complete, his grasp of the Torah’s theoretical underpinnings so comprehensive, that it encompassed even the underlying rationales for future decrees.

Rav Kook, however, was not pleased with this explanation. In his response, Rav Kook emphasized that the Torah’s theoretical foundations cannot be safeguarded without practical mitzvot. It is impossible to truly internalize the Torah’s philosophical teachings without concrete actions.

This is the fundamental weakness of religions that rely on faith alone. Without an emphasis on deeds, such religions retreat to the realm of the philosophical and the abstract. They abandon the material world, leaving it unredeemed. The Torah’s focus on detailed mitzvot, on the other hand, reflects its extensive involvement with the physical world.

Levels of Holiness

Rav Kook elucidated this Talmudic tradition in a slightly different vein. While Abraham did not literally perform the ritual of eiruv tavshilin as we do today, he was able to apply the essential concept of this ceremony to his day-to-day life. This was not just some abstract theory, but practical knowledge which guided his actions.

What is the essence of eiruv tavshilin? The Sages explained in Beitza 15b that this ceremony helps one fulfill the Biblical injunction to “Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy.” Due to the fact that there is a holiday preceding the Sabbath, the Sabbath could be forgotten or neglected. In what way might one forget the sanctity of Shabbat?

The holiness of Shabbat is greater than the holiness of the holidays. But when Shabbat immediately follows a holiday, one might mistakenly equate the two and forget that there are different laws governing them.

This could lead one to desecrate the Sabbath by performing activities that are permitted on holidays, such as cooking.

Just as we need to distinguish between the holy and the profane, so too we need to distinguish between different degrees of holiness. This is the underlying purpose of eiruv tavshilin: to remind us of the higher sanctity of the Sabbath.

Abraham, who kept the entire Torah, also made this fine distinction - in his life and actions. Abraham differentiated not only between the sacred and the profane, but also between *bein kodesh le-kodesh*, between different levels of holiness.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from *Igrot HaRe’iyah* vol. I, p. 135 (1908); vol. III, p. 92 (1917))

How Much May I Charge?

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Overcharged esrog

“My esrog dealer charged me \$150 for an esrog. My brother-in-law, who knows the business, told me that he overcharged me, and the esrog is not worth more than \$35. Can I get my money back?”

Question #2: Just a little bit

“Am I permitted to charge a little bit above the market price for an item?”

Question #3: Damaged coin

“I noticed that someone tried to scrape off some of the metal on a coin that I have. May I use it?”

Question #4: Expert error

“I purchased a rare coin from a dealer, and he clearly undercharged me. Am I required to tell him about it?”

Answer:

Upon graduation from *olam hazeh*, the first question asked upon entering the *beis din shel maalah*, the Heavenly Court, is: “Did you deal honestly with your fellowmen?” (Shabbos 31a). The *Aruch Hashulchan* (*Orach Chayim* 156:3) explains that this does not mean, “Did you steal?” or “Were your weights honest?” Someone who violated these laws, whether dealing with Jewish or non-Jewish clientele, qualifies as a *rosho gamur*. Rather, the Heavenly Court’s inquiries are: “Did you make unjustified claims about the quality of the merchandise that you are selling?” “Did you speak to people softly in your business dealings?” “Did you curse, scream, or act angrily with people?” “Did you realize that all livelihood comes only from Hashem and act within that framework?”

Anytime is ideal to discuss the details of this topic; I chose to do so this week, since the *parsha* involves an obvious question as to whether *Rivkah* and *Yaakov* were permitted to deceive *Yitzchok* about the *brochos*.

In *parshas Behar*, the Torah teaches, *Lo sonu ish es amiso* (Vayikra 25:17). The word *sonu* has the same root as the word *onaah*, the name by which we call this mitzvah. The word *onaah* is difficult to translate into English, but for the purposes of our article, I will use the word *overcharging*, although, as we will soon see, *onaah* also includes situations of underpayment or of misrepresentation. The purpose of this article is to present the basic principles; specific questions should be referred to your own *rav* or *dayan*. Just as everyone must have an ongoing relationship with a *rav* for *psak* and *hadracha*, one must also have an ongoing relationship with a *dayan* who can answer the myriad *Choshen Mishpat* questions that come up daily.

Three types of *onaah*

There are three types of *overcharging* that are included in the prohibition of *onaah*, all of which involve taking unfair advantage:

- (1) *Fraud* – when the item being sold contains a significant flaw that the seller conceals or otherwise misrepresents.
- (2) *Overpricing* – when one party to the transaction is unaware of the market value of the item.
- (3) *No recourse* – when someone is aware that he is being overcharged, but he has no recourse, because of the circumstances.

I will now explain a bit more about each of these types of *onaah*.

(1) *Fraud*

It is prohibited to hide a defect or to misrepresent an item. For example, the *Mishnah* (*Bava Metzia* 60a) and the *Gemara* (*ibid.* 60b) prohibit selling watered-down products, or painting something to hide a flaw or to make it look newer than it is (*Shulchan Aruch*, *Choshen Mishpat* 228:9). One may not add inferior material to a quality product when the purchaser will see only the quality product (*Bava Metzia* 59b-60a; *Shulchan Aruch*, *Choshen Mishpat* 228:10, 11).

Onaah is prohibited not only in sales, but also in other transactions, such as hiring people or contracting work (*Shulchan Aruch*, *Choshen Mishpat* 227:35, 36, 16).

Shidduchin

Holding back significant medical, emotional or spiritual issues that could affect a shidduch is also prohibited because of onaaah. To quote the words of the Sefer Chassidim (#507): "When arranging matches for your children or other family members, do not hide from the other party medical issues that would have been reason for them to reject the shidduch, lest they afterwards choose to annul the marriage. Similarly, you should tell them about deficiencies in halachic observance significant enough that the other party would have rejected the marriage."

By the way, there is no halachic requirement to reveal detrimental information to a shadchan, and one is not required to inform the other side before the couple meets. However, it must be told sometime before the shidduch is finalized. This particular topic is more detailed than we can discuss in this article. Indeed, I devoted a different article to this topic, entitled Can I Keep my Skeletons in the Closet, which is available on my website, RabbiKaganoff.com. There are also other articles on the website that touch on this broad topic, which can be found with the search word shidduch.

Insider trading

Insider trading, meaning buying or selling a commodity or security on the basis of information that is not available to the general public, is now a heavily punished felony in the United States, but was once legal there and is still legal in many countries of the world. Halacha prohibits all forms of insider trading because of onaaah, since the insider is taking advantage of the other party.

(2) Overpricing

A second type of onaaah is when there is no flaw or other problem with the quality of the item being transacted, but the price paid is greater than the item's market value. Overcharging of this nature is also prohibited because of onaaah.

Over a sixth

When the price, or range of price, of an item can be established, if an item was sold at more than one sixth over the market price, the aggrieved party has a right to return the item for a full refund (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 227:4.) For example, the stores that stock this item sell it for up to \$600, and the seller charged the purchaser over \$700. In this instance, according to halacha, the purchaser can return the item and get his money back. (There are detailed halachos that govern how much time he has to make this claim.)

One can demand return compensation only when the party did not use the item once he realized that he had been overcharged.

Another case where the item cannot be returned: The aggrieved party realized that he was overcharged, but decided to keep the item anyway. In the interim, the price of the item dropped such that he can now get a much better deal. Since his reason to back out on the deal is not because of the original overcharge, he may not invalidate the original sale (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 227:9).

It is interesting to note that there are authorities who rule that even the aggrieving party can withdraw from the deal when the price was so much off mark. This is because they contend that someone does not agree to a transaction if he knows that the price was so disproportionate to the item's value (Rema, Choshen Mishpat 227:4.)

