

Home Weekly Parsha TOLDOT
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

Rashi, quoting Midrash, interprets that Eisav, "haunted" his father with his pious speech and cunning conversation. Yitzchak is fooled by Eisav and believes that Eisav, the man of the world and the physically powerful figure is better suited to carry on Avraham's vision than is Yaakov, the more studious and apparently more simple of the brothers.

The other opinion, more popular among the later commentators to the Torah, is that Yitzchak is aware of the shortcomings of behavior and attitude of his elder son. His desire to give the blessings to Eisav is due to his wish to redeem and save his son, and to enable Eisav to turn his life around and become a worthy heir to the traditions of his father and grandfather. He thinks that by somehow giving the blessings to Eisav, Yaakov will not really suffer any disadvantage in his life's work, while Eisav will find his way back to holiness through the blessings that he has now received.

These two divergent attitudes towards the wayward child in Jewish families is one that is enacted daily in Jewish family life. Later Yitzchaks either willfully allow themselves to be deluded regarding the behavior and lifestyle of children or they are aware of the problem and attempt to solve it with a giving nature and a plethora of blessings.

Rivkah, Eisav's mother, is not fooled by her son's apparently soothing words nor does she believe that granting him blessings will somehow accomplish any major shift in his chosen lifestyle. To a great measure she adopts a policy of triage, saving Yaakov and blessing him while thus abandoning Eisav to his own chosen wanton ways.

The Torah does not record for us the "what if" scenario – what if Eisav had received the blessings would he then have been different in behavior and attitude, belief and mission. However, from the words of the later prophets of Israel, especially those of Ovadiah, it appears to be clear that God somehow concurred with Rivkah's policy and holds Eisav to be redeemable only in the very long run of history and human events.

The verdict seems to be that one must be clear eyed and realistic about the painful waywardness and misbehavior of enemies of Yaakov, be they from within or without our immediate family and milieu. There are many painful choices that need to be made within one's lifetime and especially in family relations.

There are few pat answers to varying and difficult situations. Perhaps that is why the Torah itself does not delve too deeply into the motives of Yitzchak and Rivkah but is content merely to reflect the different emotional relationships each had with their two very different sons. The Torah emphasizes the role that human emotions play in our lives and does not consign all matters to rational thought and decision-making.

Shabat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

Rabbi Yissocher Frand
Parshas Toldos

Yitzchak Learned the "Art" in His Father's House

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly portion: #1313 – An Orthodox Minyan in a Conservative Shul: Is there A Problem with Ma'aris Ayin? Good Shabbos!

The pasuk in Parshas Toldos says, "And Yitzchak entreated Hashem opposite his wife, because she was barren..." (Bereshis 25:21). Chazal say that Yitzchak stood in one corner and Rivka stood in another corner and they both davened. However, the pasuk continues "...Hashem listened to him, and his wife conceived." Rashi comments on the fact that the pasuk does not say that "He listened to them," but rather, "He listened to him." Rashi notes: There is no comparison between the prayers of a tzadik (righteous person) who is the son of a tzadik, and the prayers of a tzadik who is the son of a rasha (wicked person).

On the face of it, this teaching of Chazal, which Rashi quotes, contradicts a well-known Gemara. The Talmud states: "In a place where ba'alei teshuva (people who were not originally religious and "returned"

to religious Judaism) stand, completely righteous people cannot stand." (Berachos 34b). This teaching seems to clearly say that a tzadik who is the son of a rasha is on a higher spiritual level than a second generation tzadik. According to that, Rivka's prayers that she should become pregnant should have been more readily accepted than the prayers of her husband Yitzchak.

How do we reconcile these two teachings? I saw a very important principle of prayer in a sefer called Me'Orei Ohr.

There is a fellow here in Baltimore who is an expert glass blower from Italy. His works appear in museums. He is a seventh-generation glass blower. Glass blowing is in his veins. He saw it done in his parents' house. He saw it done in his grandparents' house. It is an art. If I would try it, all I would get is broken glass. Even if I would take lessons and learn how to do it, I would never reach this fellow's level of expertise, simply because I am starting from scratch without any prior exposure to this art form.

Similarly, sometimes people are natural born athletes. The person's father played in the NFL. He played in the NFL. When such people live it their entire lives, something rubs off. They have a leg up on other people, who may try to become professional athletes without such a background.

L'havdil, tefilla is also an art. Tefilla is not just opening a siddur and mouthing the words of Shemoneh Esrei. It is a skill, an art form. So, in terms of spiritual level, perhaps Rivka was on a higher spiritual level by virtue of her being a ba'alas teshuva, than Yitzchak who was born into a spiritually inclined family. However, in terms of the efficacy of tefilla – how to go about davening – what emotions a person employs, etc., Yitzchak lived that in his father's house. His prayers were not accepted because he was on a "higher madreigah" than his wife, but simply because he was more aware of the art and science of how to daven, a skill he learned in his family's home. He knew "the art of glass blowing," except that it wasn't glass blowing, it was the power of tefilla.

Yaakov Maintained the Enthusiasm of "Day One"
I saw the following interesting observation in Rabbi Buchspan's sefer. The pasuk says, "The lads grew up, and Eisav became a man who knows trapping, a man of the field; but Yaakov was a wholesome man, abiding in tents." (Bereshis 25:27).

Chazal say that the expression "abiding in tents" indicates that Yaakov learned in yeshiva. He learned in Yeshivas Shem v'Ever. This pasuk ostensibly describes Yaakov and Eisav. However, shouldn't the pasuk say that Yaakov yashav b'ohalim (i.e. – he sat in the yeshiva), in past tense? Yoshev ohalim means he is sitting there, in the present.

There are two other places in Sefer Bereshis where the Torah uses the word yoshev instead of yashav, both times indicating something significant. For instance, the pasuk in Parshas Vayera says, "And the two Angels came to Sodom and Lot was sitting (yoshev) in the Gates of Sodom." (Bereshis 19:1). The fact that the present tense was used rather than the historical past teaches us (as Rashi comments) that it was specifically that day that Lot was appointed to a judicial position in Sodom. Yoshev means that today was his first day.

A second example is in last week's parsha: Efron was sitting (yoshev) in the midst of the children of Ches." (Bereshis 23:10). Rashi there as well comments that it was just that day that Efron was appointed as a judge over the children of Ches. Thus, when the pasuk writes yoshev rather than yoshav, it means that he just started today.

So, what are we going to do about the pasuk "Yaakov ish tam, yoshev ohalim"? It can't mean that this was his first day! The Medrash (on the pasuk "and the lads grew up" (Bereshis 25:27)) writes that this is reminiscent of two flowers that sprouted up next to one another – a myrtle and a thorn-bush. At the beginning of their sprouting, they look similar. However, when they grow up, one emits its beautiful aroma and the other one gives off thorns. So too, the first thirteen years of their lives, both Yaakov and Eisav attended school each day. After thirteen years, this one went off to the house of study and this one went off to the

house of idolatry. They both went to the same cheder, but after their Bar Mitzvahs, Yaakov took one path and Eisav took another path.

So what does it mean “yoshev ohalim”? After all Yaakov was in cheder since age three or perhaps age five. The answer is that the special attribute of Yaakov was that it was as if it were his first day in yeshiva. Yaakov’s quest for learning was such that each day felt like it was “day one.” Each day feeling like “day one” indicates a special level of enthusiasm and excitement.

Rashi says on the pasuk “And these words that I command to you today shall be upon your heart.” (Devarim 6:6) – that they should not be upon you like an old edict but rather like a new one. This is one of the great challenges of life. It is one of the great challenges of every yeshiva bachur and of everything we do in life. It is very common that everything we do becomes “Same old; same old.” It is just another day.

If a person had this ability to treat every day as if it were new, like the first day, then our attitude would be quite different. This is a very appropriate message to any Bar Mitzvah boy. On the first day that a boy wears tefillin, it is amazing how carefully and meticulously he wraps the tefillos around his arm and puts the shel rosh on his head. The same is true on the first day of a new school year or of attending a new yeshiva. I remember the first day that I attended Ner Yisrael. It is seared into my memory for the rest of my life.

Unfortunately, that original enthusiasm wears off. It does not take too long to become “Same old; same old. Day in, day out.” The greatness of Yaakov Avinu was that he was a yoshev ohalim. Each day was a new day, like day one in yeshiva! It is hard for us to duplicate that, but the more we can appreciate every day in yeshiva (which does not last forever), the more successful we will be in yeshiva.

The Tragedy of Good Intentions

Toldot

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

It is the deep, reverberating question at the heart of Toldot. Why did Rebecca tell Jacob to deceive Isaac and take Esau’s blessing? Her instruction is brisk and peremptory:

“Now, my son, listen carefully and do what I tell you: Go now to the flock and bring me two choice young goats, so I can prepare some tasty food for your father, just the way he likes it. Then take it to your father to eat, so that he may give you his blessing before he dies.”

Gen. 27:8-10

Rebecca’s swift action is extraordinary. The situation had only just arisen – she could not have known in advance that Isaac was about to bless Esau, or that he would request some venison first – yet her plan was immediate, detailed and complete. She had no doubts or hesitations. She was determined to seize the moment. When Jacob raised concerns (What if Isaac is not deceived? What if he touches my skin and knows immediately that I am not Esau?) her reply is brief and blunt.

“My son, let the curse fall on me. Just do what I say; go and get them for me.”

Gen. 27:13

Our question tends to be, how could Jacob deceive his father? Yet the real question is about Rebecca. It was her plan, not his. How did she consider it permissible [1] to deceive her husband, [2] to deprive Esau of his father’s blessing, and [3] to order Jacob to commit an act of dishonesty? Jacob on his own would not have conceived such a plan. He was an ish tam, meaning “a simple, straightforward, plain, quiet, innocent man, a man of integrity” (Gen. 25:27)? How then did Rebecca come to do what she did?

There are three possible answers. The first: Rachel loved Jacob (Gen. 25:28). She preferred him to Esau, but she knew Isaac felt otherwise. So she was driven by maternal instinct. She wanted her beloved son to be blessed.

This is an unlikely answer. The patriarchs and matriarchs are role-models. They were not driven by mere instinct or vicarious ambition. Rebecca was not Lady Macbeth. Nor was she Bathsheba, engaging in court politics to ensure that her son, Solomon, would inherit David’s

throne (see 1 Kings 1). It would be a serious misreading to interpret the narrative this way.

The second possibility is that she believed strongly that Esau was the wrong person to inherit the blessing. She had already seen how readily he had sold his birthright and “despised” it (Gen. 25:31-34). She did not believe a “hunter” and “a man of the field” fitted the template of the Abrahamic covenant. She knew that this was one of the reasons why God chose Isaac not Ishmael, because Ishmael was destined to be “a wild ass of a man” (Gen. 16:12). She knew that Isaac loved Esau but felt – for various reasons, depending on which commentary one follows – that he was blind to his son’s faults. It was vital to the future of the covenant that it be entrusted to the child who had the right qualities to live by its high demands.

The third possibility is simply that she was guided by the oracle she had received prior to the twins’ birth:

“Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.”

Gen. 25:23

Jacob was the younger. Therefore, Rebecca must have assumed, he was destined to receive the blessing.

Possibilities two and three make sense, but only at the cost of raising a more fundamental question. Did Rebecca share her thoughts with Isaac? If she did, then why did Isaac persist in seeking to bless Esau? If she did not, then why not?

It is here that we must turn to a fundamental insight of the Netziv (R. Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin, 1816-1893). What is fascinating is that Netziv makes his comment, not on this week’s parsha, but on last week’s – the first time Rebecca set eyes on her husband-to-be. Recall that Isaac did not choose his wife. Abraham entrusted that task to his servant. Servant and bride-to-be are travelling back by camel, and as they approach Abraham’s tents, Rebecca sees a figure in the distance. Now Isaac had come from Beer Lahai Roi, for he was living in the Negev. He went out to the field one evening to meditate, and as he looked up, he saw camels approaching. Rebecca also looked up and saw Isaac. She got down from her camel and asked the servant, “Who is that man in the field coming to meet us?” “He is my master,” the servant answered. So she took her veil and covered herself.

Gen. 24:62-65

On this Netziv comments,

“She covered herself out of awe and a sense of inadequacy as if she felt she was unworthy to be his wife, and from then on this trepidation was fixed in her mind. Her relationship with Isaac was not the same as that between Sarah and Abraham or Rachel and Jacob. When they had a problem they were not afraid to speak about it. Not so with Rebecca.”

Commentary to Gen. 24:65

Netziv understood that in this description of the first encounter between Rebecca and Isaac, nothing is incidental. The text emphasises distance in every sense. Isaac is physically far away when Rebecca spots him. He is also mentally far away: meditating, deep in thought and prayer. Rebecca imposes her own distance by covering herself with a veil.

The distance goes deeper still. Isaac is the most withdrawn of the patriarchs. Rarely do we see him as the initiator of a course of action. The events of his life seem to mirror those of his father. The Torah associates him with pachad, “fear” (Gen. 31:42). Jewish mysticism connected him with gevurah, best understood as “self-restraint.” This is the man who had been bound as a sacrifice on an altar, whose life had been reprieved only at the last moment. Isaac, whether because of the trauma of that moment or because of the inhibiting effect of having a strong father, is a man whose emotions often lie too deep for words.

No wonder, then, that he loves Rebecca on the one hand, Esau on the other. What these two very different people have in common is that they are so unlike him. They are both brisk and action-oriented. Their “native hue of resolution” is not “sicklied o’er by the pale cast of thought.”[1] No wonder, too, that Rebecca hesitates before speaking to him.

Just before the episode of the blessing, another scene takes place, apparently unrelated to what follows. There is a famine in the land. Isaac

and Rebecca are forced into temporary exile, as Abraham and Sarah had been twice before. On God's instructions, they go to Gerar. There, just as Abraham had done, Isaac passes off his wife as his sister, afraid that he might be killed so that his wife could be taken into the royal harem. Something happens, however, to disclose the truth:

"When Isaac had been there a long time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked down from a window and saw Isaac caressing [metzachek] his wife Rebecca.

Gen. 26:8

We tend to miss the significance of this scene. It is the only one in which Isaac is the subject of the verb tz-ch-k. Yet this is the root of Isaac's name – Yitzchak - meaning "he will laugh." It is the one scene of intimacy between Isaac and Rebecca. It is the only episode in which Isaac, as it were, is true to his name. Yet it nearly brings disaster. Abimelech is furious that Isaac has been economical with the truth. It is the first of a series of disputes with the Philistines.

Did this reinforce Isaac's belief that he could never relax? Did it confirm Rebecca's belief that she could never be unequivocally intimate with her husband? Perhaps so, perhaps not. But Netziv's point remains. Rebecca felt unable to share with Isaac the oracle she had received before the twins' birth and the doubts she had about Esau's suitability for the blessing. Her inability to communicate led to the deception, which brought a whole series of tragedies in its wake, among them the fact that Jacob was forced to flee for his life, as well as the counter-deception perpetrated against him by his father-in-law Laban.

It is hard to avoid the conclusion that the Torah is telling us that communication is vital, however hard it is. Rebecca acts at all times out of the highest of motives. She holds back from troubling Isaac out of respect for his inwardness and privacy. She does not want to disillusion him about Esau, the son he loves. She does not want to trouble him with her oracle, suggesting as it did that the two boys would be locked into a lifelong struggle. Yet the alternative – deception – is worse.

We have here a story of the tragedy of good intentions. Honesty and openness are at the heart of strong relationships. Whatever our fears and trepidations, it is better to speak the truth than practice even the most noble deception.

[1] From Hamlet's 'To Be or Not To Be' soliloquy, Act 3, Scene 1.

