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from: Rabbi Yissocher Frand <ryfrand@torah.org>
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subject: **Rav Frand** - The Value of Planning, Forethought, Process and Development

Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Toldos

The Value of Planning, Forethought, Process and Development

The pasuk says, "And Yaakov boiled a stew, and Eisav came in from the field, and he was exhausted." (Bereshis 25:29). The sad news reached the family that Avraham Avinu has passed away. Yaakov Avinu was cooking lentils because it is customary to serve a mourner round food items. (This is why an egg is typically eaten at the Seudah Mafsekes before Tisha B'Av.) Yaakov Avinu was cooking lentil soup for his father as part of the customary "Seudas Havra'ah" (the first meal a mourner consumes following the funeral, typically prepared by neighbors). Eisav came home from the field tired and famished. We know the rest of the story. Eisav asked for the lentil soup. Yaakov made a deal with him. Eisav sold the birthright to Yaakov, and thus abandoned the bechora. This is the beginning of Parshas Toldos.

The Tolner Rebbe asks three interesting questions:

On the above cited pasuk (vayazed Yaakov nazid), Rashi explains that the word vayazed means to cook. However, the far more common word for cooking in the Torah is the word bishul or some derivative of that root word. Why suddenly over here when the Torah wants to say that Yaakov was cooking lentil soup does the Torah use the word vayazed, necessitating for Rashi to explain that vayazed is the same as bishul?

What was the dish that Yaakov cooked? The Torah here calls it nazid (some kind of soup). It is not until five pesukim later (Bereshis 25:34) that the

Torah calls it nazid adashim (lentil soup). Why do we need to wait to find out what Yaakov was cooking? Get to the point right away! Yitzchak was a wealthy man. Avraham Avinu was a wealthy man and he gave everything that he had to Yitzchak. We are not aware of Yitzchak suffering any financial setbacks. Would we not expect Yitzchak to have servants in his house who did the cooking? Yaakov was a diligent student. He spent his time in the Yeshiva of Shem v'Ever. He learns all the time. Later in life, he learned fourteen years straight without sleeping. Yet what is he doing at the beginning of Parshas Toldos? He is cooking! What about the servants? In fact, the Medrash here points out the humility of Yaakov Avinu that he was cooking lentil soup himself, despite the fact that his father had many servants!

The Tolner Rebbe cites a Malbim who explains the relationship between the word vayazed and the idea of cooking. The Torah uses the same root word in the expression "Ki ba'davar she'ZADU aleihem" (Shemos 18:11), where it means planned or schemed. The Malbim asks: Why is the same root word in Lashon HaKodesh used for cooking and also for planning and scheming? The Malbim answers that when a person schemes, he is cooking up a plan. The word zeidim (as in the expression zeidim b'yad osekei Torasecha) refers to people who plan nefarious and malevolent schemes. These plans that they "cook up" need to first percolate until they are fully ready to be put into action.

There is an expression – if someone wants to cheat in business, he "cooks the books". What kind of expression is that? It is the same idea. If someone wants to try to fool his partner or the government or someone else, he may plan how to charge this expense and how to charge that expense. That is "cooking the books".

That is why the expression vayazed is synonymous with the expression "bishul"—it requires this great forethought of planning, which is synonymous with "cooking up a plan" to do something. Now we can explain why the pasuk specifically uses the verb vayazed Yaakov nazid. The Torah is trying to indicate that Yaakov Avinu carefully planned this activity with great forethought and intent. He reasoned: My father just became an avel. I want to cook for him. Yaakov's action was done with great planning and forethought in order to fulfill the commandment of honoring his father. This answers the first question.

That is why he did not just let the servants cook the soup—the third question. This was not just a bowl of soup. This was Kibbud Av. Yaakov wanted to do it, and he wanted to do it from the get go. "I don't just want to serve my father. I want to cook the soup and I want to prepare the soup. This is how I want to serve my father." The purpose of the cooking was not just to get something on the plate (for which the word bishul would have sufficed). The cooking over here was a well thought out plan of providing the Seudas Havra'ah and fulfilling the mitzvah of Kibbud Av v'Em.

This is also why the Torah does not state right away that it was a bowl of lentil soup—the second question. That is immaterial at this point. At this point, the Torah is interested in stating that Yaakov was doing the act of cooking, the act of preparing food to serve his bereaved father. If his only interest was to convey the bottom line, then the menu would have been mentioned up front: A bowl of lentil soup. However, that is not the Torah's intent over here. The Torah is trying to emphasize that Yaakov did this entire act with great forethought.

This answers all three questions.

The Tolner Rebbe explains further that within this idea of planning and forethought lies one of the fundamental differences between Yaakov and Eisav. Eisav (as we also see from his name and from his whole life) is not interested in process. He is not interested in preparation. He is interested in the bottom line. That is why the name Eisav is related to the verb ossuei (done). Yaakov comes from the word Akov – crooked. Yaakov's whole life was a life of process, a life of growing, a life of becoming. His life was a life in which the journey and the path itself had merit.

Eisav is a “Just get it done” person. That is why Chazal say that when Yitzchak Avinu told Eisav “Go out and hunt for me,” the Medrash says that Eisav said to himself – If I find an animal quickly, fine, I will hunt for it, otherwise I will steal an animal from someone who has already found one. To Eisav, it was just a matter of getting it done. How? Where? The process is all immaterial.

This is reflected in the difference between Yiddishkeit and secularism. Yiddishkeit emphasizes process and growing in stages. “Going through the motions” itself has value. This is not the case in the secular world. They are not interested in process. What’s your batting average? How many runs did you score? How much money do you make? They are not interested in the effort you put into it. It is just the “bottom line.” This is not a Jewish value. Anu ameilim v’hem ameilim (we toil, and they toil). We are rewarded even for the toil (even when it does not necessarily lead to concrete accomplishment). This is the difference between Yaakov and Eisav.

The Tolner Rebbe told an amazing story at the end of this presentation: In Europe there were a number of very brilliant people. There was a child prodigy known in Europe as the prodigy from Meit’zat. He wrote a sefer called Chidushei ha’Ilui m’Meit’zat (<https://www.hebrewbooks.org/50602>). He later came to America and was a Rosh Yeshiva in Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchonon. His name was Rav Shlomo Polacheck (1877-1928). His son told over an amazing story about his father:

When Rav Polacheck came to America from Poland and he saw children playing with toys and games, he cried. Why? He said “If I would have had the opportunity to play with toys and be a child when I was young, I would be a bigger Talmid Chochom than I am today – because the process of growing up is important.” There is a thing called maturation. There is a stage called childhood and a stage called adolescence and a stage called adulthood. He was such a prodigy that perhaps he knew Mishnayos by heart at age three. Someone who knows Mishnayos by heart is not able to play around with whatever little toys three-year-olds played around with in Europe. So, he did not really experience childhood. He said about himself that if he would have had a proper childhood, he could have become an even greater Talmid Chochom (which is hard to imagine).

That is the point of the Tolner Rebbe’s whole shtickle Torah. Process and development have value. A person cannot just skip to the bottom line or skip to the end. That is what we learn from “vaYazed Yaakov nazid.”

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from: **Rav Immanuel Bernstein** <ravbernstein@journeysintorah.com>

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subject: Dimensions in Toldos

DIMENSIONS IN CHUMASH

Parshas Toldos

The Avos and Taryag Mitzvos

עָקַב אָשֶׁר שָׁמַע אֶבְרָהָם בְּקוֹלִי וַיִּשְׁמַר מִשְׁמֵרֵי מִצְוֹתַי הַקּוֹטֵי וְתוֹרֹתַי

Because Avraham heeded My voice, he observed My safeguards, My commandments, My decrees and My laws.[1]

Introduction

Rashi, based on Chazal,[2] explains the different phrases in this verse as comprising the various components of the Torah’s mitzvos, reflecting the idea that that Avraham kept the mitzvos of the Torah even prior to it being given at Har Sinai to the Jewish People. This tradition is likewise assumed by the Rishonim to pertain also to Yitzchak and Yaakov, as well as their children. The understanding behind this idea is that even without being formally commanded regarding the mitzvos, the heightened spiritual sensitivity of the Avos enabled them to independently intuit what acts would be spiritually beneficial for them, as well as those which would be spiritually detrimental.[3]

The commentators discuss the fact that, understandably, there are many mitzvos whose practical performance would not seem to have been relevant to the Avos. Additionally, they raise the specific question of Yaakov marrying Rachel and Leah, seeing as marrying two sisters is something that the Torah would in time prohibit. Nevertheless, as a matter of general principle – to whatever degree and in whatever way feasible – the Avos kept the mitzvos of the Torah.[4]

Ramban: Home Rules

A very well-known position regarding this tradition is that of the Ramban,[5] who states that it only applied when the Avos were in the Land of Israel.

They perceived and recognized that life in Hashem’s Land intrinsically involves keeping the mitzvos of the Torah – regardless of whether they have been commanded yet or not. Outside of Israel, however, the Avos did not adopt this practice. With this, the Ramban offers his answer to the question of how Yaakov could marry two sisters, since he did so while he was living outside of Israel, in the land of Aram.

Counter Messages from the Midrash?