One sixth

The halacha is that if the overcharge was by exactly one sixth, the deal holds, but the aggrieved party is entitled to be refunded the overcharge sum (one sixth of what he paid). Thus, if the item was worth \$600 and it was sold for \$700, the purchaser is entitled to receive \$100 back.

Less than a sixth

If the overcharge was less than a sixth, which means that the price was clearly too high but less than a sixth over the market value, the deal is valid, and the aggrieved party is not entitled to any compensation. Thus, if the item was worth \$600 and it was sold for \$690, the deal remains as is.

Is it permitted?

At this stage, we can address one of our opening questions: "Am I permitted to charge a little bit above the market price for an item?" Granted that the deal will be valid if someone did this, is one permitted to do so lechatchilah?

Indeed, this is an issue that is disputed by the halachic authorities (Tur, Choshen Mishpat 227, quoting Rosh). The Tur explains that min haTorah, overcharging is prohibited if one is aware that this is the case, but Chazal were lenient, because it is difficult for anyone to be this accurate. However, many prominent authorities are of the opinion that it is prohibited to overcharge intentionally, even by a very small amount (Aruch Hashulchan, Choshen Mishpat 227:2).

The Tur concludes that a yarei shamayim, a G-d fearing person, should try to act strictly regarding this law.

The Shulchan Aruch rules that it is uncertain whether it is permitted to overcharge by less than a sixth (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 227:6). Some major authorities conclude that a yarei shamayim should return the difference, even in a case where it amounted to less than a sixth (Sma 227:14).

Furthermore, when the price on a specific item is very exact, because of government regulations or market conditions, even those authorities who are lenient about overcharging a small amount will agree in such a case that it is

prohibited to charge any more than the accepted market price (Aruch Hashulchan, Choshen Mishpat 227:3).

Cash fast

Here is a situation in which someone cannot demand return compensation, even though he sold the item at way below its value: A seller needed to raise cash quickly and therefore sold items without checking their proper value. He cannot request his money back by claiming that he was underpaid, because it is clear that, at the time he sold them, he was interested in selling for whatever cash he could get (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 227:9).

All items?

The Mishnah (Bava Metzia 56b) quotes a dispute between tana'im whether the laws of overcharging by more than a sixth apply to items such as sifrei Torah, animals and precious stones. The tanna kamma contends that the laws of onaaah apply, including the right to have the item returned, whereas Rabbi Yehudah holds that these laws do not apply to such items. In the case of sifrei Torah, this is because the pricing is difficult to determine, and in the cases of animals and precious stones, because the purchaser may have a special need for this specific animal or stone which makes it worth more to him than the usual market price. For example, this animal has the same strength as an animal the purchaser already owns, making it possible to pair them together in work, or the stone matches well to the specific color and size he is using for a piece of jewelry (Bava Metzia 58b).

Wartime

Although most tana'im disagree, the Gemara (Bava Metzia 58b) adds that Rabbi Yehudah ben Beseira ruled that there is no onaaah for selling horses, shields or swords during wartime, because your life might depend on it. I presume that this means that during a war, the value of these items far exceeds their normal market price, and that, therefore, even an inflated price is not considered overcharging. The halacha does not follow the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda ben Beseira. Therefore, should someone be overcharged for the purchase of these materials during wartime, he is not required to pay more than the accepted market price.

Overcharged esrog

At this point, we are in a position to examine our opening question: "My esrog dealer charged me \$150 for an esrog. My brother-in-law, who knows the business, told me that he overcharged me, and the esrog is not worth more than \$35. Can I get my money back?"

This question is discussed in Shu"t Beis Yitzchak (Orach Chayim 108:4). He explains that the laws of invalidating a transaction because of an overcharge do not apply to an esrog purchased for use on Sukkos, unless the esrog was not kosher. His reason is that an individual has all sorts of reasons why he wants to purchase a specific esrog, and that, therefore, high-end esrogim do not have a definitive price. We could compare this to someone who purchases a painting at auction, and an art expert contends that the purchaser overpaid. The opinion of the expert does not allow the buyer to invalidate his acquisition.

Expert error

At this point, let us return to one of our opening questions: "I purchased a rare coin from a dealer, and he clearly undercharged me. Am I required to tell him about it?"

An expert can also be overcharged or underpaid (Mishnah, Bava Metzia 51a; Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 227:14). Therefore, the purchaser is required to point this out to the dealer.

Furthermore, if you know that the price of an item has gone up, but the seller is unaware of this, you are required to let him know (Aruch Hashulchan, Choshen Mishpat 227:1).

Mistaken overcharging

A person who overcharged someone in error is required to bring it to his attention. All the halachos mentioned above of overcharging apply, even if it was unintentional (Pischei Choshen 4:10:fn #1).

Real estate

The Mishnah (Bava Metzia 56a) states that there is no onaaah regarding real estate. This means that the concept of a deal being invalidated when the price is more than a sixth overpriced does not relate to land. Nevertheless, it is prohibited to deceive someone in matters germane to property, such as by withholding information that affects the value of the property or its utility (Sma 227:51, quoting Maharshal; Pischei Teshuvah 227:21, quoting Ramban and Sefer Hachinuch).

Title search

If someone sells a property based on his assumption that proper ownership has been established, which is later legally challenged, the purchaser has a claim to get his money back (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 226:5).

Legal tender

At this point, let us examine another of our opening questions: "I noticed that someone tried to scrape off some of the metal on a coin that I have. May I use it?"

In earlier days, a coin's value was usually determined by its weight and purity. In today's world, the value of a coin or other currency is determined predominantly by the market forces germane to that country's currency, but not by the quality of the individual coin, unless it is damaged to the point that it will no longer be

accepted in the marketplace. Therefore, today, it is acceptable to use a damaged coin or bill that the average merchant or the bank will accept (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 226:6). One is even lechatchilah permitted to give someone a damaged coin or bill and hoard the nice-looking ones for himself, since it is not harming the other party in any way (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 227:6 and Sma).

Counterfeit money

However, this is true only when the bill or the coin is damaged, but is still legitimate and legal currency. It is forbidden to use counterfeit money, even if you ended up with it in error. Once you know that the currency you are holding is counterfeit, it is not only forbidden to use it, you are required to destroy it (Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 227:18). It would seem to me that it is permitted to turn the counterfeit item over to the authorities for investigation and enforcement.

Calculated profit

According to what we have said until now, a person is obligated to know the market value of a product that he is selling and he will violate onah if he sells it at a price that is clearly significantly above the market price. This means that one must constantly be aware of the fluctuations in market price of all items he is selling. Is there any way one can avoid having to be constantly aware of the market values of the items he is selling?

Yes, there is. It is permitted, halachically, to do the following: A seller may tell the purchaser, "This is the cost at which I acquired this item, and I add this percentage for my profit margin. Therefore, I arrive at the following price" (Bava Metzia 51b as explained by Rambam, Hilchos Mechirah 13:5; Shulchan Aruch, Choshen Mishpat 227:27).

(3) No recourse

Previously, I mentioned that there is a type of onah in which a person is aware that he is being overcharged, but that circumstances force him to pay more than he should for the item. There are several examples of this. One is when a business or cartel creates a monopoly and then raises prices because they control the market. Since the halachos germane to this situation are somewhat complicated, I will leave this topic for a different time.

A second situation is when someone has a serious need for a product now – and the seller takes unfair advantage, insisting on a price that is well beyond what the item should fetch. For example, someone needs a medicine and can find it only at a certain place, which decides to increase the price tenfold, simply to gain huge, unfair profit. This is forbidden.