Divination, Tarot Cards, and Coffee Reading

Revivim

The use of divination, tarot cards, or coffee reading to predict the future, or uncover hidden truths, is prohibited by the Torah * One should not attempt to foresee the future using magic or trickery; instead, we must confront challenges through the natural means provided by God * Consulting true prophets for guidance about the future is permitted, as their words are truthful, and intended to guide us along the path of Torah * Reservists and active-duty soldiers should recite the Birkat HaGomel blessing after every period of combat service

"Peninei Halakha" Daily Study

On Thursday, the 20th of Cheshvan, as part of the "Peninei Halakha" daily study program, which approximately 6,000 people follow by studying two sections from "Peninei Halakha" books each day, a new book, Brachot, will be started. Initially, I thought this learning schedule was too limited, as it would be more fitting to study halachot at a faster pace—perhaps ten sections a day, to cover the entire series in a year. However, I realized that even studying two sections daily is meaningful, as small increments add up to significant accomplishments. By year's end, with God's help, we will complete the volume on Brachot, and the two volumes on the laws of Shabbat. A notable benefit of focusing on just two sections a day is the opportunity to reflect on them throughout the day, making the learning more impactful. For example, by studying Brachot, one becomes more mindful of each blessing, imbuing life with deeper meaning.

Birkat HaGomel for Soldiers

Q: Should our brave soldiers, defending our people and land, recite Birkat HaGomel each time they return home for a short leave?

A: The general rule for Birkat HaGomel is that it is recited only after the danger has passed. This applies to someone who travels in a caravan for several months, or sails on a months-long voyage, which historically were fraught with danger. After completing the journey, Birkat HaGomel has to be recited.

In practice, a reservist should recite Birkat HaGomel at the end of each reserve duty period, even if they know they will be called again in a month. The blessing should be recited after each completed period. Similarly, active-duty soldiers should recite Birkat HaGomel after completing each period of frontline service. For instance, someone deployed in Lebanon for an indeterminate period of weeks or months, should recite the blessing after that combat period ends. Even a week-long leave (regila) or training session could mark a break between combat periods, warranting the recitation of Birkat HaGomel.

Additionally, even though operations in Judea and Samaria are currently considered less dangerous, Birkat HaGomel should still be recited after each service period in those areas (see, Peninei Halakha: Brachot 16:9).

May God grant our soldiers the strength to vanquish all our enemies, protect them from harm, and bring them home safely. In the merit of the great mitzvah they fulfill—equal to all other mitzvot—they, and their families, will be blessed with abundant goodness.

Divination Practices

Q: Is it permissible to use divination, tarot cards, or coffee reading to predict the future, or uncover hidden truths?

A: These practices are forbidden by the Torah. Before explaining the prohibition, let us briefly describe these methods:

Divination (Goralot)

Divination involves casting lots, such as rolling dice, to predict the future. Some forms answer simple yes-or-no questions, while others are more complex, based on astrology. Practitioners interpret a person's fate based on their birth date, and cast lots to determine personality traits, future events, and potential challenges. All forms of divination are prohibited by the Torah.

Tarot Card Reading

Similar to divination, tarot card reading involves shuffling a deck of cards, laying them face down, and drawing cards at random. The cards are then interpreted to predict the future or offer advice, based on the belief that random selection aligns with the questioner's fate, and inner world. Predicting the future using tarot cards is also forbidden.

Coffee Reading

Coffee reading involves interpreting the residue left by a beverage of coffee. Proponents believe that when someone drinks, their spirit interacts with the liquid, and their subconscious knowledge of the future is transferred to the residue. The patterns left in the cup are said to reveal these insights. Predicting the future through this method is likewise forbidden.

The Prohibition of Divination

The Torah explicitly forbids these practices under the commandment "You shall be wholehearted with the Lord your God" (Devarim 18:13; Shulchan Aruch Yoreh De'ah 179:1). This mitzvah teaches us to trust that all events occur under divine providence, guiding us toward truth and goodness. Even when hardships arise, they are intended to prompt personal growth. Seeking to predict the future through magical means violates this commandment, and distracts from the natural methods God has given us to address life's challenges. These natural efforts lead to personal improvement.

However, consulting true prophets is permitted, because their words are truthful, and intended to guide us according to Torah principles.

The Prohibition of "Kossem" and "Menachesh" (Soothsaying and Divination)

Additionally, there is room to say these practices are also forbidden due to the Torah's prohibition against "kossem" (soothsaying) and "menachesh" (divination), as it is written:

"There shall not be found among you... one who practices divination, soothsaying, or witchcraft... For whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord... You shall be wholehearted with the Lord, your God" (Deuteronomy 18:10-13).

Definition of “Kossem” (Soothsayer)

A kossem is someone who performs various actions to predict the future.

Examples include:

Repeatedly striking a stick while uttering strange sounds.

Stirring sand to form patterns.

Handling stones or sand.

Long contemplation of a mirror or a flame in a lamp.

Bowing to the ground in strange movements.

All these actions aim to achieve a meditative or hypnotic state to connect with “supernatural” forces, enabling them to predict the future, or reveal hidden matters (see Rambam, Avodah Zarah 11:6; Sefer HaChinuch 510).

Definition of “Menachesh” (Diviner)

The term menachesh stems from the idea of “hastening” (Ramban). Naturally, a person does not know what will happen in the future, but a diviner seeks to hasten knowledge of future events through current occurrences, even if there is no logical causal connection. For instance:

Someone sees a piece of bread fall from their hand, or their walking stick drop, and they interpret this as a sign to abandon plans for the day (Sanhedrin 65b).

Similarly, those who cast lots, read tarot cards, or interpret coffee grounds use certain actions like a kossem to predict the future. Based on random outcomes from lots, cards, or coffee shapes, they predict events or offer guidance, which falls under the prohibition of menachesh.

The Lenient Halachic View

Among those inclined to the worlds of mysticism and Kabbalah, some Torah scholars have used casting lots. Their rationale is as follows:

The prohibition of lots arises when one connects with impure forces to obtain worldly benefits. However, casting lots in the context of repentance, reverence for Heaven, and prayer to God—seeking Divine guidance for future actions—does not violate the prohibitions of kossem or menachesh.

Even so, they agree that when lots are cast by individuals lacking reverence for Heaven, or performed without repentance and prayer, impure forces become involved, rendering the practice forbidden (see Rema and Levush, Yoreh De’ah 179:14).

Regarding the commandment to be “wholehearted with God” (tamim tihyeh), these lenient authorities argue that predicting the future with absolute certainty is prohibited. Since they believe in repentance and prayer to alter the future, they do not make definitive predictions, thus avoiding a violation of tamim tihyeh.

A similar claim could be made by those reading coffee grounds, or using tarot cards: as long as they act with reverence for Heaven, accompanied by prayer and inspiring their questioners to repentance, they believe no prohibition is transgressed.

Did our Sages of Old Use Lots?

According to lenient opinions, some great figures of earlier generations utilized lots. This argument is based on Jewish books of lots and mystical remedies written in Hebrew, attributed to giants of Jewish scholarship such as Rav Saadia Gaon, Rav Tzemach Gaon, Ibn Ezra, and others.

However, the majority of halachic authorities reject this claim. Since the vast majority of our Sages explicitly stated that using lots is prohibited, it is unlikely that these practices originated from great Jewish scholars. Additionally, many lots described in Jewish mystical texts were previously recorded in gentile Greek, Roman, and Muslim texts, and rooted in pagan and magical traditions.

The lenient authorities counter that ignorant copyists inadvertently included lots and mystical remedies from idol worshippers and magicians in ancient Jewish books. They claim to have refined these works, only using lots rooted in authentic Jewish teachings.

Practical Halakha

Even if we accept the lenient position that one acting solely for the sake of Heaven does not violate the prohibition of kossem or menachesh, the practice remains prohibited due to the mitzvah of tamim tihyeh (wholeheartedness with God). This is as codified in the Shulchan Aruch regarding casting lots (Yoreh De’ah 179:1).

The lenient argument that guidance derived from lots, or similar methods, is akin to advice from a rabbi or psychologist, is flawed. A rabbi or psychologist offers advice after deep acquaintance with the individual, basing their guidance on logic. This allows the recipient to critically evaluate the advice, and ultimately make their own decisions. Such a process adheres to tamim tihyeh, as it utilizes the natural faculties God provided.

In contrast, advice derived from supernatural or obscure methods is challenging for a person to rationally dismiss, even if flawed. This can lead to misguided life decisions, such as pursuing an unsuitable career based on a mistaken perception of talent, or deciding to marry (or not marry) someone based on flawed advice.

Conclusion

Therefore, it is prohibited to predict the future or offer guidance for future actions using lots, tarot cards, or coffee ground readings.

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed

Parshat Toldot: Rebecca’s Choice – Deception for the Sake of Heaven

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“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’ (Genesis 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 that ‘the elder son would serve the younger’ (Genesis 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 marshalled 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 right- fully 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.” (Genesis 27:28–29)

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.

It is fascinating that, in the next generation, Jacob’s wife, Rachel, alongside her great spiritual gifts of kindness and humility (remember that she gave the secret signs to her sister under the nuptial canopy in order not to embarrass Leah), also had the practical ability to steal the household gods. In the ancient world of Mari and Nuzu – ancient peoples contemporaneous with the patriarchs – these gods belonged to the inheritor of the birthright. When Rachel stole the gods she was securing her husband’s rights, because after all it was Jacob who was responsible for Laban’s material success. She also knew how to cover up her actions when her father began his search. It is no accident that her son Joseph rises to greatness not only because of his great moral qualities but also because of his practical wisdom and his ability to take advantage of every situation.

We should also remember that the King Messiah, the progenitor of whom is King David, is both the sweet singer of songs with a voice of Jacob as well as the great warrior of Israel with hands of Esau. Indeed, when Samuel the prophet anoints David, the young shepherd-singer is described as ‘a red-faced man (admoni) with beautiful eyes and goodly appearance’ [I Sam. 16:12]. Edom is also another name for Esau, who was also born an admoni (ruddy-complexioned) and who ate the red lentil pottage. King David’s strength as well as his weakness apparently was derived from that aspect of Esau which was 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’ (Genesis 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’ (Leviticus 5:23), demands biblical morality.

But Jacob even goes one step further. He is so remorseful about his youthful act of deception that when presenting his final will and testament to his children, Jacob himself acts according to his father’s intention. He grants Judah the spiritual blessings of the nation’s leader-

ship, and to the sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Menashe – the physical blessings, the double portion of the bekhora, the fat of the land, physical increase, material prosperity.

However, perhaps children are generally doomed to repeat the mistakes of their parents. What Jacob does is certainly understandable: in his search for forgiveness, he feels he must return to his father’s original place and reject his mother’s vision of unity. But in principle, Rebecca was right. This split of the blessing and birthright between Judah and Ephraim planted the seeds of division in the Jewish people, between Judah’s concentration on religion and the Holy Temple, and Ephraim’s celebration of luxury and lawlessness. However, Rebecca dreamt of a different world of unity, where Torah and technology, yeshiva and military service, could dwell together.

Shabbat Shalom

**Let the Good Times Role
by Jonathan Rosenblum
Mishpacha Magazine**

Let the Good Times Roll

By Yonoson Rosenblum | November 20, 2024

Whatever the next four years have in store, they will not be boring. President Trump was as surprised as anyone by his election victory in 2016. He had little background in Washington, D.C., and as a consequence, he came into office after a hastily-put-together transition, unfamiliar with many of those he would be appointing to key positions. Beyond the southern border wall, his priorities in office were unclear.

That is not the case this time. He has been announcing key appointments at a historically rapid pace. Having already spent four years in the White House, he has a much better idea of where the pitfalls lie, after having experienced frustration with many of those he appointed and having been preoccupied by the ongoing Russian collusion investigation in his first two years in office. He has a much clearer vision of what he hopes to achieve and the obstacles that must be removed.

Though never known for his attention to the details of policy, as long ago as December 2022, Trump already detailed a plan to prevent government agencies — e.g., the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security — from colluding with social media companies, as they did in 2020 to stifle the story of Hunter Biden’s laptop and the ways in which Joe Biden was implicated in Hunter’s influence peddling.

Trump has proposed to rewrite Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which immunizes social media platforms from suit for material posted on their sites, to require strict rules of transparency and neutrality as a condition for protection. In addition, he has proposed financial penalties for universities involved in identifying disinformation on social media, as did Stanford — one of the world’s leading research institutions — in 2020, in conjunction with government actors and social media platforms.

In a similar manner, he has taken aim at the huge DEI bureaucracies entrenched in almost every university, and proposed to hold universities accountable for the harassment of Jewish students with a loss of government funding. He has posted that on day one of his administration, he will notify every university president that continued anti-Semitic propaganda will result in loss of accreditation and federal funding. (Execution of that threat will no doubt result in numerous First Amendment challenges.)

The woke obsessions and emphasis on DEI will also be uprooted, root and branch, from the armed services. Doing so is at the top of the agenda of Secretary of Defense-designate Peter Hegseth.

THE PRESIDENT-ELECT’S first announced appointments were almost exclusively members of his foreign policy team. And those appointments were repeatedly labeled Israel’s “dream team.” They were not merely “pro-Israel” in the sense of having voted for appropriations bills with aid for Israel. They are ardent supporters of Israel.

Senator Marco Rubio, who will be secretary of state, responded angrily to a question about Gazan casualties by telling the reporter that Hamas is a group of vicious criminals whom Israel must destroy wherever they can. And Trump’s chosen national security advisor, Congressman Mike

Waltz, terms Israel the greatest ally the United States has ever known. The new US ambassador to Israel, Mike Huckabee, rejects the terminology of the "West Bank" in favor of Judea and Samaria and says that Jews cannot be "settlers" in their historic homeland.

The new UN ambassador, Congresswoman Elise Stefanik, has been an unrelenting critic of the organization and its anti-Israel bias. She first came to prominence with her congressional questioning of the presidents of Harvard, University of Pennsylvania, and MIT as to whether calling for genocide against Jews violated their university policies. The failure to answer forthrightly resulted in the resignations of the first two out of the three.

Steve Witkoff, Trump's golf buddy and fellow real estate magnate, will be the latter's special envoy to the Middle East, to build upon the Abraham Accords, in which task he will be assisted informally by Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, who was instrumental in the negotiation of the first Accords.

Moreover, each of those appointees supports the "maximum pressure" approach to Iran of Trump's first term in office. (Brian Hook, who oversaw that campaign, is in charge of the State Department transition team, and is expected to reprise his former role.) The new CIA director, John Ratcliffe, advocates putting one's foot on the throat of terrorist regimes like Iran, as Israel has been doing. And Peter Hegseth, the secretary of defense-designate, has even gone so far as to say that the United States should be prepared to bomb the Iranian nuclear sites.

That latter comment is especially significant, as it is very much an open question whether Israel alone can destroy those sites buried deeply underground. The urgency of doing so, however, has been lessened by news this week that the most recent Israeli attack on Iran destroyed the site where all its research on creating a nuclear warhead was located.

Even before he takes office, the world has reacted strongly to Trump's election. The Iranian rial plunged to its lowest rate ever. And the Iranian regime has also announced that its plans to strike Israel again have been shelved pending discussions with Trump. With Supreme Leader Khomeini on his deathbed, and the leadership likely to pass to his inexperienced son, the regime of the mullahs is highly vulnerable. That is especially so with the likely loss of hundreds of millions of dollars in oil revenues, if Trump reimposes the sanction regime from his first term in office, as expected. Elsewhere, manufacturers are moving their production from China in anticipation of Trump's threatened tariffs against China.

BUT LET US not get carried away. Both Israel and the United States may have dodged a bullet with the defeat of Kamala Harris. But that defeat hardly cures all the world's problems — and may bring others in its wake.

It should be noted that the campaign just completed was one of the least substantive in American history. Much of the discussion was over things that should not be issues at all — biological men in women's sports, for instance, or the use of proper pronouns. Meanwhile, the doom star waiting America in the form of ever-growing debt went unaddressed. Kamala Harris's only contribution was to accuse Republicans of planning to cut Social Security benefits. To which Republicans responded by denying any such intent and airily pronouncing trillion-dollar deficits curable by cutting government waste. Indeed, they even proposed large new tax cuts, like exempting income from tips (a Trump proposal immediately endorsed by Harris).