The Ramban proceeds to cite one statement of Chazal that appears to contradict his position, for the Midrash states that Yosef kept Shabbos even while he was in Egypt![6] To this, the Ramban responds by saying that this practice of Yosef was an exception, which he deemed necessary in order to instill the fundamentals of faith and monotheism within his children who were surrounded by the pagan society of Egypt. With regards to the other mitzvos, however, there was no notion of electing to keep them outside of the Land of Israel.

However, there is another statement of Chazal which the Ramban does not mention, which would appear to pose a much greater challenge his approach. Commenting on Yaakov’s words to Esav upon his return to the land, “עַם לְבָן – I sojourned with Lavan,”[7] the Midrash notes that the letters of the word “גַּרְתִּי” are identical with those of “גַּרְתִּי,” the numerical value of the six hundred and thirteen mitzvos of the Torah, indicating that Yaakov kept them all even while with Lavan.[8] Once again, with the above-mentioned proviso that many of the taryag mitzvos could not be kept on a practical level etc., nevertheless, the Midrash indicates that, at least as a matter of principle, Yaakov was keeping the taryag mitzvos in Chutz La’aretz. This seems to directly contradict the Ramban’s position!

Harmony: Pshat and Remez

Perhaps we may suggest the following. The word “גַּרְתִּי” itself actually means “I sojourned”, indicating a short-term or transient stay. Let us ask: is there any connection between the pshat meaning of the word “גַּרְתִּי” itself and the gematria that Chazal attached to it denoting Yaakov’s fulfillment of the mitzvos? Perhaps it is revealing the reason why Yaakov kept the mitzvos while staying with Lavan. In reality, seeing as he was in Chutz La’aretz, there was no actual need to keep the mitzvos. However, since he regarded his stay with Lavan as temporary – as indicated by the word “גַּרְתִּי” – with the notion of his return to Eretz Yisrael firmly entrenched in his vision, he thus saw it as appropriate to continue his fulfillment of the taryag mitzvos even while outside the land, in order to maintain his familiarity and fluency with them for when he would ultimately return. It thus emerges that the allusion within the word “גַּרְתִּי” is in fact a product of its meaning on a pshat level![9] Indeed, looked at in this way, not only can the above comment of the Midrash be reconciled with the Ramban’s approach, but it actually emerges as a support for it, for it specifically frames Yaakov’s observance of taryag within the context of the temporary nature of his stay in Chutz La’aretz. Without the “garti,” element in Charan, there may not have been “taryag” there either!

[1] Bereishis 26:5. [2] See Yoma 28b and Bereishis Rabbah 64:4. [3] R’ Yehoshua Heller, Beis Tefillah chap. 17. [4] For a discussion of these questions, see e.g. Daas Zekeinim mi’Baalei HaTosafos, Bereishis 37:35, Maharsha Yoma loc. cit., Gur Aryeh Bereishis 46:10, Ohr Hachaim ibid. 49:3 and Nefesh Hachaim 1:21.v [5] Bereishis 26:5. [6] See Bereishis Rabbah 92:4. [7] Bereishis 32:5. [8] Cited in Rashi ibid s.v. garti. See Torah Sheleimah ibid. sec. 31 who cites various sources in the Midrash where this comment appears. [9] In this regard, this is a “pre-echo” of the words of the Sifrei

in Parshas Ekev (sec. 43, cited in Rashi Devarim 11:18 s.v. ve'samtem, and discussed at length by the Ramban in Vayikra 18:25) which state that the fulfilment of the mitzvos while in exile is in order that they not be new when we return to the Eretz Yisrael. Of course, we will understand that once the fulfilment of the taryag mitzvos in Chutz La'aretz is not essential but "provisional", it could be overridden by other concerns, such as those which led Yaakov to marry two sisters, something which would not have occurred in Eretz Yisrael itself, as the Ramban states.

<https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/1016214/yutorah/yutorah-in-print-parshat-toldot/>

YUTORAH IN PRINT Toldot

The Genuine Kibud Av ve-Eim

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh

(Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from the YUTorah shiur, originally entitled "Parsha Bytes - Toldot 5778," presented at Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim on November 17, 2017)

This week, in Parshas Toldos, we read about the difference between Yaakov and Eisav. And Chazal tell us that even though Eisav was generally a big rasha, nevertheless, he was a world expert—Guinness Book of World Records tzadik at performing the mitzvah of Kibud Av va-Eim. And we see throughout the Parsha how he feeds his father, how concerned he is to take care of him, and how he doesn't want his father to disapprove of his marriage—so he would not upset him. He is willing to marry someone else to make his father happy, and he does thousands of audio shiurim and articles at www.yutorah.org not want to kill Yaakov while his father is still alive.

When he discussed the inyan of Kibud Av va-Eim, Rav Soloveitchik pointed out that those actions do not mean that Eisav had a proper attitude towards his father. Eisav excelled in Kibud Av va-Eim, and he went off the derech? How could that be? This is a famous problem in the Acharonim. There are two mitzvos asef when it comes to your father and mother—Kibud and Morah. There is a big diyun in the poskim as to the difference between Kibud Av va-Eim and Morah Av va-Eim. Does one mean actively serving them, while the other is avoiding disrespectful actions? The Rav says that there is a tremendous philosophical difference between them. He says that Kibud Av va-Eim means striving to make your parents happy—ma'achilo, mashkeihu, etc. You feed them and give them drink; you take them out; and take care of their various needs. That is Kibud. If so, what is Morah? You don't contradict them, and you don't sit or stand in their place. The Rav says that it's not simply two different modes of making your parents happy—you give them food and drink, and you show them respect. No. They are distinct concepts. Kibud means acting to make them physically and psychologically happy. Do you want to be nice to them? Do you want to make their lives better? That's Kibud—wanting to improve their lives. Morah is not about the quality of life. Morah is about what your parents stand for—it's about what they believe in. Morah doesn't just mean to respect your parents. It doesn't mean: Don't contradict them because they will be upset. It means: Don't contradict them because you admire and respect what they stand for so much that you don't want to seem like you stand for the opposite, chas ve-shalom. The Rav says that Eisav was a world expert in Kibud Av va-Eim. He always wanted to make his father happy. Eisav said: I am not going to kill my brother while my father is alive. I don't want my father to cry. I don't want my father to be upset—I just want my father to be happy all the time. But what did he say? Yikrevu yemei eivel avi ve-aharga es Yaakov achi—as soon as my father passes away, that's it, I am killing Yaakov. Doesn't he realize that Yitzchak stood for certain values? Even after Yitzchak's death, he would not want his sons to kill each other! Did Eisav care about that? The answer is: No! He cared enough for his father to be happy. But he didn't care about the values and ideals of his father. He didn't care for what his father stood for. As soon as his father passed away and would not see what he was doing anymore, Eisav felt he could betray his father's whole legacy—he could do everything his father would disapprove of. He didn't really internalize the values of his father. He just didn't want his father to cry. Ok.

That's nice; that's a madreiga. That's how the Rav described the difference between Kibud and Morah. Eisav had Kibud but not Morah. That's why, ultimately, he could not continue their mesorah. He got to the chitzonius level of Kibud Av va-Eim but he did not understand the penimius. It's not enough to want your parents to be happy; it's not enough to be attentive to their physical and psychological needs. You need to be loyal to their values and what they stand for, as well. And that's what Eisav was ultimately missing. And that's why he was Eisav ha-Rasha, who said—yikrevu yemei eivel avi ve-aharga es Yaakov achi. It's our responsibility to have Kibud and Morah of Av va-Eim, to not only want our parents to be happy, but to also be loyal to what our parents stand for and what they believe in. Whether or not they realize, whether they see it. Whether they are with us, or if they have already passed on to the olam ha-emes. We should do those things that would make them proud, whether they are watching or not. That's ultimately the embodiment of Morah Av va-Eim.

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Reb Yeruchem

Based on **Daas Torah**, by **R. Yeruchem Levovitz**

- Real Spiritual Men Take Risks

By Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

Parshas Toldos

Esav said, "Look, I'm going to die. For what do I need the birthright?[2] According to Rashi, Esav was not in imminent danger of expiring from hunger. Hungry he was – but not that hungry. Yaakov wished him to sign off on his potential claims as the first-born to perform the future avodah of offerings to Hashem. Esav cautiously inquired about what this birthright thing was all about.

Yaakov explained that assuming the role of the priest for the family was fraught with complications. A great honor – certainly. But there were consequences. Breaking some of the rules meant punishment – even death. "Death?!" said Esav. "What do I need that for? The birthright is yours, gladly." The question and answer say it all. They are not limited to this particular transaction, however. They apply to the pursuit of every worthwhile spiritual elevation. There is always a price to be paid for going for great, whether for a small amount or all the way. Some people are willing to pay the price to seek advancement; others are not.

Chazal looked similarly at life in general, asking[3] whether Man is better off having been created, or having never come into existence. Given all the opportunities for failure, and the attendant unsavory consequences to messing up, perhaps the entire enterprise isn't within an individual's interest. The gemara accepts the gloomy cost-benefit analysis in principle. However, that should not and does not deter some people. Those who are dedicated to spiritual achievement, to attaining new spiritual heights, don't lose sight of the goal because of the pitfalls in the road. Their thinking is that the achievement is well worth the risks.

Esav's analysis was different because he undervalued the achievement, making it indeed not worth his while to pursue. When the Torah tells us that "Esav showed contempt for the birthright,"[4] this is what it means.