Was the seller wrong?

I once purchased a four volume reprint of an old, very hard-to-read edition of a relatively rare sefer. Subsequently, I discovered that the sefer had been reprinted in a beautiful format, a fact which the bookdealer must surely have known. Had I known that the new edition existed, no doubt that I would have purchased it instead. I will leave my readers with the following question: Was the bookdealer permitted to sell me the old edition without telling me that a new one exists? Does this qualify, halachically, as insider trading or deception, and is it therefore prohibited as onah?

Conclusion:

The Gemara tells us that the great tanna Rabbi Yehoshua, the rebbe of Rabbi Akiva, was asked: "What is the best means to become wealthy?" Rabbi Yehoshua advised that, aside from being very careful in one's business dealings, the most important factor is to daven to He Who owns all wealth (Niddah 70b). A Jew must realize that Hashem's Torah and His awareness and supervision of our fate is all-encompassing. Making this realization an integral part of our thinking is the true benchmark of how His kedusha influences our lives.

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Toldot

For the week ending 10 November 2018 / 2 Kislev 5779

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonofthemoon.com

Insights

Belief and Disbelief

"The voice is the voice of Yaakov..." (27:22)

In his youth, the Vilna Gaon studied together with a group of boys. Many years later after the Vilna Gaon was famous far and wide, one member of that group met up with his old friend and asked him how he had managed to become so great in learning. The Vilna Gaon replied, "Do you remember the gemara in Chagiga where Hillel says: You cannot compare someone who reviews his learning one hundred times to one who reviews his learning one hundred and one times?" "Yes," replied the friend. Said the Vilna Gaon, "Did you really believe that gemara without any iota of doubt?" "Of course," the other replied. "I didn't" replied the Vilna Gaon, "and so I checked it out for myself."

"The voice is the voice of Yaakov..."

Inspirational stories about great Rabbis can very often have the reverse effect. It's easy to become uninspired by the enormous and seemingly unbridgeable gap between our own efforts and the stories of self-sacrifice and extraordinary commitment.

My Rebbe once told me of a conversation that he had with a young man, who, at a relatively young age had mastered the Mishna Berura. My Rebbe asked him how he had managed such a feat. He replied, "Well, every day since I was quite young I made a set period of time for Torah study lasting 45 minutes every day — without fail — learning the Mishna Berura." "That doesn't sound so hard" said my Rebbe. "No, it wasn't. But I did it."

In life, the difference between failure and success is often the difference between not opening the book and opening it. Something quite magical happens if you can go beyond your comfort zone. One hundred and one is not one more time than one hundred. It's an entirely different world.

Once there was a competition to climb the stairs of the tallest building in the world — all 163 floors — without stopping. Most of the contestants gave up around the 90th floor, but one determined climber wouldn't quit. On and on he pushed: 120, 130, 140, 145 and 146. With nothing but will power he pulled himself to the 147th floor. He crawled up to the 148th. He lay sprawled on the floor listening to the wind howling around the heights. A little voice inside him wouldn't let him rest. He clawed his way on. Each step felt like a huge platform. Just one more... He reached the 149th floor and collapsed. He had failed. He just couldn't go on.

Then he saw a sign in front of him. It said, "If you got this far, you can take the elevator."

When we reach up to G-d with all our power, He reaches down to us and sends the elevator.

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OU Torah

Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Ask a Busy Person

I'm fairly certain that you have heard this saying before: "If you want something done, ask a busy person to do it." It is a popular saying and is attributed to all sorts of "wise people," ranging from Benjamin Franklin to Lucille Ball. Whatever its original source, I'm convinced that there is a great measure of truth to it.

Busy people are generally responsible and reliable people. It, therefore, makes good sense to entrust the tasks one wishes to accomplish to such individuals.

But I think it goes deeper than that. I think that busy people are always looking for new challenges, interesting options, and opportunities to use their intelligence and creativity, and that is what makes them so valuable.

There are all sorts of reasons why some individuals are not busy. Some simply lack opportunity. Others have been found to be incompetent and, therefore, are not busy.

But such individuals are not "opposites" of the busy person. The busy person's "opposite" is the individual who shirks new tasks, who actively avoids new assignments, who is reluctant to risk novelty and uncertainty.

Where in the Torah can we find mention of archetypes, or models, of the busy person and of the one who is determined not to be busy? I like to suggest that we find such archetypes in the persons of this week's Torah portion, Parshat Toldot (Genesis 25:19-28:9). I refer to Jacob and Esau, and specifically to the following passages:

Jacob was cooking a lentil stew when Esau came in from the field, exhausted.

Esau said to Jacob, "Pour some of this red stuff down my throat because I'm exhausted!" ...

Jacob said, "Sell me your birthright (the privilege of performing the sacrificial services carried out by the firstborn)."

Esau replied, "I am going to die, so why do I need this birthright?" ...

He sold his birthright to Jacob.

Jacob gave bread and lentil stew to Esau, who ate and drank, and got up and left.

Esau despised the birthright.

(Genesis 25:29-34, adapted from the expanded translation of Rabbi Chaim Miller)

At this point, you might find yourself asking about the connection between Jacob and Esau in this narrative and the dichotomy I've drawn between the busy man and the man who shirks busyness. To address your very legitimate question, allow me to introduce you to a very interesting Torah scholar and his unique take on the personalities of Jacob and Esau.

I refer to a man whom I had heard about many years ago from my childhood tutor, Rabbi Jacob Abramczyk. In his youth, Rabbi Abramczyk was a student at the Yeshiva of Novardik in pre-Holocaust Lithuania. He survived the Holocaust, but most of his fellow students did not. He often spoke to me of one of those fellow students, a man named Rabbi Yitzchak Valdshain.

I recently came across a book entitled *Torat Yitzchak*, which contains a biography of Rabbi Valdshain, along with a few of the Torah essays which he had published in his lifetime. One of those essays is devoted to this week's parsha. It is entitled, "The Devout Person Seeks Obligations." That title intrigued me, and his opening paragraphs intrigued me all the more.

He distinguishes between two types of religious personalities. One he calls the "Eagle". Just as the Eagle flies ever upward toward the sun, so does the Eagle-personality seek every opportunity to get closer to the Almighty's service. He seeks to learn about religious obligations of which he was previously ignorant, and he seeks to become involved in new religious roles.

The other religious personality type he terms the "Bat," the person who not only does not fly toward the sun but flies in the opposite direction, away from the sun's rays, toward the darkness in which he is most comfortable. This person is satisfied with the religious obligations that are familiar to him and wants to remain oblivious to the other duties that might be out there. He is comfortable in his current role and does not wish to even hear of new possibilities, of new religious roles.

Rabbi Valdshain reminds us of a passage in the Talmud that illustrates these two opposite tendencies. It reads:

The later generations are different from the earlier ones. The earlier ones would bring their newly harvested crops through the wide front doors of their homes and courtyards, so that they could proudly perform the obligation to tithe their crops. Later generations brought their crops through rooftops, alleyways, and side entrances in order to exempt those crops from tithes. (Talmud Bavli, Berachot 35b, loosely translated.)

The earlier generations were "Eagles," flying upward toward the sun and performing the good deeds far beyond the minimal standards. Later generations deteriorated to the level of "Bats," doing what they could to evade, albeit within the letter of the law, unwanted obligations.

Rabbi Valdshain elaborates upon the differences between the two personalities. As I understand it, his "Eagle" is like our busy man, who is ever alert to new responsibilities, who rises to every new occasion, and who constantly broadens the sphere of his experience.