Charles Cooke of the National Review noted accurately, "Trump has no plan for our endless deficits, he has no interest in reducing the debt, and he is allergic to discussing the entitlement reform that will be necessary to fix both problems. Worst of all, when he is pushed on any of these questions, he asserts that everything will be magically magnificent or that he will fix each and every problem the country faces by collecting large across-the-board import tariffs."

It is possible to roughly calculate the depletion of the Social Security fund at current rates; present recipients, like me, have little more than a decade to go, while younger workers now paying into the fund may never receive their benefits. Yet every politician in America would

prefer to ignore the inevitable and the threat to our currency posed by galloping debt service.

At the same time, we devote enormous energy to worrying about climate change, about which all predictions have proven wrong. The ruinous policies proposed by Western governments to combat climate change have caused enormous increases in manufacturing and food costs, and yet will have, at best, little impact in the absence of buy-in from the world's two most populous countries — India and China. Here, at least, the Trump administration has a clear plan to ramp up production of oil and natural gas, and to revive the nuclear power industry, source of the only truly clean energy.

Trump speaks about tariffs as if they were King Arthur's magical sword Excalibur — the answer to all problems. At times, he gives the appearance of thinking tariffs are checks written by importers to the American taxpayer and could even obviate the need for income taxes. Nor does he appreciate that it is difficult to reconcile large tariffs with bringing down consumer prices, which was one of his winning issues on November 5. While it is true that not all tariffs will be passed on in full to the consumer, to some extent they will be. And they may not help American manufacturers as much as hoped, since they inevitably invite retaliation from nations whose products have been slapped with tariffs.

Another issue the candidates barely touched upon was how they would respond to a Chinese effort to conquer Taiwan, which could trigger a full-scale war between the world's two most powerful militaries. Their thinking on the issue — if indeed they have thought about it at all — remains unknown.

FINALLY, DONALD TRUMP remains very much Donald Trump: transgressive, impulsive, narcissistic, and grudge-bearing. One would have to go back over a century to President Warren Harding's appointment of his poker-playing buddy Harry Daugherty as attorney general to find someone as ill-suited for the task as Congressman Matt Gaetz. For one thing, he is as likely to be the subject of a criminal investigation as he is to head one. Indeed, Gaetz quickly resigned from the House, in the wake of the announcement of his pending appointment, to avoid the issuance of a House Ethics Committee report on him, believed to be highly unflattering. (The contents of that report, however, will no doubt see the light of day, and may even push mainstream news outlets to once again engage in investigative reporting.)

Gaetz is as reviled by Republicans as Democrats for his lead role in bringing down Speaker Kevin McCarthy, and four Republican votes will likely be found in the Senate to deny him confirmation. Even in the unlikely event that he is confirmed or receives a recess appointment, he will surely not be able to muster the required Senate support for the massive restructuring of the Justice Department, in general, and the FBI, in particular, that Trump envisions. Moreover, he is almost completely lacking in the legal experience required for the sweeping reorganization of Justice Department.

Trump's choice of Gaetz is best seen as a deliberate thumbing of his nose at his various opponents, along the lines of the apocryphal appointment by the Roman emperor Caligula of his horse Invictus to serve as a consul, as an expression of his contempt for the Roman Senate.

But here the president-elect would be well-advised to remember that as surprising as the magnitude of his victory was, it was not exactly a total rout, comparable to Lyndon Johnson's defeat of Barry Goldwater or Richard Nixon's defeat of George McGovern, and there is still room for building on the coalition he assembled rather than reviving the doubts of all those who voted for him with extreme reluctance. Nor was it wise to taint all his excellent foreign policy picks with a choice for attorney general that signals that Tucker Carlson and Donald Jr. still have his ear. True, Trump's willingness to ignore conventional wisdom has, on occasion, been his greatest strength. That is what made it possible for him to move the American embassy to Jerusalem, in the face of decades of warnings that doing so would ignite the Arab street. The so-called two-state solution was the North Star of American Middle East policymaking for decades, and it was argued that solving the Palestinian

problem was the key to all regional peacemaking. The Abraham Accords provided a conclusive refutation of that conventional wisdom. Another example of Trump's rejection of the conventional wisdom was his cutting off of funding to UNRWA. Who knows, he may one day decide that the United Nations, as currently constituted, serves little function, and should be sent packing from Manhattan.

Whatever the next four years have in store, they will not be boring, though hopefully not in fulfillment of the ancient Chinese curse, "May you live in exciting times."

Rabbi YY Jacobson

We Fed the Crocodile for Too Long: Israel's Mission Today

Rivkah Didn't Want to Deceive Her Husband, She Just Wanted Jacob to Display Another Side

By: Rabbi YY Jacobson

Touched to the Core

The bloodbath orchestrated by Hamas and Iran on Saturday, Simchat Torah, 5784 (October 7, 2023) in Southern Israel has woken up a part in every single Jew that was dormant. The glee of the enemy in slaughtering Jewish babies reminded us that this has nothing to do with occupation, colonization, apartheid, or any other myth. This was a manifestation of visceral evil which craves to destroy every single Jew. Had Hamas had its way, it would joyfully perform this mini-Holocaust daily, until all 6.6 million Jews in Israel lay lifeless.

Every Jew living today feels the need to respond. Of course, we must defend ourselves in every possible way; we must support Israel and our soldiers with every fiber of our being—encouraging them to fulfill their moral historic duty of eliminating every vestige of bloodthirsty evil. Of course, we must lift the morale of our brothers and sisters in Israel and the world over through an unprecedented outpouring of support, love and oneness, like never before.

But there is something more.

Taking the Blessings

The twin brothers Jacob and Esau (Yaakov & Eisav) occupy the leitmotif of this week's Torah portion, Toldos.

Rebecca (Rivkah) loves Jacob (Yaakov), the child dwelling in the tents; while Isaac (Yitzchak) loved Esau (Eisav), the "skilled hunter, the man of the field." As the story progresses, Isaac grows old and his eyes become dim. He expresses his desire to bless his beloved son Esau before he dies. While Esau goes off to hunt for his father's favorite food, Rebecca summons her son Jacob and instructs him to go take his father's blessings. She dresses Jacob in Esau's clothes, covers his arms and neck with goatskins to simulate the feel of his hairier brother, prepares a similar dish, and sends Jacob to his father with the food. The Torah quotes her saying:[1]

And now my son, listen to my voice, to what I am commanding you.

Go now to the flock, and take for me from there two choice kids, and I will make them tasty foods for your father, as he likes.

So Jacob drew near to Isaac his father, and he felt him, and he said, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau."

Jacob receives his father's blessings for "the dew of the heaven and the fat of the land" and mastery over his brother. Once Esau returns with the food, it is too late. Jacob has already obtained the blessings.

The Mysteries

This is a deeply complex narrative, or to paraphrase Winston Churchill who said of Russia, "a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma."

Here are five of the most thundering questions. How did Isaac and Rebecca allow themselves to grow so far apart in their perception of their children, to the point that Isaac favored Esau, and Rebecca insisted that Jacob receive the blessings? Why would she deceive her husband rather than speak to him? Why did Jacob employ cunning and stealth to deceive an unsuspecting brother? When Isaac discovers the trick, he seems shocked and bewildered. Why did he never chastise his wife or son?

Finally, when Jacob entered Isaac's chamber, and his father felt him, Isaac declared: "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau." Clearly, Isaac identified this man as having Jacob's

voice. So why did he give him the blessings? Why did he not investigate who is the person standing before him?

Dozens of interpretations have been offered. Today I wish to present one perspective (of many possible ones)—it is an extraordinary insight presented by the late Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (1903-1993).[2]

The Ashes of Isaac

Isaac was the first person to be born a Jew. At the most defining moment of his life, he lay on the altar, bound up, about to be sacrificed. He was moments away from death. Only in the eleventh hour did the angel command Abraham: "Do not lay your hand on the lad."

It was, at that moment when he lay on the altar, that Isaac understood the magnitude of sacrifice that Jewish existence would require.[3] He knew that to be a Jew would be far from a simple feat. His people will endure fire and water. "Fire will not burn us; water will not drown us," goes a famous Russian Chassidic song. But fire and water it is! Jewish survival ought never to be taken for granted. "In each generation they rise up against us to annihilate us," we say in the Passover Haggadah, "and G-d saves us from their hands."

The Mission

That may be one reason Isaac had a special affinity for Esau: "And Isaac loved Esau because [his] game was in his mouth," the Torah states.[4] "Esau was a man who understood hunting, a man of the field, whereas Jacob was an innocent man, dwelling in tents," the Torah tells us.[5] Isaac understood that for the Jew to survive he will need to "dwell in the tents" of study and prayer,[6] to reside in the citadels of the spirit, in the mansions of moral contemplation and ethical explorations, aligned with G-d, the source of life, but he will also need to learn how to hunt in the field, how to take a weapon in his hand and battle with viscous aggressors in the killings fields of a harsh terrain. In the worlds of the Talmud: "He who comes to kill you, kill him first." [7]

It's not only about security. The mission of the Jew is to transform the physical and material world into a divine abode. To achieve this, he must enter into the real world and impact it. He must enter the open fields of society and live proudly as a Jew, to bring sanctity and holiness into the mundane, to integrate heaven and earth.

A Perfect Partnership

In Isaac's mind, a partnership between the twins Esau and Jacob will guarantee an eternal people. Jacob will grant the people its soul, spirit, conscience, and moral GPS, its Divine core, but Esau will be in charge of the "field," he will become the facilitator of Jacob's spiritual light and love in our physical world, standing guard against the enemy that craves to destroy goodness, morality and holiness in our world.[8]

The tragedy, of course, was that Esau did not see himself as a partner of Jacob. His material prowess, hunting skills, and field-maneuvers have become divorced from his spiritual, soulful core. His body was severed from his soul.

"And Esau came from the field, and he was exhausted." His soul was exhausted because it felt empty. He craved to conquer the entire "field," to own the world, but he did not own himself; he remained internally worn out, emotionally exhausted, detached from his own spiritual roots. His internal universe was chaotic, distraught, and frenzied.

Isaac yearned that Esau's enormous strength be harnessed to facilitate his soul, becoming a partner with Jacob. He wants to bless, empower and sublimate Esau.

Rebecca's Vision

It is Rebecca, the Jewish mother, who understands the calling of the moment—and the calling of history. "Now my son, listen to my voice, to what I am commanding you. Go now to the flock, and take for me from there two choice kids, and I will make them tasty foods for your father, as he likes."

My dear Jacob! It is time to leave your tents of study and go out to the field (where the goats are).[9] It is time for you to learn how to garb yourself in Esau's cloaks and gear—to confront the enemy that might come to kill you. Sure, your tents of study and prayer will remain your eternal compass; they will guide your direction in the field and navigate your movements in the outside world; your faith and spiritual authenticity will be the bedrock of your success. But to be anchored in

G-d means that at times you must go out and protect your children, standing up to your enemies with unwavering resolve.

You must never apologize for your moral duty to crush your enemy, and you must never allow your hyper sense of fake morality and ethics to turn you into the punching bag of the world. If there is even the slightest chance that one of your children is in danger, you must go on the offensive and let your enemy be frightened for his life.

My dear Jacob! You despise violence, loathe conflict, and never give up on the dream of peace. We are the people of the book, not of the sword. But Jacob, there is a time in history when you must wage war, so that your children live. David will need to stand up to a Goliath; in the Persia of old, during the edicts of Haman, Jews will need to engage in moral violence to fight off their blood thirsty foes. In the days of Chanukah, the Jews will once again need to take up arms to save their people and faith. Time and time again, Jews will need to learn how to fight back.

In June of 1967, and numerous times before and after, Israel will need to wage war to save a beleaguered people from the enemy's quest for our annihilation. After Simchas Torah 5784 it is clear that the restraint Israel demonstrated over the last decades, and all the compromises it made, have invited only war and violence. The words of Churchill in 1940 about the Nazis are applicable to Israel's terrible lack of vision in regard to its neighbors: "Each one hopes that if he feeds the crocodile enough, the crocodile will eat him last. All of them hope that the storm will pass before their turn comes to be devoured. But I fear greatly that the storm will not pass. It will rage and it will roar ever more loudly, ever more widely."

Do we want dead Jews who are seen as ethical, or living Jews whom the UN and other clueless Jew haters will forever condemn?

My dear Jacob—said his mother—one day, Esau and Yishmael will become your partner. One day, the Moshiach will come—and may it be very very speedily in our days—and you will return to your tents of spiritual ecstasy, as the “spirit of impurity will be removed from the world,” and the entire “earth will be filled with Divine consciousness as the waters covers the sea.” There will be a time when, in the words of Isaiah (2:4), “He [G-d] shall judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples, and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift the sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”

But till that glorious day, my dear Jacob, you -- a prince of G-d, a man of wisdom, integrity and faith -- must dress like Esau, you must don his gear. For your enemy is brutal, ruthless, and bloodthirsty. As long as you duck, the international community empathizes with his murderous plans. The world respects Jews who respect themselves, their faith, their history and their Torah; the world admires Jews who are not afraid of doing everything it takes to stop immoral violence and bloodshed. The world wants a strong Israel who demonstrates unwavering moral clarity to eliminate every last vestige of evil and terror.

A Radiant Field

Jacob obeys. He learns to enter the field. He learns to don the clothes of Esau. And when he enters the chambers of his father, something remarkable happens.

And he [Isaac] said, "Serve [it] to me that I may eat of the game of my son, so that my soul will bless you." And he served him, and he ate, and he brought him wine, and he drank.

And his father Isaac said to him, "Please come closer and kiss me, my son."

And he came closer, and he kissed him, and he smelled the fragrance of his garments, and he blessed him, and he said, "Behold, the fragrance of my son is like the fragrance of a field, which the Lord has blessed!

Isaac tells his son that his fragrance is one of a field blessed by G-d. Esau was a man of the field. Jacob was not. But when Jacob was forced to enter the field—to enter into the material, physical and earthy reality where Esau lives and succeeds; when Jacob is forced to learn how to use a rifle and drive a jeep; when Jacob is compelled to battle a war for survival; when Jacob is compelled to live and function in the larger world—it has “the fragrance of a field, which the Lord has blessed!”

It is not a field which causes exhaustion and loneliness; it is a field that mirrors the radiance of the Divine. Jacob's field is filled with sanctity, harmony, and spiritual depth. Jacob imbues Esau's cloaks and vocation with holiness. Jacob's field is not a place of vulgarity and bruteness; it is a garden of G-d.

Jacob holds his book in one hand, and his plow in the other; his book in one hand and his sword in the other—realizing that the material too belongs to the oneness of the Divine. As Moses tells his people:[10] “For the Lord, your G-d, goes along in the midst of your camp, to rescue you and to deliver your enemies before you. Therefore, your camp shall be holy...”

An Integrated Jacob

Isaac, at last, acknowledges the possibility of Jacob fulfilling his mission, even while Esau is not yet ready to serve as a partner. “So Jacob drew near to Isaac his father, and he felt him, and he said, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau." At this moment, Isaac experienced that wondrous synthesis in his child.

His voice is the voice of Jacob—a voice of Torah, of wisdom, of spiritual truth, of justice, compassion, ethics, sacred nobility, and moral values. It is the “Yiddishe Shtime,” the voice of Yiddishkeit. “But the hands are the hands of Esau”—this same boy is capable of standing up to a cruel enemy with unapologetic resolve, unwavering moral clarity, unrestrained determination, and undeterred strength to preserve its life. His mind, heart and soul will be defined by Torah, and when the moment calls for it, he will know how to go out and change the world.

Of course, when the Jewish country has enough manpower to fight the enemy on the battlefield, it is an awesome and Divine merit for the army and the community to allow Jews to be dedicated completely to Torah study—the lifeline of our people. Those Jews who sit and study Torah day and night grant spiritual protection and Divine blessing to the army, the people, and the land. But if more manpower is needed, it is a grand mitzvah for every single capable Jew to don arms and go fight when the enemy attacks. And concerning war, the Torah states, “Your camp shall be holy,” as your rifle is part and parcel of your spiritual holiness.[11]

Indeed, the opening of Isaac's blessings to Jacob is: “And may the Lord give you of the dew of the heavens and [of] the fatness of the earth and an abundance of grain and wine.” He blesses him not only with the heavenly dew but also with the fatness of the earth. He empowers him not only to be holy in heaven, but also to bring holiness to the earth. Not to shy away from his power to conquer the earth and bring G-d into the earth.[12]

Wake Up!