Undervaluing the spiritual goal in itself is the ultimate expression of contempt.

There is a parallel in the attitude taken by many people. Mesilas Yesharim [5] speaks of people who seek to make things a bit more comfortable for themselves without, G-d forbid, rejecting Torah life. They argue to themselves, however, that they really don't need that much Gan Eden. As long as they get in, taking a back seat there isn't the worst proposition,

particularly if the alternative is a life in their mortal existence full of extra responsibility and concern. Setting more modest goals for eternity means getting the best of both worlds.

But it doesn't! Here is why. Many of us, whether we are aware of it or not, secretly are jealous of non-Jews. How wonderful it would be, some inner voice whispers, to move along carefree without restrictions. We could eat what and when we wished. No worrying about mitzvos, or ever having to make a berachah. There would be nothing blocking or inhibiting us from doing as we pleased.

That inner voice lies! Are we jealous of a horse – which also does what it pleases? It eats grass that is readily available, naps where and when it wishes, and never worries about proper attire. Why are we not jealous of a horse? Because we know that that the greatest pleasure is to be fully human! We gladly trade in the inconveniences and responsibilities for the privilege of belonging to the human race! We were created not to be content with less than we could be. A person who foregoes the opportunity to achieve spiritual achievement is not merely an average, undistinguished human. In a sense, he's a horse!

Eisav could spurn the avodah, if it meant too much trouble. We, however, understand that he was selling short his sense of what it means to be fully human.

1. Based on Daas Torah, by R. Yeruchem Levovitz, Toldos, pg. 169-170 ↑ 2. Bereishis 25:32 ↑ 3. Eruvin 13b ↑ 4. Bereishis 25:34 ↑ 5. Chapter 4 ↑
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Insights Parshas Toldos Kislev 5782

Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim / Talmudic University

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Jack Fefer, Yaakov ben Yisroel Yitzchak. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

Conwoman?

And Yitzchak was forty years old when he took Rifkah for a wife, the daughter of Besuel the Aramean of Padan-Aram, the sister to Lavan the Aramean (25:20).

Rashi (ad loc) wonders why the Torah reiterates that Rifkah was the daughter of Besuel the Aramean and the sister of Lavan the Aramean. After all, last week's parsha clearly identified Rifkah's lineage and from where she came.

Why should the Torah choose to repeat it at the beginning of this parsha?

Rashi answers that the Torah is teaching us that even though Rifkah grew up with a wicked father and brother, and came from a place of wicked people, she didn't learn from their evil ways. Yet this explanation requires further clarification. In last week's parsha we see that Rifkah was a kind and generous person, as well as one of great modesty. Furthermore, Hashem clearly answered Eliezer's prayer for help and guidance by unmistakably indicating that He intended Rifkah to be Yitzchak's wife. But why is it necessary to once again highlight the difference between Rifkah and her wicked relatives from a wicked place?

Finally, it is odd that the Torah repeats by both Besuel and Lavan that they were Aramean. Why is there a special emphasis on their Aramean nationality?

The Babylonian Talmud is written in Aramaic, the language of Aram, while the Jerusalem Talmud is written in Hebrew, the language spoken in Eretz Yisroel. Yet the Talmud that is written in a foreign language is the one that enjoys a much wider popularity; it is studied far more than the Jerusalem Talmud and comprises the bulk of the curriculum in yeshivos all over the world. The Babylonian Talmud is also the foundation and source of all halacha. Why is it that the Babylonian Talmud became more widely accepted than the Jerusalem Talmud, which is written in our native tongue?

The Aramean people were known for being conmen (exactly what Yaakov was worried about when making a deal with his wicked uncle Lavan in next week's parsha, and Lavan actually did try to trick him). What is the talent that makes a conman successful? He is able to delve into the reality of his "mark." In other words, a successful conman is able to see how his target will look at a situation; he then tailors the con to the other person's perspective and desires.

The Aramean language is one of understanding another's perspective. As an example, the word chessed in Hebrew means kindness, yet Rashi tells us (Vayikra 20:17) that in Aramaic it means shame. How can the same word mean both kindness and shame? It's all a matter of perspective: the giver feels that he is doing a kindness, but the recipient feels shame at having to accept charity. The Arameans focus on the other individual's perspective – hence in Aramaic chessed means shame.

The Babylonian Talmud is the most widely accepted authority for this very reason. When we have an argument about law we want each opinion to be sensitive to the other's perspective before we decide on the proper approach. Only in understanding the other sides' perspective can we properly distill our own perspective. This is deeply rooted in the very essence of the Aramean culture.

The reason that Rifkah's lineage is repeated in this week's parsha is because it becomes very relevant to the story line. After all, it was her idea that Yaakov enter into Yitzchak's reality and, through a subtle subterfuge, receive the brachos that were intended for her wicked son Eisav. Rifkah too, being from Aram, had the quality of insight into another's perspective, but she used it to make sure that her righteous son prevailed over her wicked son.

True Kibud Av

And Yaakov went near to Yitzchak his father; and he felt him, and said, the voice is Yaakov's voice, but the hands are the hands of Eisav (27:23).

Rashi (ad loc) directly addresses the source of Yitzchak's confusion; even though he felt that Yaakov's arms were indeed hairy like Eisav's arms (as part of the disguise worn by Yaakov), his voice was dissimilar to Eisav.

Rashi goes on to explain that Yaakov had addressed his father with a very respectful statement: "Please get up and sit to eat the food that I have prepared..." (27:19). Eisav, on the other hand, would speak in a combative tone "Get up father!"

The implication is that Eisav's tone was harsh and perhaps even disrespectful, while Yaakov's was more gentle and accommodating.

However, we find in the Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 65) that Raban Shimon Ben Gamliel stated: "All of my days I served my father, and I didn't accomplish even 1/100th of the degree to which Eisav honored his father.

When Eisav served his father he served him (wearing) royal garments." Even the great and pious Raban Shimon Ben Gamliel's kibud av did not compare with that of Eisav's.

Similarly, it is brought down from the Zohar that there was no one in the world who honored his father like Eisav did, and that zechus protected Eisav in this world. Thus, it is difficult to imagine that the very paradigm of kibud av would err in such a basic area as communicating respectfully with his father. What can Rashi possibly mean?

Certainly, Yaakov addressed his father very respectfully, as we see from the pesukim. But Eisav actually superseded his brother's efforts. Rashi, in next week's parsha (see 28:13), says that Hashem associated His name with Yitzchak, even though Hashem does not usually associate His name with the living (for they might sin). But in the case of Yitzchak he was considered as if he was dead because he was blind and homebound and therefore no longer had an evil inclination. The implication in this week's parsha is also that Yitzchak was frail and bedridden, as we see that both Yaakov and Eisav have to tell him to get up and go over to eat.

While Yaakov treated his father with great deference, he was also catering to his father's self-image of being old and frail. Yaakov's kibud av was all about being deferential and respectful. On the other hand, Eisav was treating

his father like a lazy teenager; he wasn't letting his father perceive himself as an old and sickly person. Eisav didn't accept the notion that Yitzchak is old and frail, and didn't let Yitzchak accept it either.

This is similar to people who hire personal trainers; they aren't hiring somebody who will gently ask them to "please do another pushup." Quite the opposite, they are literally paying someone to yell at them and push them past their malaise and perceived physical limits. But it is a very fine line. A personal trainer cannot be derisive or abusive, he must convey that he believes his client is far more capable than the client himself believes and push him in that direction. At the end of the day, one comes to understand that the personal trainer is making him suffer for his own good.

This was Eisav's approach and it was obviously a much more difficult way of dealing with his father because it required constant pressure and a refusal to allow Yitzchak to deteriorate to the point of actually physically requiring to become bedridden. In fact, Yitzchak goes on to live another sixty plus years. Achieving this with anyone is quite an accomplishment; doing so with one's own father is a seemingly impossible task. Eisav managed to do this, which is why he is known as the quintessential example of *kibud av*.

Did You Know...

The last possuk in this week's parsha, "Eisav went to Yishmael and took Machalas [...] as a wife" is, quite remarkably, the source for a well-known teaching from Chazal. Rashi (Genesis 36:3) cites this possuk as the source for the maxim that on the day of their wedding a bride and groom are forgiven of their sins. This is why the name of one of Eisav's wives is originally given as "Machalas" while later she was called Basemath (Machalas is related to the word *mechilah*, forgiveness).

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For the week ending 6 November 2021 / 2 Kislev 5782

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonofthemoon.com

Parshat Toldot

No Fit for Counterfeit

"And Hashem said to her (to Rivka about Esav and Yaakov), 'Two regimes are in your womb...'" (25:23)

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

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

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

logic, epistemology, and the philosophy of mathematics established him as one of the foremost philosophers of the 20th century.

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

In Judaism, you have to be a triangle.

"And Hashem said to her, 'Two regimes are in your womb...'"

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

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Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Drasha Parshas Drasha - With Death Do Us Apart!

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

After a debilitating stroke, Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz, the Rosh Yeshiva of the Mirrer Yeshiva in Jerusalem, continued to say a weekly mussar shmues (ethical sermon) at the yeshiva. Hundreds of students strained to hear the brilliant words of wisdom that were peppered with anecdotes and aphorisms that shed new light on the age-old words of sages of yore.