Of course, Rabbi Valdshain is concerned with the man who is busy with religious affairs, but from a psychological perspective, his analysis can easily be applied to any area of human activity.

Rabbi Valdshain's "Bat" is not a bad person. He is a complacent person. One might even say that he is a self-satisfied person.

Taking the "Eagle/Bat" metaphor a bit further, one can say that the Eagle, because he is open to the sun's radiance, is open to personal growth. The Bat, however, hides from the sun and so denies himself personal growth opportunities.

For Rabbi Valdshain, this is the key difference between the Jacob and Esau. Jacob actively seeks to "purchase" the role of the firstborn. He greatly desires the role of sacrificial service, the challenges of leadership, the expansion of his spirituality, and the opportunities for reaching out to others.

Esau, on the other hand, eschews new responsibilities and new obligations. He is satisfied with lentil stew, with the "red stuff," with his basic physical needs. Sacrificial service, the pressures of leadership, challenging spiritual opportunities—these are all mere burdens to him. They are to be "despised."

And so, "he eats and he drinks and he gets up and he leaves."

These two personality types, the "Eagle" and the "Bat," reside side by side within each of us. There are occasions when we fly upwards to the sun and become responsible busy people. There are also, regrettably, moments when we withdraw to the dark caverns of our souls, avoid all sorts of possibilities, and forfeit growth opportunities.

Rabbi Valdshain, may his memory be blessed, urges us to be aware of these tendencies within us all. He implores us to suppress our inner "Bat" and permit our inner "Eagle" to soar.

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Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message

NJOP stands in solidarity with the Squirrel Hill community in Pittsburgh and expresses its profound condolences to the members and families of the Tree of Life Congregation who lost their lives in the horrific Shabbat attack.

It is our hope that the outpouring of love and support from the broader Jewish community and from people of good will across the length and breadth of America, may serve as some small comfort as the community mourns the loss of precious lives and face the pain and suffering experienced by others at the synagogue. Profound thanks to the members of the Pittsburgh Police Department who risked life and limb to save other potential victims from death and harm. May God grant comfort to the families who lost loved ones and a Refuah Shelayma, a speedy and full recovery, to all those who were injured in this terrible attack.

"The Dangers of Assimilation"

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

In this week's parasha, parashat Toledot, more of the personality of the highly "enigmatic" patriarch, Isaac, emerges.

Until now, much of Isaac's life has been one of extraordinary challenge. Early in his life he was caught in the crossfire of the jealousies between his mother, Sarah, and her handmaiden, Hagar. It could also be that he was subjected to abuse (מִצָּחֶק, M'tza'chek) by his older brother Ishmael (Genesis 21:9). As a young man, his father nearly sacrificed him.

Now, as a young married person, when faced with famine in the land of Israel, Isaac does what his father Abraham before him had done. Isaac goes down to Gerar, where he and his wife, Rebecca, are subjected to extreme scrutiny by the Philistine king, Abimelech.

After an uncomfortable encounter with Abimelech, Isaac settles in Gerar, where he meets unprecedented success as a farmer. His success enables him to acquire flocks and herds and many enterprises, raising the envy of the Philistines.

As a result of the resentment, all the wells that Abraham's servants had dug were stopped up by the local Philistines and filled with earth. Eventually, Abimelech advises Isaac (Genesis 26:16): לָךְ מֵעַתָּה, כִּי עַצְמָתִי, "Go away from us, for you have become much mightier than we." The commentaries interpret this to mean that Abimelech was saying that "You [Isaac] have become prosperous at our expense."

Isaac moves to the valley of Gerar. There he digs new wells, calling them by the same names that his father, Abraham, had called them. But the herdsmen of Gerar are not happy, and claim that the water is theirs. Isaac keeps moving further away from the local people, eventually relocating in Rehovot, where his workers dig a new well that was not quarreled over.

When King Abimelech sees the unusual success of Isaac, whom he had earlier exiled from Gerar, he travels with Phicol, his general, to Isaac, to make a peace treaty with him in Beer-Sheba—ostensibly assuring the security of Isaac and his family. Scripture attests to this fact when it states (Genesis 26:31): וַיִּשְׁכְּבוּ בַבֶּקֶר, וַיִּשְׁבְּעוּ אִישׁ לְאָחִיו, וַיִּשְׁלָחֵם יָצֵאתָ, וַיָּלְכוּ, "They awoke early in the morning and swore to one another; then Isaac saw them off, and they departed from him in peace.

The contemporary Bible commentator, Rabbi Mordechai HaCohen, asks the question: Why did Isaac move away from Abimelech just when conditions were favorable for staying, and after concluding a security

covenant with the Philistine king? Rabbi HaCohen suggests that when Isaac was subject to harassment, he felt that he was in no danger of adopting the Philistinian ways and customs. But, now that he was secure and peace had come, he said to himself: "Who knows whether I can preserve my spiritual identity?"

Assimilation and intermarriage have long been a fixture of Jewish life. Tragically, millions of Jews have been killed by sword and other nefarious methods throughout the millennia. However, knowledgeable estimates suggest that many more Jews were lost due to assimilation and intermarriage than to persecution and murder. The well-known estimate of famed historian Paul Johnson, is that Jews constituted about 10% of the population of the Roman Empire in the time of Augustus, about eight million souls. According to natural birth rates, notwithstanding the pogroms and the murders, Jews today should number in the hundreds of millions, but do not, because of assimilation.

It is terribly painful to acknowledge the tragic truth that when Jews are persecuted, there are fewer losses. It is generally in the more open and enlightened societies that countless numbers of Jews are lost. The sword and the ghettos, ironically, kept Jewish life intact, with the exception of eras of mass murder.

History records that, between the years 1812 and 1848, fully 85% of the Jewish community of Berlin formally underwent conversion to Christianity. Some scholars even suggest that had Hitler allowed the Jews of Germany to live in peace, they would have disappeared within a generation or two. That's how profoundly assimilated they were.

With the intermarriage rates of non-Orthodox Jews in the United States today above 70%, we see that Jews are being lost not because they are hated. To the contrary, they are loved, and non-Jews are often delighted to have Jewish sons and daughters-in-law.

This is the challenge that we face today. If there would be peace between Israel and the Arabs, there will be significant assimilation. Even now, at a time of great enmity, Jewish-Moslem marriages, while rare, are not uncommon.

In most instances, it is more likely that those who live in tight-knit and highly-sheltered religious Jewish communities, even in large metropolitan areas, will be able to repel the tide of assimilation that prevails throughout the world today. But, even in those highly-sheltered communities, the rates of assimilation are climbing significantly.

When peace was made between him and the king of Gerar, Isaac realized that it was time to move away, to distance himself, so that he could maintain his strong Jewish identity and live a full Jewish life with intensity and passion. Contemporary Jews, may need to do the same to ensure their own continuity.

May you be blessed.

Drasha - Parshas Toldos - Butter Battles

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

This week the Torah tells us of the great dichotomy of character between Yaakov and his older brother Esav. Yaakov sat and studied while Esav hunted. Though it is difficult to understand the roots of this great divide, their parents' reaction to this diversity is even more confusing. The Torah tells us that "Yitzchak loved Esav for there was game in his mouth, and Rivka loved Yaakov." (Genesis 25:28)

The variance in their opinions manifested itself in the fight over the blessings. Yitzchak intended that Esav receive his blessings for worldly goods, intending to save the spiritual ones for Yaakov. Rivka pushed her son Yaakov to attain the blessings for the worldly goods, too.

What was the fundamental difference between Yitzchak's and Rivka's view of their children? Why was there such a diverse notion as to who should inherit the wealth of this world? How is it possible that Yitzchak, who epitomized the very essence of spirituality, favored Esav, a man steeped in worldly desires?