The relevance to our times is clear. The Jewish people are facing yet again a sworn enemy. What Hamas and its supporters targeted was not just a piece of land, but an entire people. We have once again been confronted by the force of evil and diabolical hatred that craves to destroy G-d's eternal people.

At such a time, our response must be: Let's be Jewish like never before in history, and let's be united like never before! The voice of Jacob remains our greatest power—the voice of Torah study, the voice of prayer, the voice of celebrating Mitzvos and Judaism. This is why we are here today, 3300 years after our inception and 3300 years after almost every Empire tried to get rid of us.

Let us become the greatest Jews ever, by studying what it means to be a Jew and living it. 16 million Jews are waiting for marching orders. Each of us ought to use his or her influence to inspire our brothers and sisters to start living Judaism in their daily life, beginning with one mitzvah.

And at this moment let us not forget our moral duty to use the “hands of Esau.” Israel's moral obligation is to eliminate terror with unwavering might, without endangering our soldiers. We must protect ourselves. Every synagogue, every school, every Jewish center, and every Jewish community must guarantee the highest level of physical and spiritual security. Not minimal security, but the maximum level of safety.

While we do not look for wars, we are a nation which loves peace, searches for peace, and respects and loves all people, if someone attacks us, we ought to respond with all our might. “One who is merciful to the cruel becomes cruel to those who deserve mercy,” say our sages.[13]

Meir Uziel, an Israeli comedian (and grandson of former Sephardic Chief Rabbi Ben Zion Uziel), once quipped: In the competition for Ms. Ethical among the 200 nations of the world, we always come in last place, since we are the only ones who show up!

Lessons from the Holocaust

The late Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin once wrote:

"I believe the lessons of the Holocaust are these. First, if an enemy of our people says he seeks to destroy us, believe him. Don't doubt him for a moment. Don't make light of it. Do all in your power to deny him the means of carrying out his satanic intent. (Note: one month later, Begin dispatched Israel's Air Force to destroy the Iraqi nuclear facility at Osirak.)

"Second, when a Jew anywhere in the world is threatened or under attack, do all in your power to come to his aid. Never pause to wonder what the world will think or say. The world will never pity slaughtered Jews. The world may not necessarily like the fighting Jew, but the world will have to take account of him.

"Third, a Jew must learn to defend himself. He must forever be prepared for whenever threat looms.

"Fourth, Jewish dignity and honor must be protected in all circumstances. The seeds of Jewish destruction lie in passively enabling the enemy to humiliate us. Only when the enemy succeeds in turning the spirit of the Jew into dust and ashes in life, can he turn the Jew into dust and ashes in death. During the Holocaust it was after the enemy had humiliated the Jews, trampled them underfoot, divided them, deceived them, afflicted them, drove brother against brother, only then could he lead them, almost without resistance, to the gates of Auschwitz. Therefore, at all times and whatever the cost, safeguard the dignity and honor of the Jewish people.

Begin missed one point, which sadly proved to cause such weakness in Israel. For Israel to retain its deterrence power, it must be convinced of its moral right, of its spiritual mission in this world, of its destiny as G-d's people. Every Jew must know the truth that the entire land of Israel is our eternal home, G-d's gift to the Jewish people. Only when the voice is the voice of Jacob, will his hands be able to deliver the punch it needs to. Without it, Jacob become apologetic, weak, frail and perceived as someone who can be defeated with enough pressure, lies, and terror.

Today Jacob must increase his voice and must don the gloves of Esau to eliminate through absolute strength and deterrence every vestige of terror in its midst.

May G-d bless Israel and the entire Jewish nation; may G-d protect and free our hostages; may G-d protect our holy soldiers; may G-d give us the resolve we need to stop ducking and start demonstrating authentic strength. And may G-d bring redemption to our people, our land, and our world, now, Amen!

[1] Genesis 27:8-18.

[2] The Rav shared this at a convention of the Mizrahi movement, in Atlantic City, in 1961. You can read the original insight here: <http://hebrewbooks.org/2813>. Go to pp. 12-14. I included some other ideas to clarify some details.

[3] The end of Vayikra (26:42) reads: "V'Zocharti es brisi Yaakov, v'af es brisi Yitzchok, v'af es brisi Avraham ezkor. I will remember My covenant with Yaakov; also my covenant with Yitzchak, and also My covenant with Abraham will I remember." The term Zechirah, the word for Remembering is mentioned in connection with Yaakov, and it is mentioned again with Abraham, but it is not mentioned with Yitzchak. Why? The great Biblical commentator, Rashi, offers the midrashic insight (Rashi to Lev. 26: 2): "Why does Hashem use the term 'Remembering' for Abraham and Yaakov but not when he speaks of Yitzchak? Because in the case of Yitzchak, 'Remembering' is not necessary. The ashes of Yitzchak always appear before Me, gathered up and placed on the Altar!" Yitzchak remains the symbol of Jewish sacrifice, the readiness of the Jewish people to dedicate their lives as an offering for G-d. Yitzchak's symbolic ashes stand before my eyes every single day, says G-d. The sages define Yitzchak as an "olah temimah"—a wholesome offering, whose sanctity required he never leave the borders of the Holy Land.

[4] Genesis 25:28.

[5] Ibid. 25:27.

[6] See Rashi to Genesis 25:27.

[7] Sanhedrin 72a.

[8] See at length the commentary of Netziv to the story.

[9] Esau is represented by the goat, "saeir," while Jacob by the sheep, "hakvasim hifrid Yaakov." (Or HaTorah Vayishlach vol. 1).

[10] Deut. 23:15

[11] See the address by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, 6 Tishrei 5728 (1967), a few months after the Six Day War. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fsADqkXyALk>

Rabbi Yitzchak Zaler, in his commentary Minchas Yitzchak to the Talmud ibid. adds a nice hint in their names: The second letter of our three forefathers are: (אברהם, 'צ' (צחק) 'ע' (ע' יעקב) and (ע' יעקב), alluding to the Hebrew terms: "בוקר" (morning), "צהריים" (afternoon), and "ערב" (evening). These correspond to the time of day at which each one instituted a different prayer.

[12] What is fascinating is that Jacob beloved's son Joseph, will dream up, years later, a storm. "And Joseph dreamed a dream and told his brothers... 'Listen now to this dream, which I have dreamed: Behold we were binding sheaves in the middle of the field, when, behold! -- my sheaf arose and also remained standing; then behold! -- your sheaves gathered around and bowed down to my sheaf.' "So his brothers said to him, 'Will you reign over us? Will you dominate us?'. And he again dreamed another dream, and he related it to his brothers, and he said: 'Behold! I have dreamed another dream, and behold, the sun, the moon and eleven stars were prostrating themselves to me'... His brothers envied him, but his father awaited the matter." Joseph's double dreams take him from the plane of agriculture to the realm of the celestial. First, he dreams of himself—and his brothers—embodied as sheaves of a field where their sheaves bow to his. Yet as his dreams progress, he views himself and his family as heavenly lights: the son, the moon and the stars. Joseph defines here two roles for himself and his family: He will be the great economist, leading a nation to a prosperous agricultural future, sustaining the land with earthly food. But simultaneously he sees himself guiding the sun, moon and stars—granting vision, light, and direction to the planet. The two are not contradictory in his world—as Jacob was given both the dew of heaven and the fat of the earth. The voice must be the voice of Jacob, and the hands must employ the skills of Esau.

[13] Tanchuma, Parashat Metzora 1. Yalkut Shimoni Shmuel 1 #121.

Lentil Soup

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Question #1: Lentil Soup?

What beracha should Eisav have recited on his lentil soup?

Question #2: Apple Sauce?

I am sitting down to a snack of apple sauce and coffee. Does it make any difference how I recite the beracha?

Question #3: Candied Ginger?

What is the correct beracha to recite on candied ginger?

Introduction:

The Torah teaches us that Yaakov gave Eisav bread and lentil soup, and, according to the old Jewish tradition, Eisav did not recite a beracha when he ate his meal. If Eisav had skipped the bread and made a beracha on the soup, what beracha should he have made? It might depend on the recipe that Yaakov used when he made the soup, and it might also depend on the consistency of the soup. So, although I know that some people assume that the beracha on all soups is shehakol, this is certainly not an accurate rule. As always, the goal of our column is not to provide definitive halachic ruling; that is the role of each individual's rav or posek. The goal of our article is to educate about the halachic principle. Let us begin with the Gemara, where it states that "the water of beets is treated like beets, and the water of turnips is treated like turnips, and the water of all cooked items is like the cooked item" (Berachos 39a). This means that if someone cooked beets, and then drank the liquid without

the vegetable, he should recite the beracha of ha'adamah on the liquid, notwithstanding that he is not even eating the vegetable itself. This Gemara is teaching us an interesting application of the Mishnah, which states, "This is the rule: Whatever is primary, ikar, and is accompanied by something secondary, tafeil, one recites the beracha on the primary and absolves the secondary item" (Berachos 44a). According to the rule in this Mishnah, someone eating cooked beets does not recite a beracha on the liquid in which they were cooked, even should he drink some of the liquid by itself. A similar case is someone eating breakfast cereal and has some milk left in his bowl; he does not recite a beracha on the milk that is left. However, the Gemara extends the Mishnah's ruling, teaching that even without eating any beets, the beracha on the water in which the beets were cooked is the same beracha as that of the beets, because the beets are still considered the ikar.

The Rambam (Hilchos Berachos 8:4) qualifies the ruling of the Gemara: "For vegetables that are commonly cooked, the beracha on the liquid is borei pri ha'adamah, provided that he cooked them in order to drink the liquid, because, when it is common to drink the water of cooked vegetables, the liquid has the same law as the vegetables." The Shulchan Aruch quotes this ruling of the Gemara, although he omits the stipulation of the Rambam: "On the water in which vegetables were cooked, one should recite the same beracha that one would recite on the vegetables themselves, notwithstanding that you are consuming only the flavor of the vegetables" (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayim 205:2). Then he adds a different stipulation: "This is true only if the vegetables were cooked without any meat; if some meat was added, the beracha on the liquid is shehakol."

Ikar and tafeil

To explain this ruling of the Shulchan Aruch, we need to examine the laws of ikar and tafeil.

There are two general categories of situations included in the halachos of ikar and tafeil; (1) enhancers and (2) mixtures.

(1) Enhancers: This category includes food items where the tafeil food makes the ikar food tastier. Some common examples include: Cereal with fruit and milk; eating latkes with apple sauce; stirring herbal tea with a cinnamon stick; breading fish or meat (schnitzel). In all of these cases, one recites the beracha for the ikar; that is, the cereal, latkes, tea, or meat; and the tafeil is included.

(2) Mixtures: This category includes cases where one food is not specifically enhancing the other, but both foods are important. For example, someone eating macaroni and cheese, blintzes (they always contain a filling), cholent, kugel, or stew is interested in eating all the different foods that comprise the dish. The same halacha applies when eating soups, which may contain vegetables, meat, noodles or barley. In these cases, all the food items eaten are important and none of these ingredients serve only to enhance the rest. Although these are mixtures, they are considered one complete food item and therefore have only one beracha. Thus, the concept of ikar and tafeil is very different here -- it determines which beracha we recite on this food. The beracha of the ikar, usually the majority item, is the beracha on the entire item.

We will return to the concept of mixtures, but first I want to explain the concept of enhancers and how it affects the halacha regarding the water in which vegetables were cooked. The reason that the beracha prior to drinking the "water" of beets or turnips is ha'adamah, is because this is considered the enhancer of the water. In other words, the beet water (also known as borscht) is being drunk primarily because of its beet flavor. Therefore, if someone added meat to the borscht, the beracha becomes shehakol, since the meat flavor is now considered the ikar and the beracha on meat is, of course, shehakol.

Having noted how the Rambam understood the Gemara that taught that the beracha on "beet water" is ha'adamah, I will note a question on this passage of Gemara raised by other rishonim. An earlier passage of Gemara rules that the correct beracha to recite on the liquid squeezed out of dates, called date honey or silan, is shehakol. That passage then explains that this ruling is dependent on a dispute between the tanna'im Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua, whether or not date honey is still considered "fruit" germane to the laws of terumah. The Gemara

concludes, in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Yehoshua, that the honey squeezed out of dates has lost the status of fruit and is shehakol. This leads the rishonim to question what is the difference between date honey, on which the beracha is shehakol, and beet or turnip soup, on which the beracha is ha'adamah. The Ba'al Halachos Gedolos (usually abbreviated Bahag), who predated the rishonim, writes that when the Gemara rules that the beracha on date honey is shehakol, it refers to date honey that was watered down, but the beracha on pure date honey is ha'etz. The rishonim explain that since the =posuk that praises Eretz Yisrael as the land of the seven special fruits refers to dates as devash, the Bahag assumes that pure date honey must have the prominence of dates, presumably for the berachos both before and after eating it.

Nevertheless, most rishonim reject the Bahag's approach and rule that the beracha before eating date honey is shehakol. There is also another opinion that the beracha before eating date honey is ha'adamah (see Hagahos Ashri, Berachos 6:12).

This returns us to our question: What is the difference between honey and beet soup? The rishonim and poskim suggest several possible distinctions, each of which results in a different halachic conclusion. Some understand that there is a difference between the flavor cooked out of a fruit or vegetable and that which is squeezed out. When cooking, a greater degree of the flavor is removed, and in the case of a fruit or vegetable that is eaten cooked, the beracha on the liquid extract is ha'etz or ha'adamah (Rosh, Berachos 6:18, as explained by the Tur and the Bach, Orach Chayim 202).

Another approach is that the beracha ha'etz or ha'adamah is recited on the liquid extract or soup of the fruit or vegetable only when the fruit or vegetable is usually eaten this way (Chiddushei Harashba, Berachos 38a s.v. Devash). There are fruits that are commonly eaten cooked, such as apples, quince, peaches and prunes, but few of these are eaten most of the time in the cooked state together with their liquid. Although the Bach (Orach Chayim 202 s.v. Ve'im bisheil) concludes that the beracha on the cooked liquid extract of any of these fruits is ha'etz, this is not the conclusion of most acharonim. Based on their understanding of the Rashba, they conclude that the beracha of ha'adamah was recited on the liquid of the beets and turnips only because these vegetables were usually served cooked with their liquid. However, for vegetables that are often served cooked without the liquid, the beracha on the liquid is shehakol. According to this approach, the correct beracha on the lentil soup that Yaakov served would be ha'adamah if (1) there were pieces of lentil still in the soup or (2) lentils were usually served with the liquid in which they were cooked. However, if the lentils were removed from the soup (or already eaten) and it was unusual to serve lentils with the liquid in which they were cooked, the beracha on the lentil soup would be shehakol. In either case, if there were still significant quantities of lentils in the soup (enough to say that the person was eating lentils and not just their liquid), the beracha would be ha'adamah.

Mixture Berachos

Above, I mentioned that there are two rules governing the laws of ikar and tafeil, types of mixtures, one governing the laws of ikar that are enhancers and another governing foods that are true mixtures. I have already explained the rules of the enhancers germane to vegetable soups. Now I will explain the rules that determine the beracha of a mixture.

There are three rules to establish which beracha to recite on a mixture:

1. If one of the items is clearly the most important, it determines the beracha (Pri Megadim, Orach Chayim, Pesicha Koleles, Hilchos Berachos s.v. Hatennai; Mishnah Berurah 212:1). For example, the beracha on chicken or meat soup with vegetables is shehakol, since the chicken or the meat is the most important flavor component in the soup.
2. When there is no most important ingredient, the beracha is usually determined by the majority item in the product. Thus, the beracha on a peanut bar containing peanuts, honey, and sugar is ha'adamah, since peanuts are the major ingredient. The beracha on a tzimmes consisting of prunes and sweet potatoes depends on which item is the major ingredient.
3. However, when the mixture contains one of the five grains, the beracha is usually mezonos, unless the flour or grain is included only to

provide texture (Shulchan Aruch 204:12; 208:2, 3). For example, flour added to thicken soup is tafeil.