But one Parshas Toldos, the Rosh Yeshiva stunned his audience as he opened his remarks. "Ich gai shtarben!" (I am going to die!) he announced. In a raspy voice, he repeated the words over and over again. "Ich gai shtarben!" The students' faces turned ashen. They were not sure whether or not to summon ambulances and medical teams when he suddenly stopped, smiled, and finished his thought, "that is exactly what Esav (Esau) told his brother Yaakov (Jacob) in this week's portion!"

Indeed, the transaction in which Esau gives up his birthright for a bowl of lentil soup was preceded by those very words. "Behold I am going to die," cried Esav, "so why do I need my birthright?" (Genesis 25:30)

The thought of death was a catalyst in Esav's decision to rid himself of the birthright and its responsibilities. But why? Everyone dies. However, what did the ultimate end have to do with Esav's decision? Why did it play a role in deciding whether or not to trade in the birthright for a cup of lentil soup? Could Esav not just as easily responded to Jacob's offer in the following manner: "Behold, the birthright carries too much responsibility. What do I need it for?" What, however, does the concept of death have to do with it?

A student of the Telshe Yeshiva once related the following story: An airplane carrying Dovid, a Telshe Yeshiva student, back to Cleveland began experiencing severe turbulence. The young man became quite nervous, but after seeing that his own Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Mordechai Gifter, was sitting in front of him, he felt secure. "After all," thought the young man, "with such a tzadik (righteous man) on board, what possibly could go wrong?"

Suddenly the captain's voice was heard over the intercom. "We are experiencing some difficulty with the plane's hydraulic system and may be forced to make an emergency landing. Everyone please return to your seats, fasten your seatbelts, and follow the instructions given by your flight attendants."

Dovid quickly leaned forward toward his Rebbe. "Perhaps we are in danger. I have a Tehillim in my carry-on luggage. Are there any particular Psalms or prayers should I recite?"

Quickly, Rav Gifter reassured the young man, and suggested to him a few appropriate Psalms. Then he urged him to quickly buckle up and prepare for landing. His advice was interrupted by shouts coming from a frantic passenger who sat next to Dovid. "Stewardess, quick! Get over here! Make me a double scotch on the rocks. Make it Johnny Walker Blue Label! Better make it fast, and better make it good, 'cause it may be my last drink before I die!"

The Chofetz Chaim, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan of Radin, explains that the Mishnah in Pirkei Avos tells us do repent one day before our death. (Avos 2:15). Obviously, those of us who do not know when that day is to arrive must reflect and ask pardon daily. But

the catalyst of serious reflection and sobriety is the very thought of the final moment – death. Its approach should shake us if not wake us into teshuvah. Esav’s approach is disturbingly different: I will cast away any vestige of responsibility or spirituality, because, after all, tomorrow I may die. His catalyst of Epicureanism is our cause for stoic concern.

And so for a bowl of lentil soup, a cocktail of craving gulped down in a moment of passion, Esav abandons his world of eternity. And the motivating factor behind his faux pas should have inspired him to seek the meaning of life.

A question that we must all ask our selves, when we stare at the prospect of gloom or wait for its imminent arrival, do we drink or do we think?

Dedicated by Yitz & Gilla Stern to commemorate the Yahrzeit of

Reb Azriel ben Reb Eliyahu Stern A”H — 7 Kislev

Good Shabbos!

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Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

Parashat Toldot 5782 : The Process and the Goal

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Parashat Toldot begins with a very upsetting subject: infertility. Isaac and Rebecca waited for a child for twenty years. For twenty years, they prayed to G-d for a pregnancy until G-d granted their wish and Rebecca gave birth to twins – Jacob and Esau.

We also come into contact with the subject of infertility with Sarah who was infertile until the age of ninety when she had Isaac. In the following generation as well, Rachel – Jacob’s wife – is infertile and waits many years before she has her two sons – Joseph and Benjamin.

Other mothers in the Bible are described as infertile. What they all had in common is that they were ultimately mothers to children who left an indelible mark on history and on the presence of G-d in the world. This raises the question – Why did the women around them manage to get pregnant without difficulty while those women who were going to give birth to children marked for greatness had to first undergo suffering and anxious anticipation?

Jewish sages offered this short explanation:

Why were the matriarchs infertile?... Because the Blessed be He desired their prayers, and desired their conversation. (Midrash Tanchuma Toldot 9) Based on the simple understanding of this explanation, the mothers of the nation were infertile because G-d wanted them to pray to Him! There is great beauty in this explanation, but on the other hand, it seems so unfair. The matriarchs had to suffer so that G-d would get His wish?!

The Malbim – Rabbi Meir Leibush Wisser (Eastern Europe, 19th century) – was a unique and profound biblical commentator. Reading his commentary, the sages’ comment is seen in a new light:

Humans giving birth to their own kind is rooted in nature, just like it is rooted in nature that plants and animals give birth to their own kind; but giving birth to something special, that will bear a select and sacred fruit goes against nature and necessitates Divine assistance. Therefore, our matriarchs were infertile, because nature is not ready on its own until Divine power appears which is awakened by prayer... (Malbim on Genesis 25, 21)

The Malbim explains that a regular birth is part of the natural life cycle; but the birth of a person of stature is a special event requiring the appearance of Godly powers in the world. The way that power is awakened to appear in the world is through prayer which brings about Divine abundance.

To better understand the Malbim’s words, we must first take a look at our lifestyle and habits today. If in the past, man had to work hard to build himself a specific piece of furniture or to prepare a certain food, nowadays, that process has been shortened and everything can arrive with the click of a button. If we want to see the scenery of a faraway land, all we have to do is get on a plane and in just a few hours we can be at our desired destination.

We have grown to expect everything to happen without delay; immediate gratification.

In a world of fast food, fast travel, online purchases, we have lost our way, we have lost sight of the process. We think the process is just a means of attaining a goal, and if we can circumvent it, even better. We even expect natural processes to go quickly, and when a problem arises, we find a better method to solve it. If we delve for a moment into the phenomenon of bringing children into the world, we discover a fascinating world. In our bodies we have great power, the power to create life! The power to bring down a Godly soul into this world! Seeing it from this perspective, it is clear that birth is an incomparably transcendent event.

If this is true regarding bringing life into the world, imagine the birth of someone special, of a soul which is unique... Undoubtedly, the birth of a child like that requires a deep process and preparation that is physical, emotional, and spiritual. That is the process the nation’s matriarchs had to undergo. The prayer and deep connection with G-d were part of the process that made it possible for them to give birth to such great people.

Seeing it this way, we can learn to appreciate the path to attaining our goals, seeing it as part of the fabric of life and not just as a means to reaching a destination. By doing so, we will be able to internalize that the more significant the goal is that we are striving to reach, the longer and more complex the process is that we have to go through in order to reach it.

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Rav Kook Torah

Toldot: Harnessing the Power of Esau

Chanan Morrison

We know little about the birth of most Biblical personalities. Yet, the Torah describes in detail the birth of Jacob and Esau and their respective naming.

“The first one came out reddish, hairy all over like a fur coat. They named him Esau. His brother then came out, his hand grasping Esau’s heel. He named him Jacob.” (Gen. 25:25-26)

The name Esau means “made” or “completed.” From day one, Esau was full of strength and energy. The name Jacob (Ya’akov) refers to the fact that he was holding on to Esau’s heel (ekev). Later on, Jacob is named a second time; here too, his name refers to his relationship with his brother Esau. The night before meeting up with Esau, he struggles with a mysterious stranger. This stranger — according to some, Esau’s guardian angel — informs him:

“Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel. You have struggled with angels and men, and you have prevailed” (Gen. 32:29).

What is the inner meaning of Jacob’s names? What is the significance of his grasping on to Esau’s heel? Why does he have two names?

Restraint versus Control

Just as there are both positive and negative forces in the world, so too, every person is a composite of positive and negative traits. We need these negative forces, however; without their power and vitality, many goals and aspirations would lack the energy necessary to be realized.

Esau represents the raw, base forces in the world. His reddish complexion indicated the violent and brutal nature of his personality. Jacob did not prevent Esau from coming into the world; after all, the world needs Esau and his raw power. Rather, Jacob held on to Esau’s heel, holding him back. The name Jacob refers to this aspect of restraint, reigning in the fierce forces.

Ultimately, however, our goal is not to simply hold back these negative forces. We aspire to gain control over them and utilize them, like a hydroelectric dam that harnesses the vast energy of a raging waterfall for the production of electricity. For example, the Talmud tells us that a person with blood-thirsty tendencies should become a shochet (ritual slaughterer) or a mohel, thus sublimating his violent nature for noble purposes. This higher aspiration is represented by Jacob’s second name, Israel, which comes from the root-word sar, meaning “to rule.”

The name Jacob is appropriate when the Jews are in the Diaspora. There, they serve as a moral conscience to partially restrict the wild and violent forces in the world. But when redeemed and living in their own land, the Jewish people are able to attain the higher level of Israel. Then they have the opportunity to demonstrate how a nation may utilize its material capabilities for constructive and ethical goals.