Vice President Al Gore tells a story about outgoing Senator Bill Bradley. Senator Bradley once attended a dinner at which he was a guest speaker. The waiter set down a side dish of potatoes, and placed a pat of butter upon them. The Senator asked for an extra portion of butter.

"I'm sorry sir," the very unyielding server replied tersely, "one pat per guest."

With a combined expression of shock, scorn, and disbelief, Senator Bradley looked up at the formal steward. "Excuse me," he said. "Do you know who I am? I am New Jersey Senator Bill Bradley." The Senator cleared his throat. "I am a Rhodes scholar and a former NBA star. I currently serve on the International Trade and Long-Term Growth Committee, and the Debt and Deficit Reduction Committee, and I am in charge of Taxation and IRS Oversight. And I'd like another pat of butter on my potatoes."

The waiter looked down at the Senator.

"Do you know who I am?" he asked.

"I am the one in charge of the butter."

Yitzchok understood the great contrariety between his children. However, he felt that Esav, the hunter-child, understood the mundane world much better. So it was only fitting that Esav be gifted with the blessings of a mundane world. Esav would then supplement Yaakov's needs, and a true symbiosis would emerge. Rivka, on the other hand, was pragmatic. She felt that putting Esav in charge of the material world would lead to selfish hoarding that would hardly give Yaakov a portion.

She understood that while Yaakov's sustenance was basically from spirituality, he still needed a little butter to survive. And she could not rely on Esav controlling the butter: she knew the personality all too well. There would be no parity or sharing. Esav would take it all.

Everybody has a job, whether it be spiritual or menial, and each job must be executed with a sense of responsibility and mission. The argument between Rivka and Yitzchak was complex, but it was simple too. Esav may be more astute in churning the butter; however, will he make sure to give Yaakov his fair share? Rivka knew that the world would be a better place if we all shared our respective portions. But she wouldn't count on it.

Good Shabbos

The author is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore.

Dedicated by Mr. & Mrs. Arthur Luxenburg in memory of Jesse Aronson

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Rav Yissocher Frand - Parshas Toldos

Sometimes It Pays to Come from a Corrupt Environment

Parshas Toldos always presents a big challenge to us because of the fact that Yaakov Avinu engaged in what can best be called "trickery" to obtain his father's brachos [blessings]. It is puzzling that logically speaking, the brachos which Yaakov received and which Yitzchak initially intended to give to Eisav in fact seem more appropriate for Eisav than for Yaakov.

The brachos are all about gashmiyus [material matters]: "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]. The brachos granted Yaakov dominion over his enemies, and so forth. We must remember that Yaakov was "a wholesome man, abiding in tents" [Bereshis 25:27]. He was the quintessential yeshiva bochur. All he needed was a Gemara and a shtender and that's it!

What is Yaakov Avinu going to do with all this gashmiyus? He does not need it! All he is looking for is "bread to eat and clothes to wear" [Bereshis 28:20]. So it appears that Yitzchak, in fact, had it right in wanting to give the brachos of materialism to Eisav and not to Yaakov.

The sefer Chikrei Lev (Rav Leibel Hyman) suggests a very interesting approach to this observation. He writes that Yitzchak knew that Eisav was a very earthly person. He also knew that his son Yaakov was entirely spiritual. However, Yitzchak had imagined that Eisav and Yaakov should have a partnership, similar to the classic Yissacher and Zevulun operating arrangement. In other words, Yaakov would sit in the Beis Medrash and be the spiritual personality of the family. Eisav – who was into materialism and matters of this world – would be the one who would provide for and sustain the spiritual endeavors of his brother.

Chazal say that Eisav wanted to impress upon his father that he was a very pious individual. Therefore, Eisav inquired of Yitzchak, "How does

one take tithe from salt?" This is a real "frume shaylah" [pious inquiry]! However, out of all the "frume shaylahs" there are in the world, why did he pick this particular question? Why didn't he ask a shaylah about tying his shoelaces or something like that?

The answer is that Eisav wanted to show his father how much charity he gave! Eisav knew that Yitzchak's plan was for him to support Yaakov. Therefore, Eisav tried to impress Yitzchak by showing him how meticulous he was in the area of giving charity and tithing his income.

However, the problem was that Eisav was not capable of being Yaakov's financial backer. Eisav was not capable of parting with his money. He was not capable of following through on a partnership between "This World" and the "Next World." Rivka did perceive Eisav's true nature and that was the point of difference between Yitzchak and Rivka regarding which son should be given the blessing of materialism. Yitzchak saw this as a Yissocher-Zevulun arrangement. Rivka realized that "this is never going to happen" and therefore somehow or another, Yaakov must receive the brachos.

The Chikrei Lev then cites a Medrash which says that whatever Hashem created in this world has a purpose. Dovid HaMelech said to the Almighty, "Hashem, everything you created in this world is good – except for insanity." In other words, Dovid felt that everything the Almighty created in the world had a legitimate purpose. However, he could not comprehend what could possibly be the purpose of a person being mentally deranged. What tachlis does the world have from a person who is literally crazy?

The Medrash continues, "The Master of the Universe said to Dovid – 'Dovid, you question the validity of insanity? By your life, you will need it.'" Indeed, there came a time when Dovid was running away from Shaul, and he was temporarily arrested by the soldiers of Achish, King of Gas. Dovid, who rightly anticipated he was in great danger that the Plishti [Philistine] king would exact revenge for his having killed Goliath, feigned insanity. When Achish saw the apparently insane individual brought before him, he concluded it could not possibly be the famous Jewish warrior, and let him go free. [Shmuel I 23:11-16]

Had this concept of insanity not existed – that some people are literally out of their mind – the king would not have known what to do with this drooling individual who was brought before him. Since there are crazy people in the world, Dovid was able to use this fact to disguise his true identity.

The point of the Medrash is that there is in fact no item or phenomenon or character trait created in this world that does not have some purpose or function in the Divine Plan.

If so, now we can understand something else: Who was Rivka, Yitzchak's wife? She was the daughter of Besuel and the sister of Lavan. The Medrash comments, "Her father was a cheater; her brother was a cheater. The people of her native town were all cheaters. Yet this righteous girl emerged from all of them. She was like a rose amidst the thorns." Rivka broke the mold.

Why did the Ribono shel Olam deem that the wife of Yitzchak needed to be a person who came from such a background – surrounded from birth by a bunch of crooks and thieves? The answer is that the One who knows what is going to happen in the future needed a person like Rivka for this very moment. When Yitzchak is about to give the Brachos to Eisav, which would affect the entire future of the Jewish people, something had to be done to stop him. If his wife had been the type of person who never witnessed a crooked transaction her entire life, she would have no way to intervene and preempt her husband's intentions.

Fortunately, Rivka knew a thing or two about deception. "I remember my father; I remember my brother; I remember all the townspeople of Aram Naharaim. I know how to handle the situation!" She reached into the bag of tricks she learned in her father's house. And that is how she rescued the brachos for Yaakov.

Hashem knew exactly what was going to happen. This also explains why Yitzchak had to become blind. If he was not blind, this deception could have never happened.

Rivka never used her knowledge of deception before and she never used it again. However, there is a place and a time for everything. Just like

Dovid had to learn the lesson that there is a place and time for meshugaim [crazy people] in the world, and we dare not doubt the Grand Plan of the Ribono shel Olam, so too when it came to Yitzchak's spouse – Hashem prepared for him a match that despite her apparently "inferior spiritual lineage" – is exactly who he needed as his ezer k'negdo [helpmate in life].