Because grains are important, they are the *ikar* of the mixture even if they are a minority ingredient. For this reason, the beracha on vegetable-barley soup is usually *mezonos*. However, if the barley is completely dissolved, the beracha on the soup will be *ha'adamah*. Also, if you do not want the barley but a few pieces ended up in your bowl anyway, the beracha is *ha'adamah*, and the barley will be considered tafeil (Mishnah Berurah 212:1).

Similarly, the beracha on a trifle containing cake and ice cream is *mezonos* even if there is more ice cream than cake, since the cake is a grain product. However, the beracha on potato kugel that contains flour, bread crumbs, and/or matzoh meal to provide texture is *ha'adamah* (when there are visible pieces of potato). Since the grain product here functions only to hold the kugel together, it is tafeil and does not affect the beracha.

These rules are only for the five grains whose beracha is *hamotzi* when they are made into bread. The beracha regarding other grains and starches, such as millet, sorghum, tapioca, arrowroot, manioc and quinoa, is that if they are cooked or ground until there are no pieces left, the beracha is *shehakol*, even if they are the *ikar*. The same rule is true if these starches are tastier eaten raw rather than when they are cooked (Rema, Orach Chayim 208:8). Thus, a porridge or hot cereal made of kasha or millet will be *shehakol* if there are no pieces of the grain left, and *ha'adamah* if there are. The beracha on quinoa is, in most cases, *ha'adamah*, because it is usually not ground or cooked until the pieces completely dissolve.

Purees

What is the correct beracha to recite prior to eating fruit and vegetable products that no longer have their original consistency, such as apple sauce, jam, fruit puree, mashed potatoes, tomato paste and peanut butter? Is the correct beracha on these items *borei pri ha'eitz/ha'adamah* or *shehakol*?

The rishonim dispute this question, many contending that even a completely pureed fruit is still *borei pri ha'eitz*; a minority rule that the beracha on a fruit or vegetable that no longer has its original consistency is *shehakol*.

What do we conclude?

The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 202:7) rules that the beracha is *ha'eitz*, and this is the ruling followed by most Sefardim. Ashkenazim follow the ruling of the Rema, who contends that one should recite *shehakol*, because of the *safek* as to which opinion we should follow. In practice, Ashkenazim usually recite *borei pri ha'eitz* when eating a product that has some of the consistency of the original product, as is the case of jam with recognizable fruit pieces in it or “chunky” or “natural” apple sauce, but recite *shehakol* before eating a completely smooth apple sauce or a smooth jam, where the fruit has completely lost its consistency (Mishnah Berurah 202:42).

However, since the reason we recite *shehakol* is because it is a *safek*, several halachic differences result. For example, someone having a snack of apple sauce and a beverage should make sure to recite the *shehakol* on the apple sauce rather than on the beverage. If they recite the *shehakol* on the beverage without specifically including the apple sauce, they have created a *safek* whether the obligation to make a beracha on the apple sauce has been fulfilled. This is because, according to the opinions that the beracha should be *ha'eitz*, they did not fulfill the beracha by reciting *shehakol* on something else.

Similarly, someone eating a fruit and apple sauce at the same time who recited *ha'eitz* on the fruit should not recite *shehakol* (and certainly not *ha'eitz*) on the apple sauce. This is because the *poskim* who contend that apple sauce is *ha'eitz* rule that he has already fulfilled his duty by reciting *ha'eitz* on the other fruit. In this situation, he should first recite *shehakol* on the apple sauce and then *ha'eitz* on the other fruit (Ben Ish Chai, Parshas Pinchas 1:16).

Some authorities rule more strictly, contending that you should not eat an item that is definitely *borei pri ha'eitz* together with an item that is questionably *borei pri ha'eitz*, such as apple sauce. This is because there

isn't any way to fulfill the need for reciting a beracha on both items without creating an unnecessary beracha. If one recites the beracha on the fruit first, then one has a *safek* as to whether he can recite a beracha on the *safek* item. However, if you recite the *shehakol* on the *safek* item first, then, according to the opinions that the beracha is *ha'eitz*, you have now recited an unnecessary beracha (Maamar Mordechai 203:3).

Candied ginger?

At this point, we will discuss the third of our opening questions: What is the correct beracha to recite on candied ginger?

The Mishnah Berurah (202:44) rules that if you dry and grind up ginger until it is not identifiable and mix it with sugar, the beracha is *ha'adamah*. Based on several earlier authorities (Terumas Hadeshen #29; Shulchan Aruch Harav; Chayei Adam), he explains that since this is the usual way that ginger is eaten, it requires the same beracha it would receive were it eaten as a fresh spice. Since ginger is a root, that makes its beracha *ha'adamah*.

This ruling is even more obvious relative to the candied ginger that is commonly made today, which is usually dried pieces of ginger topped with a sugary glaze.

Conclusion

The Gemara (Bava Kamma 30a) quotes three approaches for someone to follow should he want to develop into a true *chassid*, meaning someone who acts exemplarily beyond the requirements of the halacha. The first approach recommends that he become expert in the rules of damages and torts; the second approach recommends that he become expert in the themes of *Mesechta Avos*; and the third that he study carefully the laws of *Berachos*. The Maharsha (ad loc.) explains that there are three aspects essential to growing as a *mensch* – one must be good to Hashem, good to others and good to yourself. Becoming expert in the rules of damages influences someone to focus on being good to others; becoming expert in the study of *Avos* results in the individual understanding himself well; and becoming an expert in the laws of *Berachos* is a way to train himself to appreciate what Hashem does for us. Our attempts to observe the halachos of *Berachos* correctly demonstrate a small expression on our part to praise Hashem for even His seemingly small kindnesses to us.

Parsha Insights

By Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

Parshas Toldos

The Power of the Voice

This week we read the parsha of Toldos. “V'aileh Toldos Yitzchak ben Avrohom {And these are the generations of Yitzchak the son of Avrohom}. [25:19]” The parsha then goes on to tell us about the birth of Yaakov and Esav.

During pregnancy, Rivkah was experiencing much difficulty, as the child seemed to be trying to run right out of the womb. As this was her first pregnancy, she asked other women who had already experienced pregnancies if this was normal [Even Ezra]. Upon being told that it was certainly not typical, she approached the prophet Shem to find out what was happening. Shem told her that she was carrying twins who would each father a nation. These two nations would be engaged in a constant struggle throughout history and ultimately, “V'rav ya'avod tza'ir,” the older will serve the younger.

This prophecy that was revealed to Rivkah (but not to Yitzchak) proved to be a guiding light for Rivkah in understanding her sons. She was not fooled by the superficial righteousness of Esav. She understood that the continuity of Avrohom and Yitzchak would be through Yaakov. This understanding continued throughout their development but reached its climax when Yitzchak wanted to give the *brachos* {blessings} to Esav.

Upon hearing Yitzchak instruct Esav to prepare a meal during which he would confer upon him the blessings, Rivkah quickly called Yaakov. “Go and bring to me two goats and I'll prepare them for your father. You will bring them to your father in order that he'll bless you before his death. [27:9-10]”

Yaakov was afraid that Yitzchak would realize that he was being deceived. “My brother Esav is a hairy man whereas I am smooth (skinned). Perhaps my father will feel me and I'll be in his eyes as an

imposter. I'll bring upon myself a curse in the place of a blessing! [27:11-13]"

Rivkah confidently responded to Yaakov's worries: "A'lai {upon me} kil'lascha b'ni {will be your curse, my son}. [27:13]" The simple meaning being that any curse that might be given will fall upon me. I'll absorb it instead of you. However, the Targum Onkelos explains that Rivkah was actually revealing to Yaakov the reason why she was so confidently sending him to receive the blessings. "A'lai"—to me it was said through prophecy that there would not be—"kil'lascha b'ni"—a curse upon you, my son. The Rashbam explains that her confidence was based on the fact that she had already heard, while she was pregnant with them, that "V'rav ya'avod tza'ir," the older would serve the younger. The blessings therefore were clearly meant for Yaakov and not Esav.

When Yaakov brought the food to Yitzchak in order to receive the blessings, Yitzchak was a bit unsure. "Draw close so that I may feel you, [27:21]" he demanded. Rivkah had anticipated this and had placed woolly hide on Yaakov's hands and neck. Yitzchak felt the hands and exclaimed: "Ha'kol kol Yaakov {the voice is the voice of Yaakov} v'ha'yadayim y'day Esav {and the hands are the hands of Esav}. And he blessed him. [27:22-23]"

On a simple level, Yitzchak decided that the hands were a clearer indicator than the voice and he therefore went ahead and gave the blessings.

The Medrash explains that these words were actually a prophecy that came unknowingly from the mouth of Yaakov. When the voice of Yaakov is strong in his learning of Torah and t'filah {prayer} then the hands of Esav are weak and useless against him. However, if Yaakov's voice becomes weak (the first word, ha'kol, is spelled without the letter vav, thereby assuming the additional meaning of hakail, meaning light and weak) then the hands of Esav have the ability to rule over him.

The Medrash also offers an additional meaning. The power of Yaakov lies in his voice. The voice is that of Yaakov. Esav's power, however, lies in his hands.

This is illustrated very clearly later on in the Torah. As we were on our way to Eretz Yisroel, Moshe sent messengers to Edom (the descendants of Esav) asking for permission to pass through their land. He told them a bit of history, that they had been afflicted in Egypt and when they had called out to Hashem, "He heard our voices [Bamidbar 20:17]." Moshe was impressing upon them the fulfillment of our blessing/prophecy that our power lies in our voices uplifted in prayer.

Edom's response was not long in coming. "Do not pass or else we'll come out against you with our swords." You're flouting your blessing, we'll flout ours. The hands are the hands of Esav.

When I was a teenager, I was once walking along a main street near my neighborhood when a guy sitting on the stoop gave me a look. I returned the look, which prompted him to look even harder. When I didn't back away with my eyes he stood up and sauntered over to me. "I see you want to fight," he said to me. "Tell you the truth, I'd just as well pass," I responded. "No, you really want to fight," he said drawing closer. "No, I'm really quite fine without fighting," I answered. "No, we're going to fight," he prophesized, and started swinging. Well, we stood there like two idiots for about ten minutes, punching each other in the face until I guess he realized what I had realized right from the start—there was really no point in punching each other in the face for ten minutes.

What really amazed me and gave me a glimpse into a whole different mindset was what happened afterwards. It seems that during our slugfest, his ring had slipped off his finger. Realizing that, he turned to me with a friendly smile, congratulated me on a good fight and asked me to help him find his ring. I was incredulous. "Do you really think I could care less about you and your ring?" I told him in French and stomped away.

I thought it out and realized that for him fighting was a sport. It was fun. The same way my friends and I would enjoy really going at it in a tough game of basketball, he enjoyed punching and getting punched in the face.

Ha'yadayim y'day Esav {the hands are the hands of Esav}. An entirely different mindset. An entirely different blessing. An entirely different nation.

Let's remember who we are and where our power lies.

Good Shabbos,
Yisroel Ciner

Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Toldos

Death Wish

Esav. He represents so much evil. We know him as the hunter, the ruthless marauder, murderer of Nimrod and stalker of Yaakov. Yet, believe it or not, he had some saving grace. He is even considered a paradigm of virtuous character at least in one aspect of his life honoring parents. The Torah tells us that Yitzchak loved Esav. And Esav loved him back. He respected his father and served him faithfully. In fact, the Medrash and Zohar talk favorably about the power of Esav's kibud av, honor of his father. They even deem it greater than that of his brother Yaakov's. And so Yitzchak requested Esav to "go out to the field and hunt game for me, then make me delicacies such as I love, and I will eat, so that my soul may bless you before I die" (Genesis 27:3-4). Yitzchak wanted to confer the blessings to him. Esav won his father's regard. And even when Esav found out that his brother, Yaakov beat him to the blessings, he did not yell at his father, in the method of modern filial impugnation, "How did you let him do that?!" All he did was "cry out an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, "Bless me too, Father!" (ibid v.34). Yitzchak finds some remaining blessing to bestow upon his older son, but the grudge does not evaporate. What troubles me is not the anger of defeat or the desire for revenge, rather the way Esav expressed it. "Now Esau harbored hatred toward Jacob because of the blessing with which his father had blessed him; and Esau thought, "May the days of mourning for my father draw near, then I will kill my brother Jacob."

"May the days of mourning for my father draw near" Think about it. How did the love for a father turn into the eager anticipation of his death? The seventh grade class of the posh Harrington Boy's School, nestled in the luxurious rolling hills of suburbia, was teeming with excitement. The winter had begun, and they were rapidly approaching the beginning of the holiday season. The children had been talking about their wishes and expectations for holiday presents and were telling the class what they were going to get.

Johnny had been promised that if he finished his piano lessons, he'd get a new 800-megahertz computer. Arthur had asked for a real drum set and was promised it on the condition he gets grades of 100 on two consecutive math tests.

Billy had not been so lucky. He had begged his dad for a Harley-Davidson motorcycle, to which his father replied, "Over my dead body!" He settled. If he would write a weekly letter to his uncle in Wichita, he would get a motorized scooter.

The day came and all the kids had the chance to share their expectations with their peers.

"When I get two hundreds in a row, I'm getting a real drum set!" shouted Arthur.

"When I finish piano lessons, I'm getting the latest computer!" exclaimed Johnny. And so it went. Each child announced his goal and the prize that awaited him upon accomplishment.

Finally Billy swaggered up to the front of the class. "If I write my uncle I'm gonna get a scooter." He quickly continued, "but that's nothing! 'Cause when my daddy dies, I'm getting a Harley-Davidson motorcycle!"

Passions overrule sanity. They even overtake years of love and commitment. When one is enraged, he can turn against his best friend, his closest ally, and even his own parents! Esav, who spent his first 63 years in undying adulation of his father, changed his focus in a burst of emotion. Now, instead of worrying about his father's fare, he awaited

the day of his farewell. All in anticipation of the revenge he would take on Yaakov.

When passions pervert our priorities, and obsessions skew our vision, friends become foes and alliance becomes defiance. In the quest for paranoiac revenge, everyone is an enemy even your own parents. But mostly your own self.

Dedicated lezecher nishmat our zeida Avraham Yehoshua Heshel ben Yehuda Hacoheh – 7 Kislev sponsored by Miriam, Josh, Tamar & Shlomo Hauser

Thanksgiving: Wholesome Holiday or Chukos HaGoyim? by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

One of the interesting aspects of being American and living in the 'Medina shel Chessed' is dealing with secular holidays. A day off of work, more time to learn, and suspended Alternate Side parking rules are always appreciated. Of these holidays, Thanksgiving is by far the most popular among Yidden, with many keeping some semblance of observance, generally as a way of saying 'Thank You' and showing a form of Hakaras HaToV to our host country. Although all agree that showing Hakaras HaToV is prudent, on the other hand, it is well known that there were contemporary Poskim who were wary of any form of actual Thanksgiving observance. This article sets out to explore the history and halachic issues of this very American holiday.

Why Thanksgiving?

Americans commonly trace the holiday of Thanksgiving to the 1621 Pilgrim celebration at Plymouth Plantation, Massachusetts. The Pilgrims were expressing gratitude to G-d for a successful harvest after surviving a particularly harsh winter; mainly due to the aid of Squanto, the English speaking Native American, and the Wampanoag tribe, who taught them how to hunt (turkey) and plant (maize, a.k.a. corn) in the New World, and shared food supplies with them. A second Thanksgiving was observed on July 30th, 1623 in appreciation of an abundant harvest after a refreshing 14-day rain following a nearly catastrophic drought. Similar sporadic celebrations occurred locally throughout the New England area for the next century or so, but never on a national level until 1777, during the Revolutionary War, when 'The First National Proclamation of Thanksgiving' was given by the Continental Congress.