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Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Toldos

פרשת תולדות תשפ"ב
אברהם הוליד את יצחק

Avraham begot Yitzchak. (25:19)

The Torah underscores that Avraham and Yitzchak were father and son. One would think this is a confirmed verity and does not require the Torah's reinforcement. Apparently, as *Midrash Tanchuma* (quoted by *Rashi*) posits, the *leitzanei ha'dor*, cynics of the generation, intimated that Sarah *Imeinu* actually had become pregnant during her short captivity in the home of Avimelech, so that Avraham *Avinu* had not fathered Yitzchak, but actually, Avimelech had fathered him. Therefore, Hashem made Yitzchak's features so undeniably similar to Avraham's that no one could doubt Avraham's status. Two questions glare at us: Why were these scoffers referred to as *leitzanim*, cynics? They were out-and-out *reshaim*, wicked! Second, what is the meaning of the appellation *leitzanei ha'dor*, cynics of the generation? If they were simply *leitzanim* who degraded Avraham, it would be sufficiently evil. Why must they be, so to speak, the cynics of the "generation"?

Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl, derives from the first question that a cynic is worse than one who is wicked, because one is able to maintain an intelligent dialogue with a wicked person and even, perhaps, transform him by inspiring him. The wicked person listens. The cynic is much worse. He degrades everyone, makes a joke of everything. As *Rav Moshe* explains, the *leitz* is not *machshiv*, does not consider, anyone to be worthy of himself. It is impossible to achieve anything in a conversation with someone whose condescending attitude is the product of a jaundiced view of life. The cynic thinks that he is smart, but, by his very actions, shows otherwise. He lives a life of self-imposed blindness, negativity, with a driving desire to pull everyone else down into his abyss of acrimony.

With regard to the second question, why they were called *leitzanei ha'dor*: I think their goal was not simply to debase Avraham, but everything for which he stood and represented. *Chazal* speak about ten generations from Adam to Noach, followed by ten generations from Noach to Avraham. Our Patriarch was on the verge of altering the downward trajectory of the previous twenty generations. These cynics sought to impede his ability to do so. They sought to employ their cynicism to maintain the downward trend of the generation. Avraham's calling out in the Name of Hashem, reaching out to the world to proclaim His Glory, interfered with their nefarious success.

ויאמר עשו אל יעקב הלעיטני נא מן האדם האדום הזה... על כן קרא שמו אדום
Eisav said to Yaakov, "Pour into me, now, some of the very red stuff... (He therefore called his name Edom)." (25:30)

Avraham *Avinu* fathered Yishmael about whom we read in the previous *parsha*. The other symbol of evil born from a Patriarch was Eisav *ha'rasha*, Yaakov *Avinu's* twin. The Torah makes a point to enumerate the *alufim*, heads of the tribes, of both Yishmael and Eisav, more so than other pagan nations. This is because these two individuals/nations represent the root source of the evil of all the other pagan nations. *Horav Moshe Shapiro, zl (Mimaamakim)*, explains that Yishmael and Eisav represent the two primary categories of the seventy nations of the world, with each individual nation drawing its source of character and identity from one of these two. Thirty-five nations attribute their essence to Eisav and identify with his base character traits. Likewise, the thirty-five remaining nations receive their cultural and societal character and DNA from Yishmael.

Chazal (Tanchuma V'Zos HaBrachah) teach that prior to giving the Torah to *Klal Yisrael*, Hashem turned to all the nations of the world and offered it to each one of them. The *Midrash*, however, only delineates the responses of two nations: Yishmael and Eisav. The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that this is not a contradiction, since Eisav and Yishmael represent the nations of the world. When these two nations demurred accepting the Torah, each of them gave a reason which is consistent with the very root of his essential character. When Eisav's descendants were asked if they would accept the Torah, their response was: *retzichah*, murder, is part of our lives. Eisav was the *rotzeach* who murdered Nimrod on the day that his grandfather, Avraham *Avinu*, left this world. The Torah fared no better with *Bnei Yishmael*, who asserted that a Torah that prohibited stealing was not acceptable to their culture. Yishmael was the *pere adam* for whom no one's possessions prevented him from fulfilling his desire. If he wanted it – he took it.

The *Rosh Yeshivah* deduces that these two nations represent the sources of evil that draw their power from the poison of the *nachash*, primordial serpent. The sin of Adam *HaRishon* was founded in *taavah*, desire, and the sin of Kayin was *retzichah*, murder. *Horav Tzadok HaKohen, zl (Kedushas HaShabbos 25; Pre Tzaddik, 4:68)*, writes that the *klipah* (outer covering, husk, which conceals the G-dly light within all creation on the unholy side of the universe) of Eisav is *kaas*, anger, and *kinaah*, envy (which lead to murder), and the *klipah* of Yishmael is *taavah*, unbridled desire.

To take this further, we quote from the commentary of *Rabbeinu Bachya* to the *Parsha* (Ibid. 25:30) in which he explains the significance of the color red with regard to Eisav's intrinsic character. Eisav's repeating the word *edom* (*ha'odom ha'odom ha'zeh*) refers to the *mazalos*, discipline of astrology, in which the planet Mars appears red, and, as such, is the symbol of war and bloodshed. *Rabbeinu Bachya* contends that scientists claim that red fruit derives some of its power from the red planet. This, likewise, applies to red gemstones, such as the ruby. In other words, the planet Mars extends its influence over some of all three categories of phenomena in our world: living creatures, vegetation, and inert substances. This planet (its horoscope) was especially germane to Eisav, which was why Yitzchak blessed him with a power that he already possessed – the power of the sword. Thus, when Eisav asked for the red lentils, it was because the color was endemic to his character, more so than any other color. He derived strength from it. A bowl of red lentils would renew his flagging spirits more quickly and effectively than anything else. Eisav's inclination to shed blood was derived from his having been born under that horoscope. [Yaakov *Avinu* was also born under that same zodiac sign. He employed the fire and passion toward serving Hashem with all his heart and soul.]

We now understand that the *kochos ha'ra*, evil powers, that exist within the seventy nations are outgrowths of the two *roshei ha'goyim*, heads of the nations: Yishmael, representing *taavah*; and Eisav, exemplifying *kaas*, the two *middos*, character traits, which essentially are the root of all evil which man perpetrates.

Eisav and Yishmael refused to accept the Torah, because it would infringe on their way of life. *Klal Yisrael* accepted the Torah with two words: *Naaseh v'nishma*, "We will do and we will listen." The *Gaon, zl, m'Vilna (Aderes Eliyahu*, commentary to the beginning of *V'Zos HaBrachah*) posits that *Naaseh* is the panacea to the evil of Eisav (*asiyah*, action = Eisav) and *nishma* is the remedy to Yishmael (*shmiyah*, hearing = Yishmael). We have remedied the evil created by Eisav's actions and Yishmael's listening to his heart's desires.

Two primary antagonists have confronted the Jewish People throughout our tumultuous history: one is called *oyeiv*; the other is referred to as *sonai*. These two terms describe an enemy, an adversary. *Sonei* alludes to Eisav and his minions; *oyeiv* is a reference to Yishmael and his descendants. *V'nasan Hashem Elokecha eis kol ha'alos ha'eileh al o'yivecha v'al son'echa*; "Hashem, your G-d, will place all these imprecations upon your enemies and those who hate you" (*Devarim 30:7*). *Rabbeinu Bachya* explains: *o'yivecha* – Yishmael; *so'necha* – Eisav. What is the difference between these two terms – especially in light of the tainted character traits manifested by each individual adversary?

Rav Shapiro cites *Rashi* (commentary to *Bamidbar 10:35*), *V'yafutzu o'yivecha v'yanusu so'necha*, "And let your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate you flee." *Rashi* defines *o'yivecha* to be those who are gathered together ready/planning to attack, but have not yet done so, and he interprets *so'necha* to be those who are already in pursuit of *Klal Yisrael*. This may be explained further, with *o'yeviv* being an adversary who has a reason for his hatred. He wants something. With regard to Yishmael, this would be land. Conversely, the *sonai*, Eisav, represents implacable, irrational hatred for no reason. This makes sense, especially given the *Talmudic* dictum, *Eisav sonai l'Yaakov*, "Eisav hates Yaakov." This is an absolute – no reason – just plain unvarnished hatred. In light of the previous explanation rendered by *Rabbeinu Bachya*, that Eisav derives his power source and character from the "redness" associated with his zodiac star, hatred is part of his intrinsic character. We now have two understandings of the motivational roots of anti-Semitism. Not all types of anti-Semitism are alike. Thus, they should not be bunched together and addressed in a similar manner. Nothing is what it seems.

הנה אנכי הולך למות ולמה זה לי בכרה

"Look, I am going to die, of what use to me is a birthright?" (25:32)

Eisav's negative position *vis-à-vis* the *bechorah*, birthright, is clear: He was not interested in it. His reason: "I am going to die, of what use to me is a birthright?" *Rashi* explains Eisav's rationale. He was likely to die as a result of performing the sacrificial service improperly. A deeper understanding of this may be that a life of relinquishment, or spiritual life as he knew it, was tantamount to death. Eisav viewed spirituality, with its various demands and strictures, as an imposition on his desired lifestyle. He was on earth to live – not die.