Rivka saw beyond her husband's "Grand Plan" that Eisav and Yaakov would form a "Yissocher-Zevulun" partnership. She knew that "it's not going to happen." She saw through the ruse of Eisav's pious questioning of his father regarding the tithing of salt. She knew that Yaakov, despite his totally spiritual essence, needed these material brachos – and she knew how to get them for him!

Rav Hutner once commented – every attribute is supposed to have a purpose. However, what if a person is "krum" (a Yiddish word meaning the opposite of straight)? What is the purpose of such a person – who simply cannot think straight? There is a concept of possessing "sechel haYashar" [a straight thinker]. That is a quality we can appreciate. But why did the Ribono shel Olam create people whose thought process is invariably crooked?

Rav Hutner says that this quality comes in handy in implementing the principle "Give every person the benefit of the doubt" (hevi dan es kol ha'adam l'kaf zechus) [Avos 1:6]. We look at a situation and we conclude, based on the evidence, that so-and-so is definitely guilty. Logically, we need to come to the conclusion that he is not innocent! So what do we need to do – we need to think "krum" [illogically] in order to give him "the benefit of the doubt." So, even "krumkeit" has a place in this world, in keeping with the idea that indeed there is a time and place for everything.

Basically, this is a piece of wisdom enunciated by Shlomo [Kohes Chapter 3]. There is a time for war and a time for peace, and so forth. There is a place for an insane person. There is even a place for deception and trickery. There is even a time to think crooked – in order to give a person the benefit of the doubt.

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Rabbi Herschel Shachter

The Chazir is Not Kosher

The Torah tells us that a kosher animal is one which has split hooves and chews its cud; pigs have split hooves, but because they do not chew their cud, are not kosher. The Rabbis of the Medrash tell a parable of a pig stretching out a leap in order to display its split hooves, and attempt to fool everyone into believing that it is kosher.

Esav, Yaakov's twin, claimed to follow the same tradition as Yaakov. When Yaakov left to Padan Aram to marry a girl from the family, Esav followed suit and also married a girl "from the family," but did not divorce his non-Jewish wives. This act of marrying a "girl from the family" was solely in order appear as though he was following in the footsteps of Jewish tradition.

The so called "Judeo-Christian" tradition is merely a facade. Despite the fact that the two brothers were twins, and had a lot in common biologically, they had very little in common in terms of lifestyle. There is an often-quoted medrash which states, "Why is the pig called a 'chazir'? Because some day in the future God will give it back ("le'hachziro") to the Jewish people." The Rishonim ask how this can be. The Rambam postulates, as one of the thirteen principles of our faith, that the laws of the Torah will never change. Can it be that some day it will be permissible for us to eat Pork?

Some of the Rishonim explained that "the return of the pig does not refer to eating pork, but rather to the restoration of the Jewish government in place of the Christian one." The "pig" is the faker who makes believe that he is kosher by showing his split hooves, just as Christians claim that theirs is a twin-religion with ours, and just as Esav was a twin brother of Yaakov.

The prophet Malachi points out in the haftorah that the fact that they were twins has nothing other than biological significance: "I love Yaakov, while I have rejected Esav, and I disdain him." Throughout the generations the Jewish people have adopted a dual position vis-a-vis the Christians and mankind. Namely, the position of Avraham Avinu (in the beginning of Chayei Sara): we exist as both strangers and citizens with respect to the rest of mankind. Regarding fighting crime, terror, disease, poverty, improving the economy, and delving into the science of nature, we are equal partners, and all work together. But, with respect to the purpose of our lives, and lifestyle - the Jewish people feel "as strangers", and share nothing in common with anyone else. We are "the nation that lives alone" (parshas Balak), and will always remain so. The Jews live alone, die alone, and are buried alone. When Ruth converted and joined the Jewish people, she said to her mother-in-law Naomi, "Where you go I will go; where you stay, I will stay; the way you will die, I will die; and there too will I be buried."

After living for many years in peace and harmony in Eretz Canaan, after the passing of Sara, Avraham Avinu insists on buying her a separate burial plot. The Jew lives differently, dies differently, and is even buried differently to emphasize this point. We share biological similarities with others, and work together with others on many different projects for the purpose of improving man's position here; but we do not share their weltanschauung. "Asher bochar banu mikol haamim."

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Shema Yisrael Torah Network

Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Toldos

פרשת תולדות תשע"ט

ייתרוצצו הבנים בקרבה

The children agitated within her. (25:22)

The *Maharal* explains that the struggle between Eisav and Yaakov in their embryonic stage was not influenced by their personal proclivities to good and evil, since these inclinations had not manifested prior to their births. Yaakov Avinu and Eisav represented cosmic forces in Creation, Heavenly ordained forces that transcended the normal course of personal development, a phenomenon that predated and existed even before their births. *Chazal* (*Midrash Rabbah* 63:6) teach that Eisav hated Yaakov while they were still in the womb. The *Brisker Rav*, זל, derives from *Chazal* that Eisav's hatred for Yaakov is non-dependent on any specific circumstance, incident or rationale. Even if there is no reason – Eisav still hates. It is a *halachah*, absolute, that Eisav hates Yaakov. True, they argued over who would receive which worlds Yaakov seeking *Olam Habba*, the World to Come; and Eisav placing his stake on *Olam Haze*, This World. These claims were the end result of their hatred for one another – not the source of their animus.

One observation: *Eisav sonei l'Yaakov*; Eisav hates Yaakov. Does Yaakov hate Eisav? I think the term hatred is beneath Yaakov. He does not hate; he ignores. Eisav is a non-entity in Yaakov's world. This alone can motivate Eisav to animus. When someone hates you back, the "fight" becomes exciting. When an individual is ignored, discounted and scorned, it can drive him into insanity and increase his hatred. David *Hamelech* says (*Tehillim* 139:21), *Me'sanecha Hashem esnai*, "Those who hate You, Hashem, I hate them." We hate for Hashem. Personal hatred is below our dignity.

The *Talmud Shabbos* (89) cites the source of anti-Semitism toward the Torah which was given on *Har Sinai*: *She'misham Yardah sinaah l'Olam*, "Because the great *sinaah*, hatred, aimed at the Jew – emanates from Sinai." At *Sinai*, we were told that there is one G-d, Who makes moral demands on all humanity. As a result, the Jewish People to whom Hashem spoke became the ipso facto conscience of morality for the world. Thus, we are hated by those who seek to "liberate" the world from the shackles of moral discipline. We are to be a light unto the nations, the chosen people, the exact opposite of a world that does not want to be told what to do and how to live; a world that would much rather live in darkness than to be told to follow the light. The Torah was

given to us at *Sinai* – the Revelation was a message to all mankind to heed morality, to live moral lives. The Jewish People respect the moral imperative of G-d. They represent the truth. The world cannot tolerate such blatant truth – especially when somewhere deep down in the inner recesses of its G-dless soul, it is acutely aware of the essential truth of morality. The greater the Jewish presence, the greater the hatred.

Does this mean that there is a rationale to anti-Semitism? Sometimes, anti-Semitism means the hatred of the Jews, and sometimes it means *Eisav soneh l'Yaakov*, *Eisav's* hatred for Yaakov which heralds back to their embryonic state, when rationale did not apply. Eisav does not represent all gentiles. Eisav represents an abnormally evil strain of humanity, as manifested by his descendants, the minions of Edom, Amalek, and whoever has donned the cloak of Amalakean hatred against the Jews. It is irrational, with no benefit derived by Amalek. It is pure, unmitigated, relentless hatred for the sake of hatred. Nothing is to be gained by it. How do we respond to the hatred of Eisav/Amalek?