In 1782, John Hanson, the first United States president under the Articles of Confederation (and mysteriously somehow forgotten from the history books), declared the fourth Thursday of every November was to be observed as Thanksgiving. Several years later, first U.S. President George Washington issued 'The First National Thanksgiving Proclamation' (under the Constitution), designating November 26th 1789, as a day of Thanksgiving. He did so again in 1795. Yet, it was not until 1863, in the midst of the Civil War [a.k.a. 'The War Between the States' or 'The War of Northern Aggression' (for the Southerners out there)], when the holiday as we know it was formally established by President Abraham Lincoln, at the urging and behest of Sarah Josepha Hale, editor of Godey's Lady Book, who was lobbying for a national day off from work. Thanksgiving has since been observed annually as a national holiday across the United States.[1]

Although we can all appreciate the history lesson, nevertheless, our focus remains determining how Thanksgiving observance is viewed via the lens of halacha. Chukos HaGoyim?

In Parshas Acharei Mos, we are exhorted not to follow in the ways of the local non-Jewish populace, "U'Vichukoseihem Lo Seleichu." [2] According to the Rambam and later codified by the Tur and Shulchan Aruch, this prohibition includes manners of dress, haircuts, and even building styles.[3] Tosafos mentions that this prohibition includes two distinct types of customs: idolatrous ones, and those that are nonsensical; implying even if they are not done l'sheim Avodah Zarah, with specific idolatrous intent, they would still be prohibited to practice.[4]

However, other Rishonim, primarily the Ran, Mahar"i Kolon / Cologne / Colon (known as the Maharik), and Rivash, define the prohibition differently.[5] They maintain that a nonsensical custom of the Goyim is only prohibited when it is entirely irrational, with no comprehensible reason for it, or when it has connotations of idolatrous intent. Likewise, following a custom that would lead to a gross breach of modesty (pritzus) would fit the category. On the other hand, they maintain, observing a simple custom of the Goyim that has no reference to Avodah Zarah, especially if there is a valid reason for its performance, such as kavod, giving proper honor or respect, would indeed be permitted.

Although the Vilna Gaon rejects their understanding of the prohibition, and the Gilyon Maharsha seems to follow Tosafos,[6] nevertheless, the Rema explicitly rules like the Maharik and Ran, as does the Beis Yosef.[7] Accordingly, they hold that as long as a custom is secular, with no connection to Avodah Zarah, such a custom may still be observed.[8]

Most authorities over the generations, including the Mahari Kastro, the Imrei Aish, the Shoel U'Meishiv (Rav Yosef Shaul Nathanson), the Ksav Sofer, the Maharam Schick, the Maharsham (Rav Shalom Mordechai Schwadron), the Mahara"tz Chiyus, and more contemporarily, the Seridei Aish (Rav Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg), and Rav Ovadiah Yosef, zichronam levrachah,[9] all rule in accordance with the Rema's ruling, that as long as one has valid reasons for performing a specific custom, it does not necessarily get classified as the problematic Chukos HaGoyim, unless its origins are rooted in idolatrous practice.[10] [11]

Thanksgiving: Religious or Secular?

But to understand how this affects us and possible Thanksgiving observance, we must first ascertain whether Thanksgiving is truly a religious holiday or a secular one. Of the aforementioned Thanksgiving observances, all were declared as a unique day expressly designated to thank G-d for all of his 'gracious gifts.' This implies that it is meant to be a religious holiday. Yet, only the Continental Congress's proclamation made reference to the Christian deity. Additionally, there is no actual religious service connected with the day at all. Furthermore, nowadays, the vast majority of Americans simply associate Thanksgiving with food (mainly turkey), football, and family, and take the day off. This implies that its observance is strictly secular. Which is the real Thanksgiving?

Contemporary Rulings

As with many issues in halacha, there are different approaches to Thanksgiving observance. In fact, Rav Moshe Feinstein alone has written four different responsa on topic, spanning several decades.[12] Although in the earlier teshuvos he seems to be against the idea of a Thanksgiving celebration (there possibly was more religious connotations involved in the early 1960s celebrations than in the 1980s), nevertheless, in his later teshuvos he does allow a Thanksgiving observance (he notes that it is not a religious celebration) with turkey being served, as long as it is not seen as an obligatory annual celebration,[13] but rather as a periodical 'simchas reshush.' All the same, Rav Moshe concludes that it is still preferable not to have a celebration specifically for Thanksgiving.

Other contemporary poskim who allowed eating turkey on Thanksgiving include Rav Eliezer Silver, Rav Yosef Dov (J.B.) Soloveitchik,[14] the Rivevos Efraim,[15] and Rav Yehuda Herzl Henkin.[16] They explain that Thanksgiving is "only a day of thanks and not, Heaven forbid, idol celebration." They therefore maintain that merely eating turkey on Thanksgiving cannot be considered Chukos HaGoyim.

On the other hand, other contemporary authorities disagree. Rav Yitzchok Hutner, Rosh Yeshivas Rabbeinu Chaim Berlin, is quoted as maintaining that the establishment of Thanksgiving as an annual holiday that is based on the Christian calendar is, at the very least, closely associated with Avodah Zarah and therefore prohibited.[17] He explains that its annual observance classifies it as a 'holiday' and celebrating Gentile holidays is obviously not permitted.

It is well known that Rav Avigdor Miller was a strong proponent of this view as well, as Thanksgiving's origins belie that it was actually established as a religious holiday.[18]

Similarly, Rav Menashe Klein ruled that it is prohibited to celebrate Thanksgiving.[19] Aside from citing the Vilna Gaon's opinion, which would outright prohibit any such celebration, he mentions that although the Thanksgiving holiday was originally established by Pilgrims rejoicing over their own survival, that they didn't starve due to their finding the turkey, and might not be considered Chukos HaGoyim, nevertheless there is another prohibition involved. The Shulchan Aruch, based on a Mishnah in Maseches Avodah Zarah, rules that if an idolater makes a personal holiday for various reasons (i.e. his birthday, was let out of jail, etc.) and at that party he thanks his gods, it is prohibited to join in that celebration.[20] Rav Klein posits that the same would apply to Thanksgiving, as it commemorates the original Pilgrim Thanksgiving, thanking G-d for the turkey and their survival, and would be certainly prohibited, and possibly even Biblically.

An analogous ruling was given by Rav Feivel Cohen zt"l (author of the Badei HaShulchan) and yblich"t Rav Dovid Cohen shlit"t'a (of Gevul Ya'avetz), albeit for different reasons.[21] Rav Feivel Cohen takes a seemingly extreme position, maintaining that not only is it forbidden for a Jew to celebrate Thanksgiving, it is even prohibited for a Gentile to do so as well![22]

Rav Dovid Cohen, on the other hand, writes that for a Jew to eat turkey on Thanksgiving expressly for the sake of the holiday should be prohibited by the rule of Tosafos, as it would be deemed following an irrational rule of theirs that is improper to follow. Yet, he concedes that it is not prohibited for a family to get together on a day off from work and eat turkey together, as long as they do so not to celebrate Thanksgiving, but rather because they like turkey. Even so, he concludes that it is still preferable not to do so.

Trotting Out the Turkey?

With several differing major approaches to Thanksgiving advanced by contemporary authorities, which is the prevailing custom? Should turkey be on our plates this Thursday? The answer is that it depends. As shown, there are many authorities who maintain that Thanksgiving dinner should be avoided at all costs. However, many people do eat turkey on Thanksgiving, albeit many with non-Thanksgiving related intent. (Remember, even kosher turkey prices drop for the holiday!) Yet, it certainly seems preferable not make an 'exclusively for Thanksgiving' party. With Thanksgiving falling out on Rosh Chodesh Kislev some years, perhaps turkey may be served at a Rosh Chodesh Seudah.[23] As is usually the case, everyone should follow his community practice and the lead of their knowledgeable halachic authority.

Anecdotaly, my own grandmother, Mrs. Ruth Spitz a"t, would buy a turkey, but instead of serving it for Thanksgiving dinner, would rather save it and serve it l'kavod Shabbos on the Shabbos immediately following Thanksgiving. This way one is not compromising on tradition nor halacha, and additionally receives the benefits of kavod and oneg Shabbos (as well as gaining the 'Mitzva' of saving money by buying said turkey on sale).

Although nowadays for many in Yeshivish and Chassidic circles the idea of observing even some semblance of Thanksgiving may seem an anathema, it is interesting to note that many authorities of the previous generation did not seem overly concerned. In fact, as is widely known, the annual Agudas Yisrael Convention, attended by many Gedolim, was traditionally held over Thanksgiving weekend for many decades, with turkey on the menu.[24] Additionally, Rav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin's authoritative Ezras Torah calendar (with halachos for the whole year) noted Thanksgiving along with other secular holidays.

Come what may, with Chanukah on the way, we can concentrate on the upcoming days of true thanks giving, lehodot u'lehalal. In fact, although there generally is no need to be talking turkey while giving our thanks, nonetheless, this past year (5783/2022), due to a calendar quirk, turkey actually merited an honorable mention. You see, during Hallel on this past Thanksgiving - due to it being Rosh Chodesh Kislev - we all proclaimed "Hodu Lashem Ki Tov!" [25] [26]

Postscript: Turkey - Fowl Territory?

As an aside, and although widely eaten among Klal Yisrael, the turkey's acceptance as kosher fowl is an interesting inyan unto itself, as well as a halachic and historic seeming anomaly.

The Torah enumerates twenty-four various non-kosher "birds." [27] Since so many thousands of avian species exist, Chazalspecify four necessary anatomical indicative features (simanim) that identify a specific type of fowl as kosher: an extra toe, a crop, a pebble gizzard (meaning the gizzard's inner lining can be peeled from the outer muscle wall), and being non-predatory (doreis). [28]

However, as the exact translation of the non-kosher birds listed in the Torah is unknown, as well as the fact that we cannot be assured of the absolute non-predatory nature of any given species of bird, many early authorities contend that we do not rely on our understanding of these simanim, but rather we only eat fowl when we have a tradition (mesorah) that this specific species is indeed kosher. Indeed, Rashi cites precedent from the case of the "Swamp Chicken" (Tarnegola D'Agma), with which even Chazal made a mistake, not realizing at first that it is truly predatory in nature (doreis) and therefore non-kosher.[29] He therefore maintains that since we are not experts, we additionally need a mesorah to allow fowl to be eaten. The Rema, in fact, and concurred by virtually all halachic authorities, definitively rules this way lemaaseh, that we may not eat any species of bird without a mesorah.[30]

The issue is that our ubiquitous turkey is the quintessential as well as symbolic New World fowl,[31] and yet, is eaten by the vast majority of world Jewry, even though a mesorah pre-Columbus would be a seeming impossibility. One solution, proposed by the Netziv, Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin, venerated Rosh Yeshivas Volozhin, permitting turkey to be eaten, is on the basis that it has been eaten by Frum Yidden for several centuries and is now considered as having a mesorah.[32] Although there are certain prominent families, including descendants of the Tosafos Yom Tov and the Shlah, as well as the Frankel and Kamenetsky families, who are known to be personally stringent with partaking of turkey, nonetheless, it is widely considered not having any kashrus concerns and is indeed consumed by Klal Yisrael.[33]

Additionally, and quite interestingly, we find that several Acharonim, including the Bach, Magen Avraham, Ateres Zekeinim, Ba'er Heitiv, Aruch Hashulchan, and Mishnah Berurah,[34] understand the Yerushalmi's 'Red Chickens' (Tarnegolim Aduma)[35] which we must distance ourselves from its excrement while davening,[36] (as opposed to the understanding of red excrement from a chicken) to be referring to a turkey; giving implicit consent that it is indeed a kosher bird. (However, accordingly, and quite interestingly, it remains unclear how an American New World fowl was seemingly extant in Eretz Yisrael at the time of the writing of the Yerushalmi.)

In fact, the Chazon Ish ate turkey, based on a teshuva of his father's, Rav Shemaryahu Yosef Karelitz.[37] Obviously, the mainstream opinion that turkey is considered an acceptable fowl is also seen by the contemporary poskim who allowed it being eaten on Thanksgiving, as otherwise there would be nothing to debate.

Come what may, at least, from a kashrus perspective, it seems that turkey, the All-American fowl, is here to stay.[38]

This article was written L'Iluy Nishmas my beloved Bubby, Mrs. Ruth Spitz a"t,

Chana Rus bas Harav Yissachar Dov.

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[1] However, until 1942, when it was changed by a joint resolution of Congress, Thanksgiving was observed on the last Thursday in November, not the fourth Thursday. (The only practical difference is if there happens to be five Thursdays in November; otherwise, Thanksgiving remains the last Thursday).

[2] Yavayra (Ch. 18: verse 3).

[3] Rambam (Hilchos Avodah Zara Ch. 11: 1- 3), Tur and Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 17: 1), based on the Sifra (Parshas Acharei Mos, Parshata 9, Ch. 13: 8).

[4] Tosafos (Avodah Zarah 11a s.v. v'ee); answering the seeming contradiction between the Gemara in Avodah Zarah ad loc. and Sanhedrin 52b).

[5] Ran (Avoda Zara 2b s.v. Yisrael), Chiddushei HaRan (Sanhedrin 52b), Shu"t Maharik (Mahar"i Kolon/ Cologne/ Colon Shores 88, Anaf 1), and Shu"t Rivash (vol. 1: 158 s.v. v'yesh and v'im).

[6] Biur HaGr"t'a (Yoreh Deah 178: end 7) and Gilyon Maharsha (ad loc. 1). The Gr"t'a is bothered by the fact that the sugya in Sanhedrin seems to imply differently than the views of the Maharik, Ran, and later, the Rema, that a Chok Goyim, even one that is not a Chok Avodah Zarah should still be prohibited. Others who ask this question and conclude tzarich iyun on the Maharik's shittah include the Minchas Chinuch (Mitzvah

262: 2) and the Maharam Bennes (Divrei HaBriss; cited in Shu"t Imrei Aish, Yoreh Deah 55). However, there are those who do resolve the Gr"ra's difficulty, such as the Maharash Schick (Shu"t Yoreh Deah 165).

[7]Darchei Moshe and Rema (Yoreh Deah 178: 1). Although he does not cite either side of this machlokes in his Shulchan Aruch, nevertheless, in his Beis Yosef commentary, Rav Yosef Karo elucidates the shittah of the Maharik at great length and does not even cite Tosafos. Although one may infer that the Rambam (and later the Shulchan Aruch who codified his words as halachah) actually meant similar to Tosafos's understanding, as the implications of the prohibition of not copying actions of the Goyim, is seemingly unrelated to actions smacking of idol worship (and that is what the Ra'avad was arguing on and ruling akin to the Maharik), nonetheless, from the lashon of many other authorities, including the Maharik himself (ibid.), Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzva 262), Mabit (Kiryas Sefer on the Rambam ibid.), Meiri (Sanhedrin 52b), Bach (Yoreh Deah 178), and Divrei Chaim (Shu"t Yoreh Deah vol. 1: 30), it is clear that they understood that the Rambam himself was only referring to actions that had some relation to Avodah Zarah. See Shu"t Seridei Aish (old print vol. 3: 93; new print Yoreh Deah 39, Anaf 1: 5-14) who explains this at length. See also Shu"t Melamed L'Hoye'el (Orach Chaim 16), Shu"t Igros Moshe (Yoreh Deah vol. 4: 11), Shu"t Minchas Yitzchak (vol. 1: 29, 3 and 31), Minchas Asher (vol. 3, Vayikra, Parshas Emor, 33, pg. 197-205), and the Aderes's recently published Ovar Orach (Shema Eliyahu, 275, pg. 271-272; 2003), who discuss the parameters of the prohibition of "U'Vichukoseihem Lo Seleichu" and its nuances at length.