A sincere person understands that commitment to the spiritual/religious way of life may require inconvenience, hardship, danger and humiliation. One who is devoted to

Hashem understands this. Eisav was not interested in accepting any difficulties. When Eisav learned that Avraham *Avinu* had died, he spurned reward and punishment. After all, if a saint such as Avraham had died, then what was the value of living a life of the spirit? He went on to deny *Techiyas HaMeisim*, Resurrection of the Dead, claiming that living a spiritual life in this world with the objective that when one dies he will live a better spiritual life in the world of the spirit meant no life at all! So, as so many like him, he said that he believed in nothing. He would live life on this world to its fullest, without constraint and without apology, come what may when he dies. He then rationally sold the *bechorah* for a pot of red bean soup, because at that moment the soup, which would satiate his hunger, had greater value than dreams of spirituality.

We have presented before us two perspectives on life: Yaakov views living on this world as an opportunity to gain entrance into *Olam Habba*, the World to Come, and, unless one lives his life on a spiritual plateau, he will succumb to the physical/material enticements of this world, which will cause him to diminish, even lose, his position in the World to Come. Eisav, on the other hand, felt that a life of the spirit was tantamount to death. Why die twice? He did not believe in the World-to-Come. If he had, he would have behaved differently in this world.

With this idea in mind, *Horav Aryeh Leib Heyman, zl*, explains the significance of *kevurah*, burial, in accordance with Yaakov *Avinu's* *hashkafah*, outlook, as opposed to Eisav's "could-care-less" attitude concerning burial. We find Avraham *Avinu's* overriding concern to bury Sarah *Imeinu* in the *Me'oras Ha'Machpeilah*. This cave would serve as the burial place for the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, as well as Adam and Chavah. It was the first parcel of land purchased in the Holy Land. Yaakov *Avinu* made Yosef swear that he would see to it that he (Yaakov) not be buried in Egypt. He, too, wanted to be interred in the Cave of *Machpeilah*. Yosef also saw to it that he, too, would be interred in *Eretz Yisrael*. This teaches us that the burial place of a *tzaddik*, righteous person, plays an important role in his spiritual *weltanschauung*. For Yaakov, *bechorah* and *kevurah*, birthright and burial, went hand-in-hand, since they are both connected with the world of the spirit. Following his passing from this world, one who merits to live spiritually on this world will merit a special place in the world of the spirit. It is, therefore, only proper that the body which "facilitated" such an admiral spiritual life receive an appropriate burial in preparation for its eventual resurrection.

Rav Heyman adds a caveat concerning the *yom ha'zikaron, yahrzeit*, anniversary of one's passing. Every day of the week has within it a reflection and remembrance of the original days of Creation. The *moadim*, festivals, also represent the events that took place – events which catalyzed the festival and its spiritual properties. Indeed, every calendar date of personal and collective significance spurs memories, underscores significant lessons, and provides opportunities for spiritual advancement based upon the unique spiritual essence and character of that date. If so, what is the importance of memorializing the day of one's passing? What can be derived from the loss, other than to serve as an opportunity for surviving family members to honor and perpetuate the memory of a loved one? This is all for the living. What about the deceased – if no one is "living" to perpetuate his/her memory?

We now have a new perspective on how to view the *yom ha'petirah*, day of death, and its anniversary. The day of death underscores the continuation of the life one led on this world. Yaakov *Avinu* taught us that life should be lived with constraints, restrictions, discipline and commitment to a higher, loftier ideal. He imbued his physical existence with spirituality. Thus, death was for him a continuation of "life," a reward for a life well-lived. For Yaakov, and his descendants who follow in his perspective, the day of death is also the birthdate of the *neshamah's* homecoming! Death is the beginning of complete spiritual life. Eisav spurned all of this. He would rather have had a bowl of red lentils than have taken a "chance" on executing the birthright. To each his own.

Spirituality gives one's being a purpose. Sadly, some would rather wallow in self-gratification and self-preservation, but then we would be no better than animals. Intellect might elevate us cognitively over the animal world, but, if we defer to our base instincts and desires, we remain far from elevated. One who achieves spirituality, who rises above the physical/material "self"-dominated world, thus becoming G-dly in nature, truly achieves the purpose of creation. *Va'yipach b'apav nishmas ruach chaim*, "And He blew into his nostrils a soul of living spirit" (*Bereishis* 2:7) describes not only the creation of man, but, I think, his Divine purpose: to be and act like a soul derived from the very breath of Hashem; to be G-dly in nature; to be a living spirit distinct from the nature of animals.

What is the litmus test for defining spirituality – or a spiritual person? A human being's response to pain and suffering demonstrates his true mettle: Is he enveloped in self-gratification, or does he live on a higher plane, with loftier objectives? While some may adapt to and accept their suffering, it does not necessarily mean that they have achieved stability. They just happen to be stoic, strong and resolute. A spiritual person rejoices in the knowledge that he fulfills Hashem's will. Thus, if Hashem's will is that he should suffer, his suffering becomes his service to Hashem, which catalyzes rejoicing. A

person who, despite being plagued with privation and adversity, is able to maintain resilience and serve Hashem joyously – is a spiritual person.

We conjure up in our minds an image of the spiritual person as someone who personifies holiness, studies Torah with its esoteric commentaries all the time; prays for hours, and subsists on practically no material sustenance. While this may be true, spirituality is not exclusively the domain of the outwardly pious and saintly. Some spiritual people are simple Jews whose wholesomeness and innocence have elevated them to a *tzaddik*, righteous, level of observance. Their unquestioning attitude reflects a faith in Hashem that is unequivocal and unperturbed.

Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski, zl, writes about Reuven, a member of his father's *kehillah*, congregation, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Reuven was a spiritual man; he was never seen in a bad mood, always presenting himself as serene and happy. *Shabbos* morning Reuven would come to *shul* two hours before *Shacharis* to recite *Tehillim* in his sweet melodious voice. He was not a learned man, although he attended all the *shiuirim*, classes, given by the *Rebbe*. He had been orphaned as a child, and, as a result, he had never received a proper, formal Jewish education. He knew how to read and was versed in the popular Hebrew and Yiddish aphorisms.

Reuven had emigrated to America in the early 1900's. In order to provide for what had then been his large family, he sold rags from a pushcart. I mention his family because it was the source of his grief. In his home, Reuven had proudly displayed a family picture: Reuven, his wife, and eight sons and daughters. All but two children had predeceased him. Reuven was totally blind in one eye and wore a thick lens over his other eye. He told people that he had become blind as a result of the incessant weeping, the profuse tears that he shed over the deaths of his young wife and six children. He no longer cried, but the pain and suffering were still present. Nonetheless, his suffering did not interfere with his joy in serving Hashem.

For a person whose life is governed by self-gratification – "it's all about me," Reuven's life was far from gratifying. He had every reason to be depressed. He did not, however, measure life on the barometer of physicality. He was not a card-carrying member of the "me" generation. It was all about "Him." He lived a life of purpose, a life of spirituality, a life of devotion to Hashem. Reuven was not bitter, although he had suffered tremendously. He had his *Tehillim*; he had his *shiuirim*; he had Hashem. He was a spiritual man.

לזכות ולרפואה בעד יעקב בן פריידיא

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subject: **Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein**

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

Weekly Parsha TOLDOT 5782

This week's Torah reading begins with the recounting of the generations of Abraham and Isaac. It is titled "Toldot," which literally means the children, as it relates to genealogy, and generations. The Torah reading of a few weeks ago also recounted for us the genealogy and generations of Noah and his sons. But that portion of the Torah was titled "Noach" and not "Toldot."

The opening verse in both instances is practically identical, but the names of the Parshiyot are different. Is there any reason why the previous Torah reading should be called based on the name of person involved, and our Torah reading this week should be called based on the generations and genealogy being described? The Torah reading of this week should have been titled *Yitzchak*, like the Torah reading of Noah.

Although this is hardly the most pertinent observation regarding this week's Torah reading, it has bothered me for several years, and I have found relatively few explanations from the great commentators, who usually have many observations in answer to obvious questions such as this in our eternal Torah. I gave the matter some concentrated thought this past week, and as is usual when one concentrates upon a Torah subject, a glimmer of understanding concerning this matter came to me. It is this idea that I wish to share with you in this week's article regarding the weekly Torah reading.

There is an inherent difference between the generations and genealogy of Noah and that of *Yitzchak*. Both are survivors of great events of danger and trauma. It would be impossible to survive seeing the entire world destroyed, as in the case of Noah, or being sacrificed willingly by one's own father, as was the case with *Yitzchak*, without these events having a lasting impact

upon the survivors who witnessed and experienced them. But it is the reaction itself that differentiates between these two righteous people. Noach, as a survivor, attempts to wipe out the memory of what happened from his conscious mind and behavior. That is why he plants a vineyard, produces wine (to possibly,) becomes drunk, and is shamed and violated by his own progeny. It is understandable that he would want to forget what happened and what he witnessed, and not burden future generations with the memories of the trauma that remains buried within his subconscious. The key to further survival is to forget the past and not transmit it to the later generation. Therefore, the Torah reading involving his life is called only by his name, since there is no intention to transmit to future generations what transpired and why it occurred. In addition, since Noah's shame came specifically through his children and grandchildren, his "toldot," it would have been improper to call the Parsha by their name, calling attention to Noah's trauma.

However, in the case of Yitzchak, far from attempting to forget his being bound on the altar by his father, he desires to transmit that memory and trauma to his descendants, the Jewish people, until this very day. We revere the experience of our father Yitzchak, and his willingness to sacrifice himself for the sake of the God of Israel. This experience has become a hereditary hallmark of Jewish life, and we remember it as a symbol of continuity of generations, and not just as the experience of one individual, no matter how great that individual may have been.

Shabbat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

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A Layman's Guide to Marriage
Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1:

"A friend's son in Yeshiva in Israel got engaged to a local girl, and my friends were told that there will be a tena'im. I thought only chassidische families do this."

Question #2:

"I was told that I should not include quotations from pesukim on my daughter's wedding invitation. Yet, I see that 'everyone' does! Could you please explain the halacha?"

Question #3:

"I wish someone could walk me through all the halachic steps that we need in planning our daughter's wedding. I am afraid I'll forget to take care of something."

From the engagement to the wedding

Mazel tov!! Mazel tov!! Your daughter just became engaged to an amazing yeshivah bachur from a wonderful family. You are in seventh heaven!

Virtually everyone plans some type of formal celebration when his or her child becomes engaged. Some call it a "lechayim," others a "vort," still others a "tena'im," and in Eretz Yisroel today it is usually called an "erusin." Since these differences are not inherently halachic, I am going to note only one point about this part of the simcha: does one sign a tena'im shortly after announcing the engagement? In chassidische circles, and, in Eretz Yisrael, even among "Israeli Litvishe" families, it is accepted that one finalizes the engagement by signing tena'im, which is an agreement between the two sets of parents as to what each will provide to their child before the wedding and to conduct the wedding before a certain agreed-upon date. The climax of the engagement celebration is when this document is signed, parts of it are read aloud, and the two mothers break a plate together. The halachic authorities discuss why we break a plate at a tena'im and a glass at the chupah (see Pri Megadim, Mishbetzos Zahav 560: 4; Keser Rosh, #114). In "American," non-chassidische circles, these arrangements are more informal, and the two parties usually do not sign any formal tena'im. Some sign a type of a tena'im at the wedding, prior to the chupah.

Invitations

There are, actually, some halachos germane to invitations. One may not quote any pesukim in invitations and, according to most authorities, the lettering of an invitation should not use kesav ashuris, the Hebrew writing used for Sifrei Torah, Tefillin and Mezuzos (Shu"t Rav Pe'alim, Yoreh Deah 4:32). This is because kesav ashuris has sanctity and should not be used for mundane matters (Shu"t Radbaz 1:45; Rema, Yoreh Deah 284:2; Pischei Teshuvah, Yoreh Deah 283:3). We should note that the Kesav Sofer writes that his father, the Chasam Sofer, permitted using kesav ashuris in wedding

invitations and did so himself, contending that, since making a wedding is a mitzvah, the invitation to the seudas mitzvah is not considered a mundane use. Nevertheless, the Kesav Sofer concludes that it is better not to use kesav ashuris for invitations (Shu"t Kesav Sofer, Even Ha'ezer #22 at end).

Shomrim

Why do the choson and kallah require shomrim? From what time do the choson and kallah require shomrim?

The Gemara says that three people require a shomer: an ill person, a choson and a kallah (Berachos 54b). Although many people have the custom of providing shomrim from the ufruf Shabbos, technically the choson and kallah require shomrim only from the wedding through the week of sheva berachos. The prevalent practice is that this includes only when they leave their house. This means that during sheva berachos week, the choson may attend minyan only if someone escorts him from his house, although some hold that a choson can go to shul without a shomer (told to me in the name of Rav Moshe Feinstein).

It is common practice to provide them with shomrim on the day of the wedding also.

Things to bring to the wedding

The following can function as a useful checklist of items that should be brought to the wedding:

(1) Kesubah

From personal experience, I suggest bringing not only the kesubah one intends to use, but also several blank extra forms.

(2) Kittel

If the choson will be wearing a kittel under the chupah, remember to bring it.

(3) Candles and matches

Four candles for the shushbinin, who are the two couples that will escort the choson and kallah, and matches with which to light the candles. The matches are also useful in the creation of ashes that will be placed on the choson's forehead before he walks to the chupah.

(4) Wine

Many deliberately bring a bottle of white wine, a position that I advocate, to avoid concerns of red wine staining a white wedding dress. (I am aware of some poskim who prefer that one use red wine at a chupah. However, I prefer white wine, since it spares the worry of a stained gown.)

(5) Berachos

Cards, or something similar, with all the berachos for the various honorees.

(6) Ring

The wedding ring. This should be a ring without a precious stone (Even Ha'ezer 31:2). Some rabbonim prefer that it have no design at all. It is important that the ring be the property of the choson. In other words, the choson must either purchase it with his own money, or whoever purchased it must give it to the choson as a gift and the choson must pick it up to acquire it. So, if the bride wants to use her late great-grandmother's wedding ring, they should make sure that the current, rightful owner of that ring gives it to the choson, with no strings attached, prior to the wedding.

(7) Glass

A well-wrapped glass that will be broken. (Note that the Rema [Even Ha'ezer 65:3] states that the choson should break the glass that was used to hold the wine of the wedding beracha. Although I have seen this actually practiced, it is definitely not the common, contemporary custom.)

(8) Key

Make sure that someone has the key to the yichud room!

Wow!! We have actually gotten all the way to the wedding! What happens next?

The choson tish

If the tena'im were not performed earlier, some people make a tena'im now. If the tena'im will take place at the wedding, then one should also have a plate that one intends to break.

The kesubah is filled out and signed at the choson tish. (In Eretz Yisrael, many follow the practice of not signing the kesubah until the choson and kallah are under the chupah.)

At this point, we will introduce the mesader kiddushin, the talmid chacham who is honored with making certain that the halachic aspects of the wedding are performed correctly.

Kabalas kinyan

Following the instructions of the mesader kiddushin, the choson lifts up a pen, handkerchief, or other item as a means of kinyan in the presence of two witnesses. By doing this, he assumes the financial responsibilities of a husband and future father. Should we use the same witnesses?

There are two prevalent practices regarding the witnesses, usually dependent on the preference of the mesader kiddushin. The more common American practice is that each part of the ceremony -- the signing of the kesubah, the kiddushin itself, and the yichud --

are witnessed by different sets of witnesses, in order to honor more people. In Eretz Yisrael, the common practice is to have one set of witnesses for all the stages. The Tashbeitz (2:7) explains that once one honored someone with performing a mitzvah, we encourage that he perform the rest of the mitzvah (hamaschil bemitzvah omrim lo gemor). Other reasons for this custom are provided by the Eizer Mikodesh (end of Even Ha'ezer 42) and Rav Shelomoh Zalman Auerbach.

Signing of kesubah

After the choson makes the kabbalas kinyan, the witnesses carefully read through the kesubah and then sign it (Rema, Even Ha'ezer 66:1 and Choshen Mishpat 45:2). If they are attesting to something by signing, they must know what it is.

Choson signing kesubah

Many have the practice that the choson also signs the kesubah, beneath the witnesses' signatures. This practice dates back to the times of the rishonim and demonstrates that the choson approves what the witnesses are signing (Rashba, Bava Basra 175; Eizer Mikodesh 66:1 s.v. hayah ta'us).

Bedeken

The choson, escorted by the two fathers and accompanied by the celebrants, now goes to badek the kallah, by pulling the veil over her head. At this point, the kallah's father and perhaps others bless her. The celebrants then proceed to the chupah.

The Chupah

The chupah itself should, ideally, be open on all four sides (Eizer MiKodesh). This is reminiscent of the tent of Avraham Avinu and Sarah Imeinu, whose tent was accessible from all four directions of the globe, so as not to inconvenience any potential guests. We are conveying blessing upon the bride and groom that the house they build together be as filled with chesed as the house of Avraham and Sarah was.

Immediately prior to walking to the chupah, the mesader kiddushin places some ashes above the choson's forehead. The ashes are placed where the choson wears his tefillin, and are immediately removed, and serve to remind the choson that even at this moment of tremendous joy, he should remember that our Beis Hamikdash lies in ruins. This, literally, fulfills the verse in Yeshayah (61:3), To place on the mourners of Zion and to give them splendor instead of ashes, where the Navi promises that in the future we will replace the ashes that currently remind us of the churban (Even Ha'ezer 65:3).

Chupah under the Stars

The prevalent Ashkenazic practice is that the chupah is conducted outdoors or under an open skylight, in order to provide a beracha for the marrying couple that their descendants be as numerous as the stars (Rema, Even Ha'ezer 61:1). However, if a couple prefers to hold their chupah under a roof, the mesader kiddushin should still perform the wedding ceremony for them, since there is no violation to perform the chupah this way (Shu"t Igros Moshe, Even Ha'ezer 1:93).

Jewelry at the Chupah

There is a common custom that the kallah removes all her jewelry before she goes to the chupah. Some explain that this custom is based on the Mishnah that after the churban of the Beis Hamikdash, Chazal decreed that the choson and kallah should no longer wear the crowns that they were accustomed to wearing before that time (Sotah 49a).

Although removing jewelry may be associated with this idea, most authorities contend that this is only a custom borrowed from this idea, but is not required. If it were required, then wearing jewelry would be prohibited from the night before the wedding, until the end of sheva berachos (see Mishnah Berurah 560:17).