We follow our Patriarch's lead. Yaakov Avinu gravitated to the *bais hamedrash*, which was his only refuge from Eisav. A hatred so intense, so irrational, cannot be overcome by changing our stripes and assimilating. That might work for those who hate Torah. When they see that we are like them, they might temporarily accept us. This was what our secular brethren attempted to do in Germany during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and then they exported their heresy to America. It does not work with Amalek, a verity that was unfortunately proven during World War II. The German barbarians were directed to murder anyone with a vestige of Jewish blood, regardless of their not meeting *halachic* standards for a Jewish pedigree. It was *Eisav soneh l'Yaakov*. Concerning that: *Ein lanu l'hishaein elah al Avinu she'ba'Shomayim*; "We have no One upon to rely other than our Father in Heaven."

ויהי עשו איש יודע ציד איש שדה ויעקב איש תם יושב אהלים

And Eisav became one who knows trapping, a man of the field; but Yaakov was a wholesome man, abiding in tents. (25:27)

The Torah's characterization of the differences between Yaakov Avinu and Eisav *ha'rasha* seems minor in contrast to the actual stark differences between the two. Yaakov was holy, righteous, the pillar of Torah and truth, the third leg of the Heavenly chariot. Eisav was the epitome of evil, the archenemy of our people. Yet, the Torah chose to underscore the fact that Eisav was a man of the field, *yoshev batel*, did nothing all day, wasted his time. Yaakov, however, was a wholesome man who spent his day in spiritual ascendance, studying Torah. Apparently, herein lay the difference between the two. The nadir of depravity to which Eisav descended was the direct result of his being *yoshev batel*, wasting his time doing nothing. This led to his downward plunge, to committing one nefarious deed after another until he became Eisav *ha'rasha* – an appellation that lived with him. Yaakov grew spiritually every day, until he earned the distinctions of *amud haTorah*, *amud ha'emes*.

Everything has to begin somewhere. No one becomes a distinguished Torah leader overnight. It takes years of toil in Torah, unrelenting diligence, uncompromising commitment, devotion and love of Torah and *mitzvos*. Likewise, one does not wake up one morning, decide to become a *rasha* – and, suddenly, he is evil. It is a process. First, one is bored, he has nothing to do, lots of free time. He must occupy himself with something, and, apparently, Torah does not fit into his time slot. With nothing constructive to do and no commitment to Torah to protect him, what else should one do? One either ascends the ladder of spirituality or he plummets to the ground.

Horav Eliyahu Baruch Finkel, זל, observes that with regard to Eisav, the Torah states *yodea tzayid*, who knows trapping. No mention is made of his actual trapping – just his knowledge of the skill. On the other hand, concerning Yaakov the Torah mentions his abiding /sitting in tents, without telling us anything about his achievements in Torah. This too teaches us volumes about their disparate characters. The gentile suffices with knowledge of a given discipline. Receiving a doctorate, achieving distinction in a given field, is determined by knowledge – not action. Concerning *chochmas haTorah*, the wisdom of Torah, the

important determining factor of achievement is not knowledge, but diligence and commitment. Knowledge is a gift from Hashem. Distinction is earned via toil. Eisav was *yodea*; Yaakov was *yosheiv*. Knowledge is extrinsic and does not necessarily transform the individual. *Yosheiv ohalim*, sitting and learning in the tents of Torah, transforms a person. He learns; he is changed.

Horav Shmuel HaLevi Vosner, zl, relates that when he studied in *Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin*, a *rav* visited the *yeshivah* and spoke to the students. He said, "I have met many *talmidei chachamin*, Torah scholars, and the majority of these scholars did not possess exemplary aptitude. (They were not geniuses.) Nonetheless, they had become impressive scholars. How did this happen? It is because the primary factor in success in Torah is not an outstanding mind. Success in Torah is primarily the result of *hasmadah*, diligence and toil. Thus, Yaakov is praised for being a *yosheiv ohalim*, sitting in the tents – learning. Learning Torah is of greater importance than the *yedios*, knowledge, one amasses as a result of his learning.

One note: there are those who contend that Eisav was not wasting his time. He was preoccupied with hunting, a skill which takes time, effort and dedication to master. True – but what enduring value is derived from this skill? The definition of wasting time is to either do nothing or to do something which is actually nothing, because it is performed during the gift of time which Hashem gives us for a purpose. Time must be channeled – not spent. Eisav wasted his time; Yaakov invested his time with purpose.

על כן קרא שמו אדם

He, therefore, called his name Edom. (25:30)

Certainly the name Edom/Eisav evokes question. Referring to a bowl of red bean soup as "red" is not cause for one to be named "Red," unless this reference to red soup defines the person. *Rashbam* says that Eisav had a ruddy complexion, and he sold his birthright for a bowl of red soup. That is a pretty contemptuous act. Hence, Edom/Red is a reference, not so much to color, but to contempt, which describes Eisav quite well. *Sforno* views the red color of the soup as a description of Eisav's values and outlook on life. He was so consumed with hunting and plunder that he viewed food only by its external color – which is the way he looked at everything. He did not consider the intrinsic value of anything – only the externals. Food was judged by its color. So, too, life, people, events – everything was judged by the superficial, the external. Red was an apt description of Eisav.

Eisav cared about the here and now – not about tomorrow. Destiny, future, ramifications, were words that were foreign to him. "Give me the red stuff!" is all that mattered. The fact that the soup was comprised of round beans which was part of the mourner's meal (for the passing of Avraham *Avinu*) – with round representing the life cycle – meant absolutely nothing to Eisav. He saw external red. That was all he cared about. Thus, his name was a perfect fit.

People give names, but it is Hashem Who inspires the name. The name that a person is ultimately given is much more than a metaphoric title, an arbitrary coincidence; it often reveals a hidden significance in a person's life. Names carry on the Jewish heritage of a person. Indeed, one of the primary reasons that our ancestors were redeemed from Egypt was that they retained their Hebrew names. A person's name determines his destiny; thus, we are careful about after whom we name a child.

Interestingly, our first exposure to Avraham *Avinu* and Sarah *Imeinu* occurs after their marriage. We know nothing about their lives prior to this. We do know about Yitzchak and Yaakov and their marriages. *Horav Levi Yitzchak Berditchover, zl*, explains that everything that we are taught about the *Avos* and *Imahos*, Patriarchs and Matriarchs, carries great significance due to the role it plays in the future of *Am Yisrael*. The marriage of Avraham and Sarah plays no such role, since it was doomed to be a childless marriage as a result of the names they bore at the time.

As mentioned, a person's name is intrinsically connected with his soul. A name defines, empowers or restricts – depending upon the case or situation. Avram means supreme father, which alludes to

Hashem in His supreme state. The Divine emanations in this name are too strong and lofty for the material world in which we live. Therefore, as Avram, it was impossible for our Patriarch to have children.

His name was changed to Avraham, which means *av hamon goyim*, father of many nations. This name with regard to Hashem indicates a status of *tzimtzum*, constriction, whereby the Divine Presence allows only a constrained flow of Divine emanation to enter the world. Such a stream can be tolerated and absorbed by material creations. With this form of emanation, children were possible. A fundamental alteration took place when Avram's name was changed. It was as if he were reborn. Sara *Imeinu* also underwent a change which allowed the previous esoteric properties that made up her psyche to be altered, to the point that she could now entertain the notion of motherhood. It is all in the name. Their personal destinies had changed to include the future *Klal Yisrael*.