[8]Perhaps the most famous manifestation of this machlokes is the well-known one regarding festooning shuls with grass and/or trees on Shavuos. While the Rema (Orach Chaim 494:3) and Magen Avraham (ad loc. 5, s.v. nohagin) cite precedence for this widespread minhag from earlier authorities, the Vilna Gaon (as cited in Chayei Adam, vol. 2, 131:13, Chochmas Adam 89:1, and Maaseh Rav 195) maintained that this minhag should be banned due to potential violation of Chukos Hagoyim. For an extensive discussion of the topic, see previous article titled 'Adorning the Shul with Greenery on Shavuos: Minhag Yisraelor Chukos HaGoyim?' (see also Mishpacha Magazine's Kolmus, Shavuos 2016, "Festooning with Foliage"). Another interesting contemporary machlokes regarding flowers is whether planting flowers around a grave, ostensibly for kavod hameis, is considered a violation of Chukos HaGoyim. On this topic, see the Rogatchover Gaon's Shu"t Tzafnas Pane'ach (vol. 1:74), Shu"t Minchas Elazar (vol. 4: 61, 3), Rav Dovid Tzvi Hoffman's Shu"t Melamed L'Hoye'el (Yoreh Deah 109; also citing the opinions of Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch and Rav Ezzriel Hildesheimer), Shu"t Minchas Yitzchak (vol. 1:31), Rav Betzael Zolty's maamar printed in Kovetz Noam (vol. 2: pg. 170), Shu"t Seridei Aish (new print, Yoreh Deah 108), Shu"t Yaskil Avdi (vol. 4, Yoreh Deah 25), and Shu"t Yabia Omer (vol. 3, Yoreh Deah 24).

[9]Erech Lechem L'Maharikash (Glosses to Yoreh Deah 178:1; he adds that in his opinion we may not categorize instances not mentioned by Chazal as potential 'Chukos HaGoyim'), Shu"t Imrei Aish (Yoreh Deah 55), Yosef Daas (Yoreh Deah 348 s.v. v'hinei), Shu"t Ksav Sofer (Yoreh Deah 175), Shu"t Maharash Schick (Yoreh Deah 351), Daas Torah (Orach Chaim 494 s.v. v'nohagin and glosses to Orchos Chaim ad loc. 8), Shu"t Mahara"tz Chiyus (6), Shu"t Seridei Aish (old print vol. 3:93; new print Yoreh Deah 39, Anaf 2), and Shu"t Yabia Omer (vol. 3 Yoreh Deah 24: 5). Also of note, see Hagahos Maimoniyim (on the Rambam ad loc.) who maintains that we cannot categorize new items as "Chukos HaGoyim," as those explicitly enumerated by the Chachamim are specifically due to a Kaballah they had to include them as such.

[10]Rav Asher Weiss, the renowned Minchas Asher, in a recent maamar on the subject ("She'tichas Asavim B'Chag HaShavuot"; available here), adds that several Acharonim, including the Chasam Sofer (Shu"t, Orach Chaim 159; in a teshuva to the Maharatz Chiyus) and Beis Shlomo (Shu"t Yoreh Deah vol. 1:197) made an important distinction – ruling that even if a custom started due to goyim (i.e., a specific style of dress), once it is common for Jews to act similarly, it can no longer be considered Chukos HaGoyim. Rav Weiss illustrates this salient point with the minhag of Kaparos. Although the BeisYosef(O.C. 605) cites the OrchosChaim(Erev Yom Kippur) quoting the Ramban, that 'shluggingKaparos' is considered DarcheiHa'Emori, with the Tur and Rema(ad loc.); and in DarcheiMoshe ad loc. 5) defending this practice as a kosher common one, would anyone nowadays think that Kaparos is DarcheiHa'Emori? Has anyone ever heard of a single, solitary non-Jew waving a chicken around his head on an October morning? Quite assuredly not. Hence, even if a minhag may have started out as a non-Jewish custom, it possibly may no longer be considered as such.

[11]Furthermore, it must be noted that the Seridei Aish (Shu"t old print vol. 3: 93; new print Yoreh Deah 39, Anaf 2) at length proves that the Gr"ra's shittah actually runs contrary to the vast majority of Rishonim who conclude that unless there is at least a 'shemetz' of Avodah Zarah in their actions, copying them would not be a violation of Chukos HaGoyim. See also Shu"t Bnei Banim (vol. 2: 30) who writes that the minhag ha'olam is to follow the Rema in this dispute, as even according to those who generally follow the Gr"ra's psakim, that is only when it is a machlokes Acharonim. Yet, he posits, when the Gr"ra argues on both Rishonim and Acharonim, then the normative halachah does not follow his shittah. However, there are recent Acharonim who seem to disagree with this assessment. For example, see Shu"t Mishnah Halachos (vol. 10: 116) who does take the Gr"ra's opinion into account (in his specific case) and seems to side with him. The Minchas Yitzchak (vol. 1: 29, 3), as well (in his specific case) implies that if all factors were equal, it would be preferable to be machmir for the Gr"ra's shittah. Rav Betzael Zolty (maamar printed in Kovetz Noam vol. 2; see pg. 170) as well, regarding military funerals ostensibly performed for 'kavod hameis,' after citing many poskim and rationale why it should not be a violation of "Chukos HaGoyim," nonetheless concludes that according to the Gr"ra it most certainly would be, and therefore such ceremonies should be prohibited.

[12]Shu"t Igros Moshe (Even HaEzer vol. 2:13; Orach Chaim vol. 5:20, 6; Yoreh Deah vol. 4:11, 4; and Yoreh Deah vol. 4:12).

[13]See also Shu"t Igros Moshe (Yoreh Deah vol. 4:57, 11) where Rav Moshe reiterates this klal not to add new dates and observances to the calendar. The Chazon Ish as well (Kovetz Igros Chazon Ish vol. 1:97), and echoed by the Minchas Yitzchak (Shu"t vol. 10: end 10) and Rav Ovadia Yosef (Shu"t Yabia Omer vol. 6, Orach Chaim 41:6), famously wrote very strongly against setting new dates and obligatory observances into our Jewish calendar. A similar sentiment is expressed by Rav Moshe Sternbuch (Shu"t Teshuvos V'Hanhagos vol. 2:721), quoting the Brisker Rav, as well as by Rav Yosef Dov (J.B.) Soloveitchik (as stressed numerous times throughout his Mesorat HaRav Kinno). An opposing viewpoint regarding commemorating the Holocaust was given by Rav Aryeh Leib Spitz (no relation to this author), former Av Beis Din of Riga, and later, Newark, NJ, and renowned talmid of Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski in a maamar published in Kovetz Hamaor (vol. 262, May-June 1981).

[14]Nefesh HaRav (pg. 231). This author has heard from several talmidim of Rav Soloveitchik's that he would go home early on Thanksgiving, but only after making sure to give shiur, which sometimes lasted several hours. Apparently, he wanted to show his talmidim that a secular holiday is by no means an excuse to take a day off from Torah.

[15]Rav Silver's and Rav Greenblatt's opinions appear in theRJJ Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society (vol. 30, pg. 59).

[16] Shu"t Bnei Banim (vol. 3:37).

[17] Pachad Yitzchak - Igros U'Michtavim shel HaRav Hutner (109). Interestingly, Rav Hutner does not specify Thanksgiving by name.

[18] Aside from hearing this from several people who heard from Rav Miller directly, including my father-in-law, Rabbi Yaacov Tzvi Lieberman, Rav Miller publicly averred this in his famous Thursday night shiur (#529; titled 'The Mitzvah of Happiness'): "What's my opinion of Jews eating turkey on Thanksgiving? What's my opinion of going to church on Thanksgiving? I've consulted three encyclopedias... Each one states as follows. Thanksgiving is a church holiday. Forget about a legal holiday, forget about an American holiday. It's a church holiday. And it's made for the purpose of going to church and holding services... I don't ask Gedolim about Thanksgiving. I ask goyim what Thanksgiving is. And three kosher goyim wrote in encyclopedias that Thanksgiving is a church holiday, they're my poskim."

[19] Shu"t Mishnah Halachos (vol. 10:116). He does however concede on one point and clarifies that having a Thanksgiving seudah is not b'g'der 'Yaharog V'al Yaavor,' notwithstanding what was written in his name on a Kol Koreh!

[20] Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 148:7), based on a Mishnah in Maseches Avodah Zarah (8a).

[21] The Rabbis Cohen's opinions appear in the RJJ Journal of Halacha and Contemporary Society (vol. 30, pg. 59). Many of these Rabbim have written letters on topic to the author of this extensive article, Rabbi Michael J. Brojde of Atlanta, Georgia.

[22] The Badei Hashulchan's reasoning is based on his understanding of the Rambam (Hilchos Malachim Ch. 10:9), referring to the prohibitions of a Gentile to make for himself a day of rest akin to Shabbos or a Yom Moed. Rav Cohen posits that such a day is Thanksgiving which in essence, is an attempt by Gentiles to create a special day of festivities, and is therefore prohibited. However, it is not clear to this author why Thanksgiving should be considered similar to a Moed or Yom Tov, as there is no sheivas melacha involved with anyone's observance of the day. In fact, there is no actual observance of the day. The Rambam's intent regarding inclusion in the category of Goyim establishing a new Yom Tov would surely not incorporate the mere actions of sitting down to eat a specific food. As Rav Asher Weiss explains (Minchas Asher on Bereishis, Parshas Noach 11, pg. 66-67), according to the Rambam, in order for a Gentile's actions to qualify for this prohibition it needs to be a 'shevisa l'sheim chiddush das,' and not just for rest (menucha); an example being where he would create a 'Moed Gamur' with its own version of Kiddush, Tefillah, and Mitzvos of the day, akin to a Yom Tov. This would certainly preclude Thanksgiving, which its observance meets none of this criteria. Perhaps this explains why the other machmirim do not make use of this halachic rationale to prohibit Thanksgiving celebrations.

[23]See Tur and Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 419:1) and main commentaries: "Mitzvah L'Harbos B'Seudas Rosh Chodesh."

[24]See, for example, Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetsky's 'Streets of Life' column in Ami Magazine (#143, October 2, 2013, pg. 94, titled 'Tagging Along' and in Ami Magazine #195, December 3, 2014, pg. 100, titled 'Let's Talk Turkey'). This author has also heard this tidbit from noted historian Rabbi Berel Wein. Parenthetically, Rabbi Kamenetsky also mentions that his grandfather, Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky zt"l did not partake of the turkey, due to issues of mesorah. For more on this topic, see the postscript, as well as a previous article titled 'Buffalo Burgers and the Zebu Controversy' (see also Yated Ne'eman 19 Adar II 5774 | March 21, 2014).

[25]Aside from "Hodu" meaning "Give thanks", as well as referring to the country of India, in Modern Hebrew it actually refers to "turkey."

[26] Interestingly, there may more to this minhag, even when Thanksgiving does not coincide with Rosh Chodesh. As related to this author by R' Avi Brumer, as told to him directly by Rav Yitzchok (Irving) Chinn, longtime Rav of the Cong. Gemilas Chesed of McKeesport, Pennsylvania [see Shu"t Igros Moshe (Y.D. vol. 2:54) for a fascinating teshuva from Rav Moshe Feinstein to Rav Chinn regarding the permissibility of erecting a JFK statue in tribute for the fallen president] and talmid muvchak of Rav Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz, that Rav Shraga Feivel was of the opinion that one should say Hallel with a brachah on Thanksgiving. This is due to the fact that the settlement of North America by Europeans allowed numerous Jewish lives to be saved over the centuries, and thus the celebration of such an event was worthy of being considered a Neis. Although this was not the official minhag of Torah V'Daas, Rav Chinn recounted that several talmidim did take it upon themselves personally after hearing Rav Mendlowitz discuss it. In the concluding words of Rabbi Brummer, "I'm not sure if it was meant as a full Hallel or a Chetz Hallel. Now, Rav Chinn did say that this was a severely minority opinion, but it does further add to the discussion."

[27]Vayikra (Parashas Shemini Ch. 11:13-24) and Devarim (Parashas Re'eh Ch. 14:11-21).

[28]Mishnah and following Gemara (Chullin 59a-61b). There is much debate among the Rishonim how to properly define these simanim, especially a "non-doreis," as well as if the Gemara's intent was that all four features are necessary to render a bird kosher, or if the three physical characteristics are sufficient proof that the fowl is non-predatory and therefore kosher.

[29]Gemara Chullin (62b) and Rashi (ad loc. s.v. chazyuha).

[30]Rema (Y.D. 82:3). The Shulchan Aruch (Y.D. 82:2) actually rules this way as well, but allows several more leniencies (see ad loc. 82:3) than the Rema's stronger language.

[31]It is told that Benjamin Franklin even wanted the turkey to be the official bird / National Symbol of the USA, and not the Bald Eagle. It seems he lost that vote. See <http://birdnote.org/show/national-symbol-turkey-vs-eagle>.

[32]Shu"t Meishiv Davar (Yoreh Deah 22).

[33]For more on the topic of the kashrus status of turkey, and its more kashrus-wise complicated companion fowl, the Muscovy Duck, Posen Hen, Guineafowl, and/or Cochon, and how they are/were viewed from a halachic perspective through the ages, see Nachal Eshkol (on the Sefer Ha'Eshkol, Hilchos Beheima, Chaya, v'Of 22:10; he understands there to be an Indian mesorah on the turkey), Knesses HaGedolah (Y.D. 82:31), Shu"t Shoel U'Meishiv (Mahadura Telita'ei vol. 1:149 and Mahadura Chamisha'ah vol. 1:69), Shu"t Chasam Sofer (Y.D. 74), Shu"t Divrei Chaim (O.C. 9 and Y.D. vol. 2:45-48), Shu"t Maharash Schick (Y.D. 98-100), Shu"t Tuv Taam V'Daas (Mahadura Telita'ei 150-152), Shu"t Ha'Elef Lecha Shlomo (Y.D. 111), Shu"t Beis Yitzchak (Y.D. vol. 1:106), Shu"t Yehuda Yaaleh (vol. 1, Y.D. 92-94), Shu"t Tzelosa D'Avraham (7), Shu"t HaRim (Y.D. 8), Shu"t Tzemach Tzedek (Y.D. 60), Shu"t She'eilas Shalom (Y.D. 22), Arugas Habosem (Kuntress HaTeshuvos 16), Shu"t Ori V'Yishi (vol. 1:11), Damesek Eliezer (51:84 and Ch. 4, 12:73), Shu"t Binyan Tzion (vol. 1:42), Shu"t Dvar Halacha (53), Rav Yissachar Dov Illovy's Shu"t Milchemos Elokim (pg. 162-165; also citing teshuvos from Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch and Rav Nosson Adler, the first Chief Rabbi of England; regarding the Muscovy Duck), Shu"t Avnei Nezer (Y.D. 75), Shu"t Michtav Sofer (Y.D. 3), Shu"t Melamed L'Hoye'el (vol. 2:Y.D. 15), the Maharsham's Daas Torah (Y.D. 82:3), Shu"t Mei Be'er (19; who opines that the turkey actually came from India and even has a mesorah dating back to Moshe Rabbeinu!), Zivchei Tzedek (Y.D. 82:17), Darchei Teshuva (Y.D. 82:26), Rav Yehuda Leib Tsirole's Ma'archei Lev (Chelek HaTeshuvos, Y.D. 30; regarding the Posen Hen), Shu"t Divrei Malkiel (vol. 4:56), Rav Yosef Aharon Teren of Argentina's Zecher Yosef (pg. 1a-6b; regarding the Muscovy Duck), Shu"t Nishmas Chaim (Y.D. 63), Kaf Hachaim (Y.D. 82:21), Shu"t Igros Moshe (Y.D. vol. 1:34; also citing the opinions of Rav Naftali Carlebach and Rav Yosef Eliyahu Henkin; regarding the Posen Hen), Shu"t Har Tzvi (Y.D. 75; regarding the Muscovy Duck), Shu"t Minchas Yitzchak (vol. 5:31), Kovetz Mesorah (vol. 3, pg. 60-65; in a maamar from the Beis Avi, Rav Yitzchak Isaac Liebes, regarding Rock Cornish Hens), Rav Yisroel Belsky's Shu"t Shulchan Halevi (Ch. 19:1; pg. 169-170; regarding the turkey and vis-à-vis the Muscovy Duck), Rav Shmuel Salant's recent posthumously published Aderes Shmuel (222; pg. 225-228), Sichas Chullin (pg. 429, on Chullin 63a; who astoundingly posits that the turkey mesorah possibly came from the Ten Lost Tribes who might have been early Native Americans, as per Rav Menashe ben Yisrael's unsubstantiated theory (in his seminal Mikveh Yisrael), who then contacted Indian and English Poskim!), and Rav Yaakov Yedidiah Adani's fascinating halachic history of the Muscovy Duck, published in Kovetz Eitz Chaim (vol. 26; Elul 5776, pg. 430-455). The mainstream opinion that turkey is considered an acceptable fowl is also seen by the contemporary Poskim who allowed it being eaten on Thanksgiving.

[34]See Bach (O.C. 79, s.v. kasav Beis Yosef), Magen Avraham (ad loc. 14), Ateres Zekeinim (ad loc.), Ba'er Heitiv (ad loc. 12), Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 16), and Mishnah Berurah (ad loc. 26).

[35]Yerushalmi (Ervin Ch. 3, Halacha 5).

[36]See Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 79:6).

[37]This teshuva was recently published in Shu"t V'Chiddushim Chazon Ish (132); see also Orchos Rabbeinu (new edition - 5775; vol. 4, pg. 9, 1).

[38]See Rabbi Ari Zivotofsky's excellent and thorough treatment of the Turkey at Kashrut.com.

Disclaimer: This is not a comprehensive guide, rather a brief summary to raise awareness of the issues. In any real case one should ask a competent Halachic authority.

L'iluy Nishmas the Rosh HaYeshiva - Rav Chonoh Menachem Mendel ben R' Yechezkel Shraga, Rav Yaakov Yeshaya ben R' Boruch Yehuda.

There Is No Other Hand
By Rabbi Efreim Goldberg
Can I deny everything I believe in?
On the other hand, can I deny my own child?

On the other hand how can I turn my back on my faith, my people? If I try to bend that far I will break.

On the other hand...

There is no other hand.

-- Fiddler on the Roof

If you are familiar with my speeches, classes, and writings, you know I am a big believer and fierce advocate of the importance of nuance and using more careful language in our conversations, debates, and dialogues. Much of our divisiveness and disunity is the result of speaking in absolutes with too much confidence, too little nuance, and the inability or unwillingness to look at other perspectives.

And yet, there are certain issues, events, and people that are clear as day, and the introduction of nuance or the use of a tolerant approach isn't noble or righteous, it is cruel and irresponsible. As Tevye memorably puts it, there is no other hand.

Most of the time we should strive to live in the gray, to respect that there are opinions and approaches we may vociferously disagree with but are still legitimate, within bounds, and espoused by those who genuinely believe in the safety, security, unity and eternity of our people. One can disagree determinedly with the Satmar philosophy and its approach to the State of Israel, but you can't argue that they work against the future or fate of our people. The Satmar community has said Tehillim daily since the start of the war and I personally witnessed the Rebbe gave a member of our community a beracha that his son serving in the IDF be safe, secure and successful in defending our people.

But there are also rare times that call for a black-and-white view, to recognize that being open, thoughtful, respectful of other opinions and approaches doesn't mean tolerating or accepting the opinions and activism of those who are working against our people, who don't share in our fate, who aren't consumed by our safety and well-being, even if they are Jewish.

While Israel is fighting a war on seven fronts, seeking to defend millions of innocent civilians against evil enemies who seek the destruction of Israel and the death of all Jews, Senator Bernie Sanders, who is Jewish, sponsored and led a campaign in support of a resolution aiming to block \$20 billion in sales of U.S. arms to the Jewish state. While he stopped short of declaring Israel of perpetrating a genocide (though he had no problem calling Israel's actions "atrocities"), he asserted that military aid to Israel violates U.S. law prohibiting weapons sales to "countries that violate internationally recognized human rights."

Despite the Biden administration rejecting the claim and actively lobbying against the resolution, nearly half the Senate majority caucus voted in favor, smearing Israel's war of self-defense and casting Israel as a villain on the world stage. This group included two Jewish senators: Sanders and Jon Ossoff.

I have spoken and written about not using my pulpit or platform to campaign for or against political officials. Again, there are times that call for a different approach. Remember these senators' names, work to ensure they are not re-elected, and hold them accountable for slandering the Jewish state and compromising the safety and security of our people around the world:

Sens. Dick Durbin (D-Ill), Martin Heinrich (D-NM), Mazie Hirono (D-Hawaii), Tim Kaine (D-Va.), Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM), Ed Markey (D-Mass.), Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.), Chris Murphy (D-Conn.), Jon Ossoff (D-Ga.), Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii), Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Tina Smith (D-Minn.) Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.), Raphael Warnock (D-Ga.), Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.), Peter Welch (D-Vt.), George Helmy (D-NJ) as well as Angus King (I-Maine) and Sanders each voted in favor of at least one of the three bills, while Sen. Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.) voted "present."

Is it a coincidence that soon after the vote got the support of more than one third of the democrats in the Senate, the illegitimate International Criminal Court (ICC) issued arrest warrants for Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, and Yoav Gallant, Israel's former defense minister, for war crimes committed in Gaza? Is it random that a few days after a prominent Jew holding high political office led an effort to demonize the Jewish state a Chabad Rabbi in the UAE, Rabbi Zvi Kogan Hy"d was kidnapped and brutally murdered by emboldened

agents of Iran? Is it a stretch to draw a line connecting the dots between prominent Jews not only failing to support but working against Israel, and enemies of Israel acting in outrageous and despicable ways?

There must be no nuance in recognizing that Bernie Sanders, Jewish or not, is dangerous and his views are entirely illegitimate. In fact, one can make a reasonable argument that his Jewishness actually provides cover for non-Jewish antisemites and other bad actors, who can (and often do) point to Sanders and say, "he's Jewish and he agrees with me." Failure to call things as they are would be putting ourselves in danger.

This danger is not limited to secular Jews. Neturei Karta, Aramaic for "guardians of the city," are anything but protectors of our people. Despite their external religious garb and presentation as observant Jews, they are dangerous extremists whose behavior—meeting with and hugging world leaders who seek Jewish blood, rallying in the streets to support perpetrators of evil, to name a few lovely examples—has excluded them from our people and ensured they have no portion in the World to Come. They, too, use their Jewishness in dangerous ways and provide useful cover for antisemitism. There is no nuance in rejecting, disassociating and marginalizing them.

There is no other hand when it comes to the extreme progressive groups like Jewish Voice for Peace and Rabbis for Ceasefire. These groups don't claim to be Orthodox and certainly don't look it but they are no less dangerous and illegitimate than Neturei Karta. They use their Jewishness as a convenient tool to advance their goals of supporting Hamas and their enablers. Like Neturei Karta, they provide terrific cover, as evidenced by Rashida Tlaib and other members of the Squad being all-too-happy to rally with them, meet with them, and attend their disingenuous prayer services.

J-Street, a self-described "pro-Israel, pro-peace" organization, has advocated for the Biden administration to withhold weapons from the Jewish state, arguing that the United States needs to hold Israel accountable for alleged human rights "violations" before President-Elect Donald Trump takes office in January. Instead of educating the world about how Israel has gone to unprecedented lengths to avoid civilian casualties, this "pro-Israel" organization, led by "proud Jews," has been among the loudest voices of disinformation, miseducation, and distortions about Israel in the world.

Peter Beinart, a prominent writer and observant Jew who keeps kosher and learns Daf Yomi, has written shocking and shameful anti-Israel articles and columns for years, most recently taking to the New York Times to slander and attack Israel, describing the war as, "Israel's slaughter and starvation of Palestinians — funded by U.S. taxpayers and live-streamed on social media." He went so far as to blame the election results on Israel and by extension the Jews.

To be clear, I am not interested in name-calling. There has been endless debate since October 7 (and of course before then, too) about who is a "self-hating Jew," whether certain politicians are "kapos," and the like. To engage in those debates is to miss the forest for the trees. Coming up with the right term or label, and arguing whether or not Bernie Sanders is a self-hating Jew, an antisemite, or neither, is time not well spent. The focus should be in recognizing the behavior, calling it out, and working hard to counter any influence or voice these people have.

Since there have been Jews, there have been traitors to the Jewish people, including famous converts who led disputations and defectors who collaborating with enemies. In her article, *The Jews Who Fought for Nazi Germany*, Ellen Feldman writes: "What was the safest place for a Jew in Hitler's Germany? A cellar or an attic? A forest? At home with a well-connected Aryan spouse? The answer was in Hitler's military—in the Wehrmacht, the Kriegsmarine, or the Luftwaffe—at least until the tide of war turned and all three began to suffer staggering losses." She documents Jews who fought alongside the Nazis against the Jews for diverse motivations and for different reasons.

While their behavior is inexcusable, Jews who conspired with or aided the Nazis could at least argue they were trying to save their lives. What could Bernie Sanders, Jon Ossoff, Neturei Karta, J-Street, Rabbis for Peace, or Peter Beinart say compels them to vilify of the Jewish state and justifies their efforts to hamper its ability to defend its people? It is

disingenuous and dangerous for these people and groups to blame Israel for the suffering—including the suffering inflicted on the Palestinian civilians whom they claim to care about—that is caused by Hamas, who started this war with a heinous, bloodthirsty pogrom, and can end it immediately by returning hostages and laying down their guns.

We read every Friday night, “ohavei Hashem sin’u rah,” those who truly love Hashem hate and reject evil and wrongdoing. Dovid HaMelech does not encourage us to hate the individual, but rather his choices. However, there are times when we can’t and shouldn’t separate the person from the choices they make and if we truly love Hashem, justice, and the Jewish people then we cannot and must not tolerate or accept the perpetration of that wrongdoing. There are times for nuance and balance and time for moral clarity and clear lines.

In the days of Rabban Gamliel, Jewish traitors posed a threat to the nation. Shmuel HaKatan was recruited to author a prayer, a 19th blessing to be added to the Amidah that their nefarious and slanderous plans be unsuccessful. Shmuel was called “HaKatan” because he maintained his childlike innocence, purity and love. He was chosen to write this blessing because he had no ulterior motive or agenda in doing so. It didn’t serve him politically, financially, or socially. Indeed, he is the one quoted in Pirkei Avos who most embodied the dictum in Mishlei (24:17), “Do not take joy in the downfall of your enemies.” He was chosen because his intent was pure and unblemished.

We must remain committed to nuance in our discussions, conversations, debates, and dialogues with one another. Indeed, Shlomo HaMelech taught (Mishlei 18:21), “Maves v’chaim b’yad lashon, Death and life and in the power of the tongue.” Our language matters and it can be the difference between life and death.

But in these times when the future and wellbeing of our people is at stake, we must also have moral clarity, to hate evil, call it out, work against it, even when it is from within our people. To recognize when there is no other hand.

When you say V’lamalshinim, mean it.

Toldot: Jacob Rescued Abraham

Rav Kook Torah

According to an intriguing Midrash (Tanchuma Toldot 4), Abraham would not have made it out of his hometown of Ur Casdim alive were it not for the intervention of his grandson Jacob. King Nimrod ordered Abraham to be thrown into a fiery furnace because of Abraham’s rejection of idolatry. But Jacob came to the rescue, as it says:

“So said God to the House of Jacob who redeemed Abraham: Jacob will not be ashamed, nor will his face become pale.” (Isaiah 29:22)

Even given the poetic license of Midrashic literature, Jacob could not have literally rescued his grandfather in an incident that took place before Jacob was born. Rather, the Sages wanted to teach us that Abraham was saved due to some special merit or quality his grandson Jacob possessed. What was this quality?

Two Paths of Change

There are two paths of spiritual growth that one may take. The first path is one of sudden, radical change, usually the result of some external catalyst. One example of such a transformation may be found in the story of King Saul. The prophet Samuel informed Saul that he would meet a band of prophets playing musical instruments. This encounter, the prophet told Saul, will be a turning point in your life. “The spirit of God will suddenly come over you, and you will prophesize with them. And you will be transformed into a different person” (I Samuel 10:6). The second path is one of slow, deliberate growth. We attain this gradual change through our own toil; it does not require an external stimulus and thus is always accessible.

But why are there two different paths of change available to us? If God provided us with two paths, then clearly both are needed. We should first prepare ourselves and advance as much as possible through our own efforts. After we have attained

the highest level that we are capable of reaching, we may then benefit from unexpected inspiration from the inner recesses of our soul.

Abraham was a spiritual revolutionary, initiating a revolt against the idolatry of his generation. Abraham is the archetype of radical change. The defining moments of his life were dramatic events of astonishing dedication and self-sacrifice, such as his brit milah (circumcision) at an advanced age, and the Akeidah, the Binding of Isaac. In the merit of Abraham’s far-reaching spiritual a his descendants inherited those soul-qualities which foster sudden transformation. Future generations, however, cannot rely solely on Abraham’s style of radical change. As a normative path for all times, we need the method of gradual spiritual growth. The model for this type of change is Jacob. Unlike his grandfather, Jacob never underwent sudden transformations of personality or direction. Rather, the Torah characterizes him as “a quiet, scholarly man, dwelling in tents” (Gen. 25:27). Jacob’s place was in the tents of Torah. He worked on himself step by step, growing through perseverance and diligence in Torah study.

Two Names for Jerusalem

The Midrash teaches that the name Yerushalayim (Jerusalem) is a combination of two names, indicating that the holy city possesses qualities represented by both names. Abraham called the city Yireh, while Malki-Tzedek called it Shalem. Not wanting to offend either of these righteous men, God combined both names together, naming the city Yeru-shalayim (Breishit Rabbah 56:10).

What does the name Yireh mean? The holy city, particularly the Temple, had a profound impact on all who experienced its unique sanctity. This profound spiritual encounter is described as a form of sublime perception — “Your eyes will see your Teacher” (Isaiah 30:20). This elevated vision inspired visitors to reach beyond their ordinary spiritual capabilities. Due to the spiritual transformation effected by perceiving Jerusalem’s holiness, Abraham named the city Yireh — “he will see.”

Malki-Tzedek, on the other hand, referred to the city’s qualities which assist those who seek to perfect themselves in a gradual fashion. Jerusalem is a place of Torah and ethical teachings, “For Torah shall go forth from Zion” (Isaiah 2:3). Therefore, Malki-Tzedek named the city Shalem (perfection), referring to this incremental approach towards achieving spiritual perfection.

Jacob to the Rescue

Returning to our original question: how did Jacob rescue his grandfather from Nimrod’s fiery furnace? In what way will Jacob “not be ashamed”?

The Kabbalists explain that the goal of humanity — the reason why the soul is lowered into this world — is so that we may perfect ourselves through our own efforts. This way, we will not need to partake of nehama dekisufa (the “bread of shame”), a metaphor for benefiting from that which we did not earn.

While this explanation fits the path of gradual change, it would appear that the path of radical transformation is an external gift that we do not deserve. Is this not the undesired nehama dekisufa that we should avoid?

Not necessarily. If we are able to take this unexpected gift and use it to attain even greater levels of spiritual growth through our own efforts, then there is no shame in accepting it. We can compare this to a father who gave his son a large sum of money. If the son simply lives off the money until it is finished, then the father’s gift is nehama dekisufa, an embarrassment for the son, reflecting no credit upon him. If, however, the son uses the money to start a new business, and through his efforts doubles and triples the original investment, then the son has certainly pleased his father and brought honor to himself.

This is exactly the way that Jacob “rescued” his grandfather Abraham. Left on his own, the most natural path for Abraham — whose revolutionary soul called for sudden, drastic change — would have been to achieve complete and absolute self-sacrifice in Nimrod’s fiery furnace. It was Jacob’s trait of gradual change that saved Abraham from the fate of martyrdom. Abraham adopted the path of measured spiritual change which his grandson Jacob exemplified. Abraham left the furnace, and over the years worked diligently to attain the spiritual elevation that he had relinquished inside Nimrod’s furnace.

Why bother with the slower path? “Jacob will not be ashamed.” By growing slowly through our own efforts, the spiritual gifts of radical change are no longer an embarrassing nehama dekisufa, but an honorable gift which we have utilized to the fullest.

לע"נ

**שרה משה בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה
אנא מלכה בת ישראל**