Accepted practice is to prohibit only silver, gold or jewelry of precious stones that are worn on the kallah's head, and only at the chupah (Mishnah Berurah 560:17, quoting Pri Megadim). However, some authorities prohibit a kallah from wearing any silver or gold jewelry the entire sheva berachos week (Yam shel Shelomoh, Gittin 1:19).

Wearing a Kittel

The common practice among Eastern European Jews is that the choson wears a kittel at the chupah. The reason for wearing the kittel is tied closely to the wedding day as his personal day of atonement, and is to encourage the choson to do teshuvah on this day. When does he put on the kittel? There are two common practices: some have the choson wear the kittel folded up under his suit jacket, whereas others have the kittel placed on top of his suit as soon as he stands under the chupah, and remove the kittel either immediately after the chupah or in the cheder yichud.

The accepted practice is that the shushbin places the kittel on the choson. His "dressing" the choson reinforces the idea that the wedding day is a day of teshuvah and atonement – it should remind the choson, when he puts on the kittel for the first time, of the day when he will be wearing his kittel for the last time (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 147:4). Who walks them down?

The choson and kallah are escorted by two couples, called the shushbinin, who are usually their parents. There was an old custom that the shushbinin should both be couples who are married in their first marriage (cited by Eizer Mikodesh 68:2, who says that he is uncertain of the origin of this custom). Some have a custom that a woman who is visibly pregnant should not serve as a shushbin (Shearim Hametzuyanin

Bahalacha 147:12). Since these practices are custom and not halacha, when following them may create a dispute, shalom is more important.

There are two common practices as to who, specifically, escorts the choson and who escorts the kallah. Some have the custom that the choson is escorted by the two male shushbinin, and the kallah by the two female shushbinin, whereas others have each escorted by a couple. To decide what to do, I quote a well-known practice of Rav Yaakov Kamenetski, who at three of his children's marriages had the shushbinin walk as couples and at the other three had the fathers escorting the choson and the mothers escorting the kallah. His rule: I did whatever the mechutan preferred.

Kallah on the Right

Based on a verse in Tehillim (45:10) that teaches that the place of honor for a princess is to be stationed on the right, the kallah stands to the right and the choson to the left.

Standing at the Chupah

In America, the guests usually sit throughout the chupah ceremony, whereas, in Eretz Yisrael, the standard practice is that everyone stands throughout the chupah. The latter practice, or, more specifically, that everyone stands while the sheva berachos are recited, is quoted in the name of the Zohar (see Shu"t Ha'e'le'ef Lecha Shelomoh, Even Ha'ezer #115).

Erusin and Nesuin

There are two stages to a Jewish wedding. The first stage is called kiddushin or erusin (not to be confused with the Modern Hebrew word erusin, which means "engagement"), and is focused on the choson giving the wedding ring to the kallah. The second step is called nesuin. In Talmudic times, these two stages were conducted separately – often as much as a year apart. After kiddushin, the couple is married, but do not yet live together.

Today, the two stages are conducted as one long ceremony.

Is the Kallah's face covered?

The Rema (31:2) cites an old Ashkenazic custom that the kallah's face is covered at her chupah. The Rema does not say how thick the veil is, although we find a dispute among later authorities about this. Some authorities object strongly to the kallah wearing a veil that is so thick that the witnesses cannot identify her (Mabit, quoted by Pischei Teshuvah 31:5). Others rule that it is not problematic for the veil to be this thick, and, therefore, in many places the custom is that the kallah wears a very thick veil.

The mesader kiddushin recites the beracha of borei pri hagafen on behalf of the choson and the kallah. They should have in mind to be included in his beracha and not to interrupt before they drink the wine (see Afikei Yam 2:2). According to some opinions Shu"t Noda Beyehuda, Even Ha'ezer #1), the choson should also have in mind to be included in the birchas erusin, but most contend that he is not required to recite this beracha (see Shu"t Har Tzvi, Orach Chayim #44, who quotes this from the Tevuos Shor, Rabbi Akiva Eiger, and several other authorities). The choson and kallah then sip from the cup. The most common practice is that the mesader kiddushin gives the choson to drink, and then hands the cup to the kallah's mother, who gives her to drink. The choson and kallah need to drink only a small sip of the wine (Be'er Heiteiv, Even Ha'ezer 34:6; Amudei Apiryon page 71).

Yichud Eidim

On behalf of the choson, the mesader kiddushin appoints the two witnesses, and then asks the witnesses, within earshot of the kallah, whether the ring is worth a perutah, which is worth only a few cents. The reason for this strange conversation is so that the kallah agrees to be married, even if the ring is worth so little (Rema, Even Ha'ezer 31:2).

According to many authorities, the witnesses must see the choson place the ring on the kallah's finger (Shu"t Harashba 1:780; Rema, Even Ha'ezer 42:4). Although most authorities rule that this is not essential, the accepted practice is to be certain that the witnesses see the actual placing of the ring on the kallah's finger (Pischei Teshuva, Even Ha'ezer 42:12).

Reading the kesubah

At this point, the kesubah is read to interrupt between the erusin and the nesuin, and then the sheva berachos are recited. Although some authorities question how one can divide the sheva berachos, the accepted practice is to divide them among six, and in some places seven, honorees (Shu"t Igros Moshe, Even Ha'ezer #94; cf. Har Tzvi).

Out of order

One should be careful to make sure that each person being honored knows which beracha he is supposed to recite. If the berachos are recited out of order, one should not repeat a beracha, but recite the skipped beracha and then proceed to recite the remaining berachos. Similarly, if the honoree began reciting the wrong beracha, including Hashem's Name, he should complete the beracha he has begun, after which the remaining berachos are recited. If someone began reciting either the beracha of Sos tasis or Samayach tesamach, which do not begin with Hashem's Name, out of order, he should stop and the correct beracha should be recited (Amudei Apiryon page 76).

Putting his foot down

After the sheva berachos are completed, the choson smashes a glass (Rema, Even Ha'ezer 65:3). (According to an alternative practice, the choson smashes the glass earlier in the ceremony, immediately after the kiddushin are completed.) Many have the custom that prior to breaking the glass, the choson or the audience sings the pasuk, "im eshkeich Yerushalayim..." This custom has sources in rishonim (Sefer Hachassidim #392).

The choson and kallah are then escorted with music and dancing to the yichud room. Two witnesses, called the eidei yichud, make sure that there is no one else in the yichud room, and then remain posted outside for the amount of time that the mesader kiddushin instructs them.

Conclusion

Having studied the basic customs of our weddings, let us examine an observation of the Noda Biyehudah germane to the priorities people use for checking out shidduchin: "I am astonished that most people have no concern about marrying their daughter to a halachic ignoramus, notwithstanding the words of Chazal about the importance of marrying her to a Talmudic scholar... yet they are concerned about having her marry someone whose name is the same as her father's, which has no Talmudic basis or source" (Shu"t Noda Biyehudah, Even Ha'ezer 2:79). Thus, we see what factors are significant in a marriage: The chosson should be a Torah scholar, and his bride, a ye'rei'ah Shamayim.

<https://oukosher.org/halacha-yomis/>

Halacha Yomis

What is mayim achronim (washing hands at the end of the meal) and is it obligatory?

At the conclusion of a bread meal, there is a mitzvah to wash one's fingers before Birkas Hamazon. This mitzvah is called mayim achronim (the final waters, as opposed to netilas yadayim when we wash our hands at the beginning of the meal). We find two separate reasons for this mitzvah in different sections of the Talmud. In Chulin (105b) we learn that mayim achronim was instituted to wash off melech Sedomis (salt from Sedom) which may have adhered to the fingers during the meal. Melech Sedomis is a very strong variety of salt, and if a person would touch his eyes after the meal with soiled fingers, melech Sedomis could possibly cause blindness. According to this reason, we wash mayim achronim as a matter of safety. However, the Gemara Berachos (53b) finds an allusion for mayim achronim in the verse "V'hiyisem Kedoshim", and you shall be holy (Vayikra 11:46). Mayim achronim promotes holiness because we cannot recite berachos when our hands are not clean. Since it is common for hands to be soiled at the end of a meal, Chazal instituted a uniform requirement to wash our hands before we bentch.

Initially, Shulchan Aruch (181:1) writes that mayim achronim is obligatory. However, at the end of the same chapter, Shulchan Aruch (181:10) states that some do not observe the custom of mayim achronim. The opinion of Tosfos is that mayim achronim is no longer required because Sedomis salt is not common, and most people are not finicky about the cleanliness of their hands. Still, the Mishnah Berurah cites many poskim who maintain that mayim achronim is mandatory today as well. In addition, there are Kabbalistic reasons to fulfill this mitzvah. The Aruch Hashulchan (181:5) strongly advocates to wash mayim achronim, first because many poskim disagree with Tosofos and maintain that V'hiyisem Kedoshim is still relevant. Furthermore, the position of Tosofos that we no longer have Sedomis salt is debatable, as it may be that sea salt has traces of such potent salt mixed in. In fact, it may be that Tosofos recognized this possibility as well, and only sought to be milamed zechus (to offer justification) for those people who did not wash mayim achronim.

It thus appears that while there is some rationalization to be lenient, it is clearly preferable to wash mayim achronim.