Esterke was born during a sad and bitter time for European Jewry. It was 1942, and the evil Hitler, like his Amalekean forbear, Haman, had sworn to destroy the Jewish race. Poland and Lithuania were overrun; now it was time to swallow up Hungary. Esterke's mother knew that only a miracle would save her baby girl. Born on *Purim*, she gave her the name Esther. She felt that her birthday was a Heavenly sign that as darkness turned to light for the Jews of Persia thousands of years earlier, so, too, would her dear Esterke be saved. Her name would be her destiny.

Her roommate in the hospital said, "Mrs. Rosenberg, let me look at your sweet baby." After staring at her lovingly, the gray haired Hungarian woman who owned a farm said, "What a pity that she will not live to see her first birthday. Hitler is coming and the Jews, especially the children, are his obsession. He wants all of you dead. Please, let me take your little girl. She is innocent. I will raise her and give her a good life. I never had children of my own. I will raise her as if she were mine."

Mrs. Rosenberg looked back at her with a shocked expression, "How could I give her up? We are Jewish. You are not. I could never allow a Christian to raise my Esterke."

"You do not understand," said the woman, her compassionate tone suddenly gone, replaced by an icy, condescending tone. "You and all your people will soon be history, and your baby with you. I am her only chance for survival."

Mrs. Rosenberg replied, "Today is *Purim*. My daughter, like her namesake, Queen Esther, will survive. She will be the source of miracle, transforming darkness and gloom into light and hope."

Two years later, Esterke and her parents lived in a Hungarian ghetto. This was a prison where Jews were selected daily to leave the "comfort" of the ghetto – never to be heard from again. This was life in the ghetto. Children barely survived on the poor rations they had. Finally, on Esterke's third *Purim*, her parents made the fateful decision to smuggle her out of the ghetto to one of the poor villages where a farmer would take her away (for money, of course) and raise her as his child. It was her only chance of survival. Any day now, the Nazis would liquidate the ghetto, and the children would be their first victims.

Esterke burst into tears when her parents bid her goodbye. Everyone cried, but Esterke's mother said, "Today is *Purim*; your name is Esther. You will have a miracle. That is why we gave you this name. It is your day!"

Then her mother embraced her and gave her one last gift, "Esterke, you may no longer answer to this name. It is not safe. Your new name is Eva."

Obviously, Esterke/Eva did not understand. The next morning, a young man smuggled her out of the ghetto, amid heavy sobbing, as father and mother bid farewell to their young child. Esterke cried, "You won't come with me, *Tatty* won't come with me, and I can't even keep my name!"

The young man who looked like a Hungarian peasant, but was really Jewish, told her, "Do not worry. You will have your parents and your beautiful name – in your little heart. Every night when you recite the *Shema* you will remember them."

Months passed, and the parents heard nothing of their little girl. The war was over, and they went looking for her. They had some idea where she would be. They walked for miles, stopping at various farms looking, asking, begging – but no one knew where their little girl was. They kept on looking. One does not give up hope on their child. Finally, they came to a farm where they saw a little girl playing. Could it be? Yes, it was her! But she did not recognize them. A few months in the life of a three year old child is a lifetime. Her father called to her, “Little girl, come over here.” She came over, stared at them and ran to the house to call her “mother.” “There are strange people outside,” she said. The woman looked at Esterke’s parents with a blank, stony face. Her parents were frightened. To have gone through so much and then lose their child would be too much for them to handle.

Suddenly, her mother cried out, “Esterke! Esther *Hamalkah*, my *malkah*! It is *Tatty* and Mommy! Remember us?”

Esterke stared for a moment, as she processed what she heard and then it all came back to her. She ran to them. Their family was reunited.

Years later, Esterke remarked, “I forgot everything: my mother, my father, my religion. I remembered only one thing from my past: my Jewish name. Why? Because a Jewish name is no small thing. It is one’s destiny.”

יְבִי עֲשֵׂי אֶת הַבְּכוֹרָה

Eisav spurned the birthright. (25:34)

Eisav saw no value whatsoever in the birthright. Thus, when he was hungry, he quickly sold the birthright for a bowl of red soup. Apparently, selling the birthright is held against Eisav. The fact that he committed five grave sins that day does not seem to carry as much weight as his selling the birthright. Why? The *Brisker Rav*, *zl*, explains that concerning the other sins which Eisav committed, he always had the excuse that he was provoked by the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination. The other sins may have brought him some sort of perverse satisfaction. Selling the birthright was purely malicious. Nothing was to be gained from selling the birthright. Thus, it was an inexcusable act of denigrating the *avodah*, service, in the *Bais Hamikdash*. This is what Eisav was doing when he said, “I gain nothing from the *bechorah*. You can have it.” He knowingly, with malicious aforethought, spurned the opportunity to come close to Hashem.

Some sins are the product of the influence of the *yetzer hora*. People commit other sins as a result of a disdain for religion. This applies throughout our life’s endeavor. It is not only about sin. When someone has something to gain, we understand his weakness. He was not pernicious – just weak. Many weak people exist. A noxious person acts out of uncaring selfishness. He demonstrates that rules mean nothing to him. He laughs at convention and denigrates establishment.

He is not compelled to act. He wants to act because it means nothing to him. Someone might fall prey to opioids due to an addiction; weakness which he is unable to control. Another person might set a fire simply because he does not care about people’s property. One is upset with himself; one laughs at the world. Eisav laughs.

וַיֹּאמֶר לְאָבִיו יִקַּם אָבִי וְיֹאכַל מִצֵּיד בְּנִי בְעֵבֶר תִּבְרַכְנִי נַפְשָׁךְ

He said to his father, “Let my father rise and eat of his son’s game, so that your soul will bless me. (27:31)

The commentators (*Midrash Tanchuma*) note the stark disparity between the manner in which Yaakov Avinu addressed his father and the way that Eisav spoke to him. Yaakov spoke to his father with the words, *Kum na shvah v’achlah mitzeidi*; “Rise up, please, sit and eat of my game” (*Bereishis* 27:18). *Eisav ha’rasha* said, *Yaakum avi v’yochal mitzeid bno*; “Let my father rise and eat of his son’s game” (*ibid.* 27:31). Yaakov said, “Please;” Eisav demanded, “Get up.” Yaakov spoke with humility. Eisav arrogantly commanded, insisting that his father eat. We are well aware that the *mitzvah* of *Kibud av*, honoring one’s father, held great significance for Eisav. It was the one *mitzvah* he observed with all of its stringencies. The holy *Tanna*, Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel, declared, “All of my days I honored and served my father, but it was not even one-hundredth of the manner in which Eisav served Yitzchak Avinu. This being the case, why did Eisav speak to Yitzchak in a manner unbecoming a person who respects his father? One speaks to a father with humility – not arrogance. Why did Eisav not speak like Yaakov?”

Furthermore, if Yaakov were to succeed in his ruse of presenting himself as Eisav, he should have spoken in the same doltish, crude manner, in which Eisav spoke. Why speak in a refined manner? Also, Yaakov used Hashem’s Name in attributing the quick success of his mission to the Almighty. The real Eisav would never do that.

Horav Reuven Karlinstein, zl, explains that the answer is quite simple. The tongue, man’s speech, is the quill of the heart. In other words, one cannot transform his manner of speech. It is an expression of his heart, his essential self. Eisav could put on a show, make himself appear righteous and observant, but he could not alter his speech. He was a brute who lived in the field, living with the animals and wild beasts, preying on innocent people. He could change everything, but not the way he spoke. So, too, Yaakov could don Eisav’s clothes. He could appear to be a hunter, but he still spoke with refinement, attributing everything to Hashem. The intrinsic Yaakov did not change.

לע"נ

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה