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INTERNET PARSHA SHEET ON **TOLDOS** - 5772

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Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British
Commonwealth
<http://www.chief Rabbi.org/tt-index.html>
Toldot 5771

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

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

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

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

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

But why, in that case, did Isaac love Esau? Did he not know about Rebekah's oracle? Had she not told him about it? Besides, did he not know that Esau was wild and impetuous? Can we really take literally the proposition that Isaac loved Esau because "he had a taste for wild game," as if his affections were determined by his stomach,

by the fact that his elder son brought him food he loved? Surely not, when the very future of the covenant was at stake.

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

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

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

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

The Maggid of Dubnow adds a perceptive comment as to why Isaac, but not Rebekah, was deceived. Rebekah grew up with the wily Laban. She knew deception when she saw it. Isaac, by contrast, had grown up with Abraham and Sarah. He only knew total honesty and was thus easily deceived. (Bertrand Russell once commented on the philosopher G. E. Moore, that he only once heard Moore tell a lie, when he asked Moore if he had ever told a lie, and Moore replied, "Yes").

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

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

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

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

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

Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel said: No man ever honoured his father as I honoured my father, but I found that Esau honoured his father even more.

(Devarim Rabbah 1: 15)

Rabbi Shimon derives this from the fact that usually people serve their parents wearing ordinary clothes while they reserve their best for going out. Esau, however, had kept his best clothes in readiness to serve his father the food he had gone out to hunt. That is why Jacob was able to wear them while Esau was still out hunting (27:14). We find, much later in the Torah, that G-d forbids the Israelites to wage war against Esau's descendants. He tells Moses:

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

And later still Moses commands the Israelites:

Do not abhor an Edomite [i.e. a descendant of Esau], for he is your brother.

(Deut. 23: 8)

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

So, was Isaac right or wrong to love Esau? Esau reciprocated the love, but remained Esau, the hunter, the man of the field, not the man to carry forward the demanding covenant with the invisible G-d and the spiritual sacrifices it called for. Not all children follow the path of their parents. If it was Isaac's intent that Esau should do so, he failed. But there are some failures that are honourable. Loving your children, whatever they become, is one, for surely that is how G-d loves us.

The first two volumes of Covenant and Conversation are now available in book form; Covenant and Conversation: Genesis: The Book of Beginnings and Covenant and Conversation: Exodus: The Book of Redemption are now published by Maggid Books, an imprint of Koren Publishers

From **Rabbi Menachem Leibtag** tsc@bezeqint.net

To Pareg <par-reg@mail.tanach.org>

Subject [Par-reg]

THE TANACH STUDY CENTER [<http://www.tanach.org>] In
Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag Shiurim in Chumash & Navi
by Menachem Leibtag

* PARSHAT TOLDOT - 'the chosen son'

Are Yitzchak and Rivka playing 'favorites'? Indeed, a cursory reading of Parshat Toldot certainly leaves that impression. Furthermore, why does Yitzchak choose to bless only one of his children? Would it have been so terrible had he planned to bless both Esav and Yaakov?

In the following shiur, we search for the deeper meaning of these events by considering the distinction between what we will refer to as 'bechira' and 'beracha'.

INTRODUCTION

Our shiurim thus far on Sefer Breishit have focused on its theme of "bechira" - i.e. God's designation of Avraham and his offspring to become His special nation. We made special note of the numerous times that God had promised Avraham that his offspring ('zera') would become a great nation in a special land ('aretz'). Even though each promise added a unique dimension to Avraham's destiny, they all shared an element of the same phrase:

"le-ZAR'ACHA natati et ha-ARETZ ha-zot...

- to your OFFSPRING, I have given this LAND."

[See 12:7, 13:15, 15:18, 17:8]

However, despite these numerous blessings suggesting that this nation will emerge from all of Avraham's offspring, God later informs Avraham that specifically Sarah's son - Yitzchak - to the exclusion of all other offspring - has been chosen to fulfill this destiny:

"For it is [only] through Yitzchak that there shall be called for you ZARA [your offspring]." (21:12)

Parshat Toldot opens as God Himself confirms this blessing to Yitzchak, when He forbids him to leave the land during a famine:

"Reside in this land and I will bless you... for I will assign all this LAND to YOU and to YOUR OFFSPRING." (26:2-5)

What will happen when Yitzchak has children? Will only ONE of his children be chosen, as was the case with Avraham, or will ALL his offspring be chosen?

Considering that the reason for God's 'bechira' (selection) of Avraham was for his offspring to become a NATION (see 12:1-2), obviously this 'filtering' process of choosing only ONE son over the others could not continue forever. Should only one 'favorite son' be chosen in each generation, a nation could obviously never develop. Sooner or later, this 'filtering process' must end, and an entire family must be chosen.

Thanks to our 20/20 hindsight, we know that this process ends after THREE generations (Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov). However, the Avot themselves may have been unaware of when this 'bechira' process was to end. Let's consider this possibility in regard to Yitzchak.

ALL IN THE FAMILY

A priori, Yitzchak has no reason to assume that only ONE son would be chosen and the other rejected. Unlike Yitzchak and Yishmael, who had DIFFERENT mothers, both Yaakov and Esav are born from the same mother. What more, they are twins! Therefore, it is only logical for Yitzchak to assume that BOTH Yaakov and Esav will join the 'chosen family'.

Furthermore, even if there is some divine reason to choose only one son, it should be GOD's choice and NOT Yitzchak's! After all, God alone had been involved in this BECHIRA process heretofore. He had chosen Avraham and He alone had chosen Yitzchak over Yishmael. Without a specific divine command, why would Yitzchak even consider making such a bold decision?

Thus, Yitzchak most likely believed that both Yaakov and Esav were included within the divine promise to Avraham's progeny. So why does Yitzchak intend to bless only ONE of them? 'BRACHA' OR 'BECHIRA'?

To answer this question, we must differentiate between TWO basic types of blessings found in Sefer Breishit. For the sake of convenience, we will refer to one as BECHIRA and the other as BRACHA. Let's explain:

BECHIRA*

We use the term BECHIRA (selection) to describe God's blessing of 'ZERA va-ARETZ' to the Avot, the privilege of fathering God's special nation. BECHIRA implies that only one son is chosen while the others are rejected. As we explained, this process began with God's designation of Avraham Avinu and continued with His choice of Yitzchak over Yishmael. It is not clear, however, when this bechira process will end. 'BRACHA'

We will use the name BRACHA to describe a father's blessing for the personal destiny (e.g. prosperity, power) of his sons. Noach, for example, bestows a BRACHA on each of his three sons (9:24-27). He does not choose one son over the others to become a special nation. Rather, he blesses (or curses) each son based on his individual potential.

The classic example of BRACHA (as opposed to BECHIRA) is Yaakov Avinu's blessings to his twelve sons prior to his death, in Parshat Vayechi (see 49:1-28). Clearly, Yaakov does not choose one or several of his children to become God's special nation. Rather, he bestows a blessing of personal destiny upon each son, according to his understanding of each son's individual character and potential (see 49:28).

Thus, according to these definitions - BRACHA is bestowed by a father, while BECHIRA is established by God.
YITZCHAK'S BRACHA TO ESAV

With this distinction in mind, we return to our opening question regarding the kind of blessing that Yitzchak intends to bestow upon Esav. Is it a blessing of BRACHA or BECHIRA? Considering that Yitzchak has no apparent reason to choose only one son, we should expect that his intended blessing to Esav was one of BRACHA (and not BECHIRA).

To determine if this assumption is indeed correct, let's examine the content of the actual blessing that Yitzchak bestowed - intended for Esav but deceptively seized by Yaakov:

"May God give you of the dew of heaven
and the FAT of the land,
and an abundance of GRAIN and WINE.

Other nations shall SERVE you and bow down to you;
be MASTER over your brother,
and let your mother's sons bow down to you ..."

(27:28-29)

Note how this blessing focuses on prosperity and leadership, and hence would fall under our category of BRACHA. It cannot be BECHIRA, as it does NOT contain the phrase of 'ZERA VA-ARETZ'. In fact, this blessing strongly resembles the blessings of prosperity and leadership which Yaakov himself later bestows upon Yehuda (see 49:8) and Yosef (see 49:25-26).

But if indeed if this is a blessing of BRACHA, why does Yitzchak (intend to) bestow this blessing only on Esav? Would it not have made sense had he blessed both sons?

THE RIGHT MAN FOR THE JOB

As we suggested above, Yitzchak expects that both his children will be chosen. Realizing that this nation (that will ultimately evolve from his two sons) will require leadership, Yitzchak must appoint one of his sons to take family leadership. But which son should he choose for this responsibility?

One could suggest that Yitzchak concluded that Esav - the "ish sadeh" [a man of the world (see 25:27)] - was the more suitable candidate for this job.

Considering that Yaakov & Esav are over sixty years old, note that Esav is married with children, has a job, and can take care of himself and others. Yaakov, on the other hand, is still single and 'living at home'. It is readily understandable, then, why Yitzchak chooses Esav to become the family provider and leader.

We can even presume that Yitzchak has a blessing in store for Yaakov as well - most probably one that involves spiritual leadership. Yaakov - the "ish tam yoshev ohalim," a man of the book (see 25:27) - can provide the family with spiritual guidance.

[This 'theoretical blessing' to Yaakov resembles the ultimate responsibility of shevet Levi (see Devarim 33:10).] However, without FIRST establishing a nation (with the help of Esav), there would be no one around for Yaakov to guide.]

The fact that Yitzchak had called upon Esav to receive his blessing FIRST, does not rule out the possibility that he may have intended to bless Yaakov afterward. Note that in Parshat Vayechi, Yaakov FIRST blesses Yosef before proceeding to bless all twelve children.

So what went wrong? Why does Rivka intervene? Why must Yaakov 'steal' Esav's BRACHA? Or, to put it more bluntly, is Rivka simply standing up for her 'favorite son' or did she perceive the situation differently?

To answer this question, we must return to the beginning of the Parsha.

RIVKA KNOWS BEST

Apparently, Rivka knows something that Yitzchak doesn't. Recall that Rivka suffered from an unusually difficult pregnancy and seeks God for an explanation (see 25:22). Note how God's answer to HER (and not to Yitzchak!) already alludes to the fact that the BECHIRA process has not yet ended:

"And God answered HER saying: There are TWO NATIONS in your womb, and TWO SEPARATE PEOPLES shall issue from your body.

One people shall be mightier than the other, and the older shall serve the YOUNGER." (25:23)

Rivka here learns that her twins are destined to become TWO NATIONS, and as such, only ONE - the younger one (see 25:23, "ve-rav ya'avod tza'ir") - can be chosen. Thus, Rivka knows that YAAKOV is destined to receive the BECHIRA, and not Esav. Yitzchak, however, is unaware of this prophecy. [Note 25:23: "vayomer Hashem LAH" - to HER, and not to him!]

It is unclear why Rivka never informs Yitzchak of this prophecy. She may assume that Yitzchak also knows, and only later realizes that he doesn't (see Ramban 27:4). Alternatively, she may have thought that God specifically wants ONLY HER to know, and NOT Yitzchak. Whatever the reason may be, each parent has a different perception of their children's destiny as they grow up. Yitzchak ASSUMES that both Yaakov and Esav are chosen, while Rivka KNOWS that it will only be Yaakov.

RIVKA'S DILEMMA

After overhearing Yitzchak's intention to bless Esav (27:5), Rivka now faces a serious dilemma:

* Does Yitzchak plan to bless Esav with the BECHIRA (or that God should grant him the BECHIRA)? If so, she must act quickly, as the future of "Am Yisrael" rests on her shoulders. * Does Yitzchak think that BOTH children are chosen? Is he giving a BRACHA of leadership to Esav? The result of this blessing could be disastrous!

* Can Rivka just tell Yitzchak that he is making a mistake? Is it too late? Will he listen? Would he be willing now, after so many years, to change his perception?

Rivka has limited time to act, yet feels responsible to the prophecy she had received and hence obligated to rectify the situation. In her eyes, this may have been the very reason why God had originally granted her this information. Unfortunately, however, Rivka must resort to trickery to ensure that Yaakov receives the blessing.

Now that we have explained Rivka's course of action, we must explain Yitzchak's, as the plot thickens.

YITZCHAK'S BLESSINGS

After Yitzchak grants Yaakov (whom he thought was Esav) a BRACHA of prosperity and leadership, the real Esav arrives and begs his father for another blessing (see 27:34,36). Yitzchak's initial response is that the special blessing intended for Esav (prosperity and power) had already been given to Yaakov (27:35,37). Hence, Esav cannot receive any other BRACHA, since the BRACHA of spirituality, originally intended for Yaakov, is unsuitable for Esav. However, after Esav pleads with him, Yitzchak grants Esav a different BRACHA of prosperity. In fact, in light of our explanation, this second blessing is quite understandable. Let's explain why.

Review this blessing of: "tal ha-shamayim u-shmane ha- aretz" (27:38-39), noting how it also speaks of prosperity in a manner very similar to the first blessing. This makes sense, because 'prosperity' can be shared by both brothers. However, the second half of the original blessing - that of political leadership ("hevei gvir le-achicha - see 27:29) - can only be given to one son. Yitzchak therefore

blesses Esav that - should Yaakov's leadership falter - he shall take his place (see 27:40).

At this point of the story, it appears that Yitzchak still understands that both sons will be chosen. When does he find out the 'truth' that the 'bechira' process is not over yet?

CLEARING THE AIR

Even though the Torah never reveals the details, it would be safe to assume that Rivka must have finally explained her actions to Yitzchak after the incident of the 'brachot'. Upon hearing the details of God's earlier prophecy to Rivka, Yitzchak finally realizes that only ONE son, Yaakov, is to be chosen. To his dismay, he must now accept the fact that the BECHIRA process must continue into yet another generation.

This explains the final blessing that Yitzchak grants Yaakov, before he embarks on his journey to Padan Aram (in search of a wife). Review this blessing, noting how it obviously relates directly to the blessing of BECHIRA:

"May God grant the BLESSING OF AVRAHAM [i.e. BECHIRA] to you and your OFFSPRING, that you may inherit the LAND which Elokim has given to Avraham..." (28:4).

Note once again the key phrase - "zera va-aretz" - of the BECHIRA blessing! In contrast to the BRACHA of prosperity and power discussed earlier, this blessing involves the familiar concept of God's special NATION inheriting a special LAND. Clearly, Yitzchak now understands that the 'bechira' process is not over yet.

Note as well that Yitzchak does not actually grant this blessing to Yaakov, rather he blesses him that God should grant him the 'bechira' - "ve-Kel Sha-kai yevarech otcha..." (28:4). As we explained earlier in our shiur, the 'bechira' process is God's decision. Yitzchak is now 'rooting' for Yaakov that he receive the BECHIRA, but that decision must ultimately be confirmed by God - and that's exactly what takes place a few psukim later, at the beginning of Parshat Vayetze!

MA'ASEH AVOT, SIMAN LA-BANIM

Despite our 'technical' explanation for Yitzchak and Rivka's behavior in this Parsha, a more fundamental question remains: Why must the BECHIRA process be so complex? In other words, why is it that at the very inception of our national history, trickery must be employed for us to arrive to our divine destiny?

Although this is a very difficult question to answer, one could suggest that this entire episode may carry an important message concerning how the spiritual goals of our nation relate to the necessities of entering the physical world and prosperity and political leadership.

Indeed, to become a nation, there are times when the 'aggressive' qualities of an Esav type individual are needed. However, there is a popular notion that these physical responsibilities should be delegated to the 'ish sadeh', the son who is expert in the physical realm, but ONLY in that realm [the 'chiloni' son]. Similarly, the spiritual realm should be delegated to the Yaakov type individual, the delicate 'ish tam' who knows only how to study in the tents of Torah [the 'dati' son].

Yitzchak's original intention to bless Esav may reflect this notion, as Esav will be the provider, 'serve in the army', and enter the political realm; while Yaakov will dedicate his life immersed in the tents of Torah. Separating these responsibilities between two sons may reflect the notion that spirituality cannot be found in the physical world of establishing a nation.

To negate this notion, despite its simplicity and logic, the Torah presents it as Yitzchak's original plan. However, the other option (possibly Rivka's original plan), that Yaakov - the 'ish tam' - alone can manage both realms remains equally

unacceptable.

At the time of these 'brachot', Yaakov himself is not yet ready to take on the responsibilities of the 'ish sadeh', but sooner or later it will become incumbent upon him to do so. To establish God's special nation, there are times when it is necessary for the 'ish tam' to take on the responsibilities of the 'ish sadeh'.

To solve this 'dialectic', it was necessary for Yaakov to first don the 'hands of Esav', i.e. to pretend to act like Esav, but not actually become an Esav. It remains significant that the primal character of Am Yisrael is that of Yaakov, the 'ish tam'. [Note that later in his own life (upon his return to Eretz Yisrael), Yaakov must finally confront the 'angel of Esav', this time without trickery, to prove that he is indeed worthy of that leadership task.]

Even though many situations in our history will arise when we must don the 'hands of Esav' - i.e. when we must act as an 'ish sadeh' - our dominant trait must always remain that of an 'ish tam'. For when God provides Am Yisrael with prosperity and political leadership, it is towards the purpose that they serve mankind with personal example and spiritual guidance.

Throughout our history, even though we must periodically 'don the hands of Esav', our voice must always remain 'the voice of Yaakov' [see 27:22]!
shabbat shalom menachem

Thanks to hamelaket@gmail.com for collecting the following items:

From Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein
<info@jewishdestiny.com>
Subject Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Jerusalem Post :: Friday, November 25, 2011
THE DISCONNECT :: Rabbi Berel Wein

I think that one of the more difficult situations that exists in the Jewish world of today, especially, in my humble opinion, in the Diaspora, is the widening disconnect between the vast bulk of the population and the rabbinic leadership. While there are many rabbinic pronouncements on the minutiae of Jewish law, customs and observance there is very little that is said and heard about the major problems that face the Jewish world – the security of the Jewish state, the dire financial situation that threatens the entire system of Jewish education, the astounding rate of poverty and unemployment (voluntary and involuntary) in religious Jewish society, children at risk because of one-size-fits-all educational institutions, growing rates of divorce and family dysfunction, an unhealthy and misogynic system of dating and marriage, growing anti-Semitism and a seemingly unstoppable rate of assimilation, secularization and intermarriage that guarantees a shrinking Jewish population in a few generations.

Rather than address these terribly difficult issues, Jewish leadership is engaged in fighting over – again - the battles that destroyed the Jewish world of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Whether we like it or not, whether it is theologically acceptable to us or not, the State of Israel is a reality where six million Jews live. The predictions by many Jewish leaders made in the 1950s that the state would not survive for twenty, thirty or fifty years have all proven to have been incorrect.

We have no choice but to support the state with all of our might, prayers, talents and resources. So why don't we hear that call from our leadership, whether it be from any grouping of the Jewish people? The disconnect from reality is truly astounding! The tuition rates for attending Jewish schools are rapidly reaching the breaking point. A small percentage of parents – those who pay full or almost full tuition at schools – are subsidizing the rest of the parent body who cannot afford the astronomical amounts that are termed full tuition. But that group of people – those who can and do pay full tuition – is a rapidly diminishing breed. Instead of addressing this problem – the true time bomb that threatens the future of Torah education – we spread our wealth so thin that we are unable to help the situation.

It may be important to help a father of a daughter to raise many thousands of dollars to buy an apartment for her and her prospective husband in Israel but it certainly is more important to provide for Jewish education to one's own children and for one's own community. This is part of the current disconnect – the inability to view the forest and remain fixated on the trees or even the bushes. The fact that there is an enormous proliferation of small yeshivot, all of which are basically similar in curriculum, method and purpose is not only very inefficient and enormously costly but it has yet to prove that its educational accomplishments and scholarship are in any way superior to a large institution that would prove much less costly per student to maintain. Part of the problem is that there is such a surplus of kollel "graduates" who have no other employment potential except for yeshiva teaching so that somehow there have to be many such institutions simply to absorb some of this surplus of talent and scholarship. This is also part of the disconnect that exists in our world.

Having just recently completed the production of a documentary film about the Jewish world of the 1930's, I am very concerned about the similarities of the anti-Semitic mood of the present decade to that past decade. It is much more insidious today because this anti-Semitism is encased in the pious cloak of anti-Israel rhetoric and policy. And unfortunately there are many Jews who are themselves entrapped in this self-destructive dance. And many of these Jews live in Israel!

But again all voices against this threat are muted and very little leadership is exhibited to address the problem. This is not merely a matter for the Anti-Defamation League to fight. We are all in a precarious and vulnerable position. Our leadership should warn us about this situation.

Again, silence is a great example of the disconnect that afflicts us. We should demand more from those that claim the ability and knowledge to lead us. Connection to the true large problems that face us is and should be a basic requirement of leadership and serious opinion. Shabat shalom.

From Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein
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Subject Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

Weekly Parsha :: TOLDOT :: Rabbi Berel Wein

The rabbis of the Talmud declared that children – having them, raising them and how they turn out – are dependent on a degree of mazal, good fortune and luck. In this week's parsha, where the twins Yaakov and Eisav are described and contrasted, this cryptic statement is apparently relevant and pertinent. Both are products of the same

parents, raised in the same home and apparently given the same type of education yet they turn out to be opposite personalities.

In fact, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch sees in this the cause for Eisav's evil behavior – Eisav who is a completely different personality than Yaakov should not have been given the same education as Yaakov. It was the inability to raise Eisav according to his own tendencies and needs that turned him into the alienated, rebellious and hateful person that he became.

The story of the twin sons of Yitzchak and Rivkah certainly illustrates the uncertainty associated in raising children no matter how pious the parents and how moral the home involved in raising them. It is this element of unplanned and unforeseen mazal that the rabbis of the Talmud are referring to.

This in no way absolves parents of their responsibilities and duties regarding the raising of their children. But, it does point out they have a will of their own and that there are no guarantees as to how they develop and what their beliefs and actions in later life will be. In the nineteenth century entire generations and communities of Jewish children turned their backs to Torah life and traditional values. It was due, to a certain degree, to the obvious deficiencies present in Jewish life in Europe – poverty, governmental persecution, social discrimination and the apparent backwardness of the then Jewish society. But I feel that the major driving force of this secularization of Jewish society was the zeitgeist – the prevailing spirit of the times that then was dominant in European society and life.

Perhaps one can say that this zeitgeist is itself the mazal that the rabbis spoke of. We are all products of the ideas and times in which we live - we are influenced by everything. Some, like Yaakov, are able to shut out much of the outside world by sitting in the tents of Torah for decades on end. Eisav, who did not have that ability to sit for years in the tents of study, though he certainly had that opportunity, was swept away by the zeitgeist of the Canaanites, of Yishmael and the allure of power and wealth.

Following the zeitgeist never excuses bad and immoral behavior in the eyes of Torah. But it does explain how such alienation and rebellion, hatred and prejudice is instilled into children who were raised by great parents and in solid homes and families. Since zeitgeist can never be completely eliminated from our home environments it behooves us to be aware of its presence and attempt to deal with it wisely and realistically. And for that to happen, we will all require a large helping of undiluted good mazal. Shabat shalom.

From Ohr Somayach <ohr@ohr.edu>
To weekly@ohr.edu
Subject Torah Weekly

TORAH WEEKLY :: Parshat Toldot
For the week ending 26 November 2011 / 28 Heshvan 5772
from Ohr Somayach | www.ohr.edu
by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
INSIGHTS

Masquerade

"Two nations are in your womb; two regimes... The might shall pass from one regime to the other, and the elder shall serve the younger." (Bereishet 25:23)

I have a picture in my mind of the Olympic games at Nuremberg in 1936. Adolf Hitler (may his name be erased) is at the top of what seems to be an interminable staircase, the grandstand stretching down behind him. His arm is held out in a halfhearted version of the salute he stole from the Romans. The Nazis stole quite a few things from the Romans. The symbol of the eagle. The lust for empire and an implacable cruelty in achieving it. And the love of pomp and pageantry.

The Romans, however, had a ceremony that beat the Nazis hands down. The Talmud describes the following scene: Once every seventy years in Rome, they would take a man and place him on the back of a lame man. They dressed him in the clothes of Adam HaRishon, the first man (their possession of these clothes dated back to their common ancestor, Esav). Stretched across his face was the mummified flesh of the face of Rabbi Yishmael. (Rabbi Yishmael the Kohen Gadol was one of the ten martyrs whose memory we commemorate in the Yom Kippur Mussaf service. After he was murdered, they flayed his skin from his skull and preserved it in aspic.) Around the man's neck they hung pieces of gold. In this manner, they would parade him through markets whose streets were paved with onyx and proclaim, "Sach quiri pilaster — The calculation of the end was a fraud... What use was the trickery of the trickster and the fraud of the defrauder [Yaakov]?" They would finish off by saying, "Woe to this one [the one on top] when this one [the lame man] will rise up." The relationship of Esav and Yaakov, twins from birth, is symbiotic. When one is up, the other is down. It cannot be that both are up or down, because the cause of one being down is the cause of the other being up — like two ends of a seesaw.

In the Yom Kippur service of the Beit HaMikdash, we find another symbiotic relationship. There was a lottery with two identical goats. One goat was sent to its death in the desert. It represented the negative drive, the embodiment of Esav. The other goat was offered on the Holy Altar. This goat represented the Jewish people and their willingness to sacrifice themselves for G-d.

A lottery by its very essence means that this makes the other that; the one going to Azazel — to the desert — causes the other one to end up on the Mizbe'ach and vice versa. It's a symbiotic relationship. A seesaw. Two sides of the same coin. Positive and negative.

When the twins were born, Yaakov was found clutching the heel of Esav. For most of history, the jackboot of Esav's heel has been on the hand of Yaakov. The word Yaakov is connected to the word for "heel," ekev. The heel is the lowest part of the body. We are living now in the "heel" of time, when events are drawing to their final climax. But Yaakov still seems to be shlepping along through the annals of world history like a lame man. We seem to be the "fossils of history," as Arnold Toynbee called the Jewish people. And Esav is still "high".

Esav was the progenitor of the Roman nation. When the Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity, that faith became the state religion of the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire spawned the "Holy Roman Empire". And subsequently, the spiritual mantle of the Holy Roman Empire was assumed by the Catholic Church in the West and the Orthodox Church in the East. These scions are the direct inheritors of the legacy of Rome— and of Esav.

Every believing Christian has it as an article of faith that G-d gave the Torah to the Jews at Sinai. Without that, Christianity doesn't get off the ground. But they have a "new" testament, while the Jewish people are left with the "old" testament. In other words, Rome sees us shlepping along like the lame man of history, while Christianity rides theologically on the back of Judaism.

The religion of Rome wears the mask of Judaism; it takes the visage, the flayed skin of the high priest, and puts it on itself and claims to be the "real thing". But their relationship with G-d is only skin deep. It is, in the most literal sense, a masquerade. Their using the visage of a man is apt — for they took G-d and turned Him into a man.

Why did this parade in Rome take place only every seventy years? Seven suggests the natural world. Seven days of the week, seven notes on the musical scale, seven colors in the rainbow. Multiply seven by ten and you get seventy. Ten is also a natural cycle. After ten, numbers go back to one; there is no single number higher than nine. Ten is the completion of the cycle. The Romans were saying: The calculation of your progenitor Yaakov was flawed. The natural cycle has fulfilled itself, and you are still the underdog — and we are still the master race.

"Woe to this one when the other will rise up." The name Yaakov means "he who will come in the end." The Western world has become like a Vegas lounge lizard, a vast media machine with gold medallions dangling across his bared chest, crooning into his radio mike: "The calculation of the end was a fraud... The calculation of the end was a fraud..."

We are the children of Yaakov, the children of Israel. Our eyes are Heaven-bent, waiting for that day when Yaakov will "come in the end" —because he will come — and Esav's master race will fall like a concrete eagle from the roof of the Third Reich.

Source: Based on an idea by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

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Subject Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Parshas Toldos

And these are the generations of Yitzchak, the son of Avraham, Avraham begat Yitzchak. (25:19)

The opening pasuk of this parshah is seemingly redundant. We are about to detail the story of the offspring of Yitzchak Avinu, son of Avraham Avinu, but first the Torah repeats the fact that Avraham begat Yitzchak. One would assume that we have already been informed of Yitzchak's pedigree when it was related that he was the son of Avraham. Rashi quotes the Midrash which teaches that the leitzanei ha'dor, scoffers of that generation, individuals who had really nothing else to do but slander and denigrate, claimed that Yitzchak's real father was Avimelech. After all, Sarah had spent some time with Avimelech when she was taken captive by him. To prove them wrong, Hashem formed Yitzchak's features, his countenance, to resemble that of his father, Avraham. To attest to this verity, the Torah repeats itself, "and Avraham begat Yitzchak." Who really cares what the scoffers were saying? Was it necessary to "prove" them wrong? Clearly, Yitzchak's spiritual eminence over Yishmael was a non-issue. In Parshas Vayeira, Sarah Imeinu tells Avraham, "The son of the maidservant [Yishmael] will not inherit with my son, with Yitzchak" (Bereishis 21:10). The double language - "my son, Yitzchak" - emphasizes his spiritual superiority, regardless of his lineage. He was Yitzchak - Sarah's son. What is the significance of the scoffers' claim?

The Sefas Emes explains that actually this equation means more than meets the eye. It is more than a clarification of Yitzchak's DNA. It goes to the very core of the foundations upon which the future Klal Yisrael was to be built. Avraham and Yitzchak had divergent approaches to their avodas, service, to Hashem. Avraham had boundless love for the Almighty that literally overflowed from him. This love catalyzed him to become a baal chesed, directing him outward through acts of loving-kindness. He taught monotheism to the masses, imbued them with the ethics of the Torah and planted an eishel, which was either an inn or an orchard, as a means of educating travelers when they stopped to rest. His acts of chesed did not rest, even when he was recuperating from his Bris Milah. He sat at the door of his tent waiting, yearning to reach out to any passersby.

Yitzchak's avodah was not love-based; rather, the second Patriarch's fear of Hashem, concretized during the Akeidas Yitzchak, made him draw inward, meticulously introspecting each action before executing it, in order to determine that the consequences of his action would befit a servant of Hashem. These two paths - love versus fear - are, under normal circumstances, mutually exclusive. In Judaism, however, they have the opportunity to achieve unity. True yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven, is to be in awe of the Almighty. This is a byproduct of a deep sense of love that one has for Hashem. This applies vice versa, with each emotion - fear and love; love and fear - completing the other. Another form of fear, however, is inconsistent with love - fear of punishment, which is essentially a self-centered fear. This is the type of fear prevalent in the nations of the world. In his encounter with Avraham, Avimelech exhibited this type of fear. Thus, when the scoffers claimed that Yitzchak was the progeny of Avimelech, they were intimating that his fear was none other than fear of punishment. When the Torah attests to Avraham's fathering Yitzchak, it is saying that Yitzchak was the product of the attribute of love. Yitzchak's pure fear of Hashem was the result of - and rooted in - his intense love for, and awe of, the Creator.

The Sefas Emes takes this thesis to the next level. While Yitzchak's fear of Hashem had its source in his love of Hashem, he still lacked the perfect synthesis of these two traits. Hashem's blessing to Yitzchak's seed required the merit of Avraham. This is to be derived from the following pesukim: "I will multiply your seed like the stars of the sky... since Avraham listened to My voice" (Bereishis 26:4-5); "I will bless you and multiply your seed for the sake of Avraham, My servant" (Ibid 26:24). Clearly, Avraham is a primary component in the blessing of Yitzchak's seed.

This is to be understood in the following manner: Chazal teach that Hashem originally sought to create the world through Middas HaDin, the Attribute of Strict Justice, but He saw that unless it was tempered with Divine Mercy, the world had no chance of survival. The foundation of Klal Yisrael also calls for an alliance between these two attributes. Love can become tainted. For this,

Avraham needed Yitzchak's pure fear to maintain its pristine essence. Yitzchak's Din required bolstering from the merit of Avraham to give it continued existence among future generations. The two middos working in tandem formed the perfect base upon which to build an enduring Jewish nation. The Sefas Emes now explains how these contrasting traits play a significant role and add a new dimension to the episode in which Yaakov Avinu "appropriated" the blessings that were originally designated for Eisav. Now, Yaakov did not just take the blessings. He was guided and encouraged by his mother, Rivkah Imeinu. It was actually through her personal intervention that he was able to "liberate"

the brachos, blessings, for himself. The Torah states this clearly as it relates that following Rivkah's discovery that Yitzchak was about to give the blessings to Eisav, she convinced Yaakov to delude his father and take the blessings. Obviously, Rivkah felt justified in her advice, having been Divinely inspired to do this. Why would Hashem want Yaakov to receive the blessings in such an ambiguous manner?

The Sefas Emes explains that we understand it all wrong. Yitzchak was, indeed, destined to bless Yaakov, but Hashem did not want the blessing to flow solely through Yitzchak's Attribute of Din. This would have created an endurance problem. Rivkah was a baalas chesed par excellence. Thus, she was used as the medium for transferring brachah from Yitzchak to Yaakov. Din, operating in conjunction with chesed, results in emes, absolute truth. This is the middah of Yaakov: a symbiosis of Chesed and Din, love and fear. Rivkah's involvement in the "blessings" ameliorated Din. Yaakov reflected the combined traits of his father and mother. He was the b'chir ha'Avos, the chosen one of the Patriarchs, representing truth in its most pristine form.

Yaakov was a wholesome man abiding in tents. (25:28)

Yaakov Avinu was morally and ethically wholesome, attributes attested to by the Torah. He is characterized as abiding in tents. Rashi explains that this is a reference to Yaakov's total devotion to spending his time in the tents of Torah, under the direction of Shem and Eivar. Yaakov did not simply "learn." He studied with a passion, totally devoted to the Torah. During the fourteen years that Yaakov spent in yeshivah engrossed in Torah study, he did not willingly go to sleep in a bed. This does not mean that he was superhuman. Yaakov slept only when sleep overtook him. He did not just go to bed. He sat by his sefer and, when his head drooped, he dozed. This was Yaakov's idea of sleep - in yeshivah.

In Pirkei Avos 6:9, Chazal relate an episode which has become paradigmatic concerning a ben Torah's view of a life devoted to Torah. Rabbi Yosi ben Kisma relates that he was once walking on the road, when he was met by a man. The man greeted the sage, who returned the greeting. The man then asked Rabbi Yosi, "Rabbi, from what place are you?" Rabbi Yosi replied, "I am from a great city of scholars and sages." The man then asked whether Rabbi Yosi would consider moving to his city in exchange for an enormous amount of money. Rabbi Yosi replied, "Even if you were to give me all the silver and gold, precious stones and pearls in the world, I would dwell nowhere but in a place of Torah." The Mishnah goes on to quote a number of pesukim which underscore the value of Torah in contrast to material wealth. While all of the pesukim address the issue, the last pasuk from Chaggai 2:8, "Mine is the silver, Mine is the gold, says Hashem, Master of the Legions," does not seem to emphasize the significance of Torah, only that material abundance all belongs to Hashem.

Horav Mordechai Weinberg, zl, cites the Chasam Sofer who explains that this pasuk is addressing the first pasuk cited by the Mishnah, *Tov li Toras Picha meialfei zahav va'kesef*. "I prefer the Torah of Your mouth above thousands in gold and silver" (Tehillim 119:72). David Hamelech states that the kinyan Torah, acquisition of Torah, to "own" Torah, supersedes material procurement. One would think that the reason for this is that the value of Torah is greater. To this, the Mishnah quotes the second pasuk, to teach that only with regard to Torah can one say that he has actually acquired something, that it really belongs to him. Why? Because material wealth belongs to Hashem. *Li hacsess v'Li ha'zahav*, "Mine is the silver, Mine is the gold." A person may think that the material wealth he attains is his. Wrong! It all belongs to Hashem. The only substance of value that one can call his own is Torah. The reason that David Hamelech says, "I prefer Your Torah," is that the possession is really his. The Rosh Yeshivah takes this idea further. Baalus, ownership, of the Torah does not mean that one may do whatever he wants with it; rather, ownership catalyzes responsibility, demanding greater and more meticulous supervision to guard the holy Torah within him that it does not become tainted, desecrated or denigrated in any way through his actions. Yes, a ben Torah carries enormous

responsibility. After all, he has acquired something that heretofore has belonged to Hashem.

Rav Weinberg compares this to a large corporation with many sections and branches, with each branch having its own administrative hierarchy. There are hundreds of managers, a multitude of vice presidents, scores of workers and underlings. While each individual senses his responsibility for his immediate area, he does not feel responsible for the collective corporation. If something goes wrong in his department, he will find someone to blame. He will sleep at night. Someone else's head will roll. Another individual is involved, however, who cannot afford to shift blame on anyone else. It would make no difference, because at the end of the day the loss and blame is all his. He is the company's CEO. He is the owner. He is the last bastion of authority. This is where the buck stops.

This is how a ben Torah should feel about his Torah study. He must feel that any error on his part denigrates the Torah - not just his Torah, but the Torah. He must feel a sense of *achrayos*, responsibility, for Torah - period He is the CEO. The Rosh Yeshivah relates a powerful thought that he heard from the Satmar Rebbe, zl, concerning a Jew's accountability for accepting responsibility. We find that despite Noach's overwhelming devotion to each and every creature on board the Teivah, Ark, he once came late with the lion's dinner. Once - during an entire year. Once - out of all the myriad creatures under his care. Once! Yet, when he came late, the lion, acting according to nature, smacked him hard. The injury left Noach limping. Is this what Noach deserved after an entire year of consummate devotion to the needs of all of these creatures? Is this punishment perhaps a bit much?

The Rebbe explained that only two members of each species of Creation were allowed into the Ark. Only two - male and female. The future of the world was dependent on that Ark. Each and every creature had an enormous mission to repopulate the world. The responsibility was enormous, the consequences of failure unpardonable. Noach had to imagine in his mind that it was not simply one lion, one meal, one act of chesed. He was responsible for the future of every lion from then to posterity. If something happened to this lion - that was it. The lion would become extinct. There was no room for error. This is the meaning of responsibility.

Rav Weinberg concludes that this idea aptly applies to every ben Torah. He must sense responsibility for Torah in such a manner that his failure would impact Torah for all time. The responsibility is much greater than he is. He is acquiring Torah directly from Hashem's mouth. When a person realizes this and reflects on the source of the Torah he studies, his attitude towards guarding it changes immeasurably.

The notion that one's responsibility extends for generations is underscored by a famous episode that occurred in Mesivta Torah Vodaath one blustery, snowy morning. The Rosh Yeshivah, Horav Shlomo Heiman, zl, came to his shiur prepared, as usual, with his lengthy lecture. Since New York had been hit overnight by a blizzard, public transportation was at a standstill. The streets were not plowed, so very few students were able to show up. The Rosh Yeshivah walked into a classroom filled with four students. Yet, it did not seem to faze him. He began his lecture in earnest, raising his voice passionately, as he mulled through the topic. There was a certain excitement when Rav Shlomo gave a shiur. It was an epic experience. Usually the room would be filled, with nary a seat available, but today only four students were present.

This was pre-World War II America, and one of the students asked, "Rebbe, there are only four of us. Is it necessary to get so worked up in delivering the shiur?"

The Rosh Yeshivah's response has become a classic. "You think that I am talking only to you? I am speaking to you and your students, and to your students' students. I am speaking to generations of Jews to come. That is why I am so worked up!" We must remember our responsibility. It is not only to those around us, but to those yet unborn who will derive guidance from our Torah study. It may be ours to keep - but it is not ours to lose!

The Torah tells us that during the pregnancy with her prodigal twins, Rivkah Imeinu felt that the fetuses in her womb were agitated. Chazal explain the source of this agitation. When Rivkah passed the *bais ha'medrash* of Shem and Eivar, Yaakov "ran" and struggled to come forth; and when she passed a house of idol worship, it was Eisav who struggled to come forth. The commentators question this. After all, Yaakov was in his mother's womb studying Torah from the expert tutelage of a Malach Elokim. What in the *bais ha'medrash* could supersede this type of learning? Many explanations are presented by the various commentators, two of which stand out: Studying in the presence of an Eisav taints even the prospect of learning with an angel. Without question, the learning was superior to anything that he could find in the *bais ha'medrash*. At

least in the bais ha'medrash, however, there would be no Eisav. Environment plays a critical role. This is something we may never forget when selecting a school, a yeshivah, a class.

Second is an explanation that follows along the same lines as our original thesis. True, studying with an angel is without peer, but it is too easy. Yaakov wanted to work, to toil, to horeve for his Torah achievement. He was not satisfied to have it all spoon-fed to him. He wanted to make the kinyan, act of acquisition. His act was ameilus, toil, in Torah.

This indicates the value of Torah. In order for one to acquire Torah, he must appreciate its infinite value. When this is the case, no hurdle is impossible to traverse. No obstacle is impervious to man's ascendancy. The following vignette demonstrates a mother's realization of the value of a Torah education for her sons and the degree of ameilus that she evinced in providing this education to her sons.

One of the preeminent Torah leaders of our generation grew up in Yerushalayim in a home that was the scene of abject poverty. There were three boys in the family, and they all had to go to cheder. During the summer, this was no problem. It was winter time - when the cold, wet snow penetrated the holes in their torn shoes - that the poverty became a difficult challenge. If the boys could not go to school on snow days, they would end up spending much of the winter at home. If they were to become sick, they would still be at home. What was a resourceful mother, who cares deeply about her son's learning, to do?

There was one pair of whole shoes. They were far from new, but, at least they had no holes. So - every day - the mother walked one son with this whole pair of shoes to school. He would then don a pair of torn shoes, after which his mother brought the whole shoes home to his brother. After walking brother number two to school and exchanging his shoes, she returned for son number three. The same process was repeated at the end of the day when the boys returned home. This went on all winter! The mother walked to school and back six times! Is it a wonder that each of her sons became a Torah scholar of great distinction? She valued Torah, and she demonstrated her esteem in a unique fashion.

In loving memory of our husband, father and grandfather on his yahrtzeit
Elchanan ben Peretz z"l niftar 11 Kislev 5759

Esther Kurant, Mordechai & Jenny Kurant, Aliza & Avrohom Wrona, Naomi & Avrohom Yitzchok Weinberger, Dovid & Chavi Kurant, Yossi & Chani Kurant

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Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Toldos

Why Does "And G-d blessed him" Appear at the End of the Pasuk?

Parshas Toldos teaches a few short episodes from the life of the Patriarch Yitzchak. After the incident with Avimelech, Yitzchak planted in the land and the Torah relates that he found the yield from that crop to be 100 fold (meah-shearim) the normal expectation, an extremely bountiful harvest. The pasuk concludes "and Hashem Blessed him" [Bereshis 26:12].

Rav Elyakim Schlessinger (in his sefer "Beis Av") makes the interesting observation that the pasuk describing this scenario appears to be inverted. We would have expected the pasuk to write that Yitzchak planted, G-d blessed him, and he then had a bountiful crop. Surprisingly, the phrase "And Hashem blessed him" appears at the end of the pasuk, almost as an afterthought, rather than in the middle of the pasuk as part of a cause and effect.

< br>Shlomo HaMelech [King Solomon] writes, "There is a sickening evil which I have seen under the sun; riches hoarded by their owner to his misfortune." [Koheles 5:12] Sometimes a person can merit receiving tremendous wealth, but the wealth turns out to be a curse rather than a blessing. What determines whether wealth will be a blessing or a curse? It all depends on what the wealth does to the person. If it inspires him to give greater amounts to charity, if it

convinces him that he is now more comfortable and can cut back on his working hours to spend more time to spiritual matters, then he takes that wealth and he turns it into a blessing from G-d. However, as happens all too often, if the wealth consumes the person or changes him to become a more conceited person, then the wealth becomes a curse (shamur l'balav l'ra-aso). Rather than using his wealth to learn more Torah, do more chessed, and do all the positive things one can do with money, he turns it into a curse.

Perhaps our pasuk in Toldos is alluding to this concept. Yitzchak was blessed with a tremendous crop, and the RESULT of that was "And G-d blessed him". Rashi mentions that this bountiful crop came on the heels of a tremendous famine. In those days, when there was a tremendous famine, the poor did not get their due. The poor are only able to collect the tithe, the corner of the field (Peah), the forgotten gleanings (shikcha) and so forth. When nobody ate, the poor did not eat either.

Rashi comments, based on a Gemara [Tanis 8b] that when Yitzchak saw that he was having a bumper crop he had already given out the money to Tzedakah. This is an example of using the wealth one acquires for blessing. This explains why "And Hashem blessed him" appears at the end rather than the middle of the pasuk. The blessing was not the cause of his successful crop; it was the result of it.

For All Its Trouble and Down-side, Old Age Is Surely Worth It
We read in this week's Parsha "And it was when Yitzchak became old his eyes dimmed and he summoned Esav his older sun..." [Bereshis 27:1] We know the rest of the story. As a result of his blindness, he was not able to discern whether he was talking to Yaakov or Eisav. Therefore, Yaakov was able to receive the blessing destined for his brother, Eisav.

The Medrash tells a story that Avraham requested an elderly appearance. Avraham said: "Master of the universe, a father and son will come into a town and people will not know who the father is and who is the son, in order to give proper respect to the elder of the two." Up until the time of Avraham, people did not show their age. No one had gray hair, no one had arthritis, and no one had to walk with a walker. It was not apparent that people were aging. Avraham complained about the situation and demanded, as it were, that G-d institute a new phenomenon in the world -- that of old age. Avraham argued that if a n older person was crowned with the physical signs of old age, then people would give him the respect he deserves vis a vis his son.

The Almighty acquiesced to Avraham's request and told him that this phenomenon would begin with him. The first place where "ziknah" is mentioned in the Torah is the pasuk "And Avraham was old (zaken), coming of days" [Bereshis 24:1].

As we get up there in years and we see and feel the signs of old age, we might begin to wonder -- was this such a great idea that Avraham came up with after all? Obviously, it was a good idea because the Almighty responded to Avraham "You have asked for something worthwhile." (Davar tov ta'va'ta). Why is it so important that old age be recognizable? Why would it not have been sufficient if the world had continued as it began -- with no difference in appearance between one who was 17 and one who was 75?

Rav Simcha Zissel notes the following: The Torah is replete with the concept of "Ask you father and he will tell you; your elders and they will relate it to you" [Devorim 32:7]. It is taken for granted that a certain wisdom comes with old age. This is so axiomatic that the Gemara in Kidushin teaches in the name of Isi ben Yehduah that the principle "You shall get up before an old person" [Vayikra 19:32] applies to any old person. The great Amora, Rabbi Yochanan, used to get up when an elderly Gentile would pass him by. Why? The Gemara explains that even such a person has witnessed many events in his lifetime. A person with many decades of life experience has

been through so much that inevitably he achieves a degree of wisdom. The Torah wants us to recognize that wisdom which accrues only through old age.

As a young man, when I have a question what to do, I am directed to consult with an elderly person. Now if everybody looks like they are 20 years old, how will I know who to ask? The Torah wants us to recognize elderly people easily. The Torah wants us to honor elderly people and in order to do so, it is necessary to recognize them first. This is so important for the welfare of society that G-d instituted the concept of old age, that had not existed at the beginning of Creation. "It is a good idea, Avraham. It is an INDESPENSIBLE idea!"

With all of our complaints about old age and all the troubles associated with it, it is worthwhile for society that the younger generation be able to recognize the elders. This is important so that they can give the elders the respect and courtesies they deserve by virtue of the fact that they have experienced so much. They can give the new generation insights that they would not otherwise possess. Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD
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Following In His Father's Footsteps

Parshas Toldos is the one parsha that focuses on Yitzchak Avinu. We see the special hashgacha pratis that accompanied him. Unlike his father who in the face of the adversity of famine went down to Egypt, Hashem prohibits the holy Yitzchak from leaving the Holy Land. In just that year of famine we read "Vayizra Yitzchak bo'oretz ha'hee vayimtza bashana ha'hee me'ah shearim vayevaracheihu Adonay - Yitzchak sowed in that land, and in that year he reaped a hundred fold, thus had Hashem blessed him" (Breishis 26:12.) I'd like to focus on the nature of the blessings that Hashem bestowed on Yitzchak. Thrice in parshas Toldos Hashem blesses Yitzchak. The first two are most special, but they are what one might characterize as "left handed compliments". In the first blessing (26:4) Yitzchak is assured that his offspring will be like the stars, and they will possess the land. Why? (26:5) "Eikev asher shoma Avraham b'kolee vayishmor mitzvotai, chukotai, v'Torasai - because Avraham obeyed My voice and observed My safeguards, My commandments, My decrees and My Torah's." While it is quite explicit that Yitzchak is assured an incredible inheritance, Hashem is not necessarily blessing Yitzchak because he has earned it or deserves it. The second time that Yitzchak is blessed follows the same pattern. In (26:24) Hashem appears to him that night and said "Anochi Elohei Avraham Avicha al tira ki itcha anochi u'bairachticha v'hirbeisi es zaracha ba'avor Avraham avdee - I am the G-D of your father Avraham, fear not for I am with you, I will bless you and increase your offspring because of Avraham my servant." Once again, Yitzchak is assured of a bright future, but not as a reward for any personal accomplishments.

This formula of beracha changes with the third beracha (26:28). Here the Torah expresses the success that Yitzchak has experienced, and the notice thereof amongst the community at large, as articulated by Avimelech king of the Plishtim, "Ra'oh ra'enu ki haya Adonai imach - we have indeed seen that Hashem has been with you." Here there are no strings attached. This time Yitzchak is noteworthy of blessing independent of his illustrious father. What has transpired between the second and the third blessing to manifest this change?

The Seforno in his commentary (26:5) posits the following exciting thesis: when Hashem explains to Yitzchak the first time that he is being blessed in the merit of his father, since his father "v'yishmor mishmarti - observed my safeguards", this does not refer to the stringencies and exactitude in which Avraham fulfilled mitzvos, rather it refers to Avraham partnering with Hashem in advancing and emulating His ways, as referenced by Psalms (25:10) "all the paths of Hashem are kindness and truth". Avraham did so by extending exemplary hospitality and educating the masses regarding monotheism, as the Torah testifies (12:8) "V'yikrah b'shem Hashem", which is understood by the Ramban to mean that he preached to whoever would listen.

What changes now in the life of Yitzchak, notes the Seforno, is that after the second blessing the Torah highlights (26:25) "Vayiven shom mizbeach vayikra b'shem Adonai - he built an altar there, invoked Hashem by name". Now Yitzchak entered and extended the family business of outreach. Now he is worthy of beracha independently. Moreover, the Seforno explains that we do not ever find Yaakov being blessed in the merit of his father because the description of Yaakov as an (25:27) "Ish tom yoshev ohalim - a wholesome man, abiding in tents" indicates that he both studied and taught knowledge and Torah to the masses, especially at the yeshiva of Shem and Aiver which was the center of spirituality of its day, and as such always independently merited beracha.

A most important lesson emerges from the Seforno. In order to get beracha one has to give. Commenting on the familiar verse in Aishes Chayil (Mishlei 31:26), "V'toras chesed al l'shonah - and the Torah of kindness is her tongue". The Talmud (Sukkah 49b) comments that a Torah that is shared is a Torah of chesed, and one that is not shared is lacking chesed.

The entering of Yitzchak into the kiruv industry portrays the immutable principle that kiruv-outreach is an endeavor that is open to all and, more succinctly, incumbent on all. One does not have to be an outreach professional to reach out and touch someone. Each and every person who is observant of Torah and mitzvos can by their very persona positively communicate and transmit Torah values and mores. The Talmud (Yoma 86a) understands that the obligation to love Hashem (Devarim 6:5) is not limited to one's own individual relationship with Him, but also requires that as a result of one's pleasant demeanor and manners, others come to love Hashem through you. Thus, the workplace can serve as a positive environment for outreach.

The responsibility of kiruv is certainly included in the Biblical verse (Devarim 22:2) where the Torah obligates a Jew to return a lost object to his fellow. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 73a) deduces that if one must return a monetary object, certainly they must restore if possible one's physical health. The logical but fundamental extension is that one must also endeavor to return the next person's soul to its pristine spiritual state. Avraham's nature was most different than that of Yitzchak. This is precisely what the Torah is teaching us, that each individual in his own way should consciously engage in outreach to the not yet affiliated and not yet observant.

Finally, the lack of time is no excuse. Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l (Igros Moshe, Evan Haezer 4:26) states that just as one is obligated to tithe their physical resources, so too are they obligated to invest a tenth of their time and activities to enhance and enrich the Torah life of others. Oftentimes one's hosting guests for a Shabbos or Yom Tov meal can make a significant impact on their lives. I'm not sure that kiruv came easily or naturally to Yitzchak, but I do know that it made a significant and blessed difference in his life.

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Subject Weekly Halacha - Parshas Terumah
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Weekly Halacha
by Rabbi Doniel Neustadt

Reciting Shema and Shemoneh Esrei: Proper Times

Many commentators wonder why Yaakov was reciting Shema while Yosef was not. If it was time for Shema to be recited, why, then, did Yosef not recite Shema as well? Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik of Yerushalayim¹ suggested the following answer: Yaakov met Yosef just before sunrise. L'chatchilah, one should recite Shema at that time, as Yaakov did. B'diavad, however, one may recite Shema for the first three hours of the day. Since Yosef was engaged in the mitzvah of honoring his father at the time, he reasoned that he could recite Shema a bit later. Yaakov, who had no reason to delay the l'chatchilah time of Shema, recited Shema at the preferred time. Let us elaborate:

Correct Times for Reciting Shema

In order of halachic preference, there are several time slots in which Shema may be recited:

1. Several minutes before sunrise. This is known as vasikin and it is the preferred time to recite Shema and its blessing² according to the majority of the poskim.
2. From thirty-five minutes before sunrise (misheyakir³) until sunrise. This time slot is l'chatchilah according to most of the poskim.⁴
3. From after sunrise until a quarter of the day has passed. This is the time slot in which most people recite Shema even l'chatchilah,⁵ even though Mishnah Berurah and other poskim are critical of those who delay until after sunrise in performing this important mitzvah.⁶
4. From sixty minutes before sunrise until thirty-five minutes before sunrise. This is the time of misheyakir according to a minority view of the poskim, and may be relied upon even l'chatchilah in case of need.⁷
5. From seventy-two minutes before sunrise (alos ha-shachar⁸) until sixty minutes before sunrise. Neither Kerias Shema nor its blessings may be recited at this time. If, however, one mistakenly did recite Shema or its blessings during this time, he need not repeat them later on.⁹ Under extenuating circumstances, e.g., one would be unable to recite Shema later due to work, travel or medical reasons, it is permitted to recite Shema at this time.¹⁰ The blessing of Yotzer ohr, however, is omitted,¹¹ and should be said later on by itself.
6. After a quarter of the day passed. One can no longer fulfill his Shema obligation. How to calculate a quarter of the day is a subject of great dispute: Magen Avraham rules that the day begins at alos ha-shachar and ends at tzeis ha-cohavim, while the Gaon of Vilna maintains that the day begins at sunrise and ends at sunset.¹² While the prevalent custom follows the second view,¹³ there are many individuals who are particular to recite Shema in accordance with the first opinion.¹⁴

Although one cannot fulfill the mitzvah of Kerias Shema after a quarter of the day has elapsed, one should still say Shema at the time he says birchos Kerias Shema and Shemoneh Esrei.¹⁵ Birchos Kerias Shema may be recited for the first third of the day. In case of an emergency, Birchos Kerias Shema may be recited until chatzos.¹⁶

Correct Times for Reciting Shacharis Shemoneh Esrei

In order of halachic preference, there are several time slots in which Shemoneh Esrei may be recited:

1. Exactly at sunrise. This is the known as vasikin and it is the preferred time for reciting Shemoneh Esrei.
2. After sunrise until a third of the day has passed. This is the time slot in which most people recite Shemoneh Esrei l'chatchilah.
3. From seventy-two minutes before sunrise until sunrise. When necessary, e.g., before embarking on a trip or going to work or school, one may daven at this time l'chatchilah.¹⁷ Otherwise, one is not allowed to daven at this time. A retired person who was formerly permitted to daven before sunrise due to his work schedule should now daven after sunrise only. B'diavad, if one davened before sunrise, he has fulfilled his obligation and does not need to repeat Shacharis.¹⁹

4. After a third of the day has passed until chatzos. L'chatchilah, one must daven before this time, as this time is considered after zeman tefillah. But if one failed to daven earlier for any reason, he must still daven during this time period, although his davening is not considered as if he davened "on time."²⁰
5. After chatzos. It is no longer permitted to daven Shacharis at this time.²¹ If his failure to daven Shacharis earlier was due to circumstances beyond his control or because he forgot, a tashlumin (makeup tefillah) may be said during Minchah. If he failed to daven Shacharis because of negligence, however, tashlumin may not be davened.²²

Question: As stated earlier, one should not daven before sunrise l'chatchilah. What should one do if an early minyan needs him to join in order to have the minimum number of men required for a minyan?

Discussion: Contemporary poskim debate this issue. Some²³ rule that he may join to form a minyan but he may not daven with them. Since a minyan requires a minimum of six men who are davening (in addition to at least another four who must be present but are not required to daven together with them), if there are only five people davening besides him, he should not be the sixth one, even though that will in effect preclude the formation of a minyan. If, however, there are nine other people davening besides him, he may join them—in order to complete the minyan with his presence—but he may not daven along with them.

Other poskim hold that if his refusal to join will preclude the formation of a minyan, he should daven with them so that they, too, will daven with a minyan. But this may not be relied upon on a regular basis.²⁴

Question: What should one do if the only minyan in town recites Shemoneh Esrei after misheyakir but before sunrise—is it better to daven without a minyan after sunrise or to daven at an improper time but with a minyan?

Discussion: If the choice is to daven without a minyan but exactly at sunrise, thus gaining the advantage of vasikin, then one should do so. If he cannot do so, some poskim rule that he should daven with the existing minyan,²⁵ while other poskim maintain that he should wait for the proper time and daven without a minyan.²⁶

1 Quoted in Rinas Yitzchak al ha-Torah, pg. 230.

2 Mishnah Berurah 58:6.

3 Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:6. Rav Y. Kamenetsky calculated the correct time as 36 minutes before sunrise (Emes l'Yaakov, O.C. 58:1). There are other opinions as well; see Halichos Yisrael 1:8.

4 O.C. 58:1. A minority view in the Rishonim holds that Shema may not be recited before sunrise, but this is not practical halachah.

5 Based on Shulchan Aruch 58:1 who does not mention that l'chatchilah one should recite Shema before sunrise. See Shulchan Aruch ha-Rav 58:4 and Kaf ha-Chayim 58:8 who quote two views on this issue and tend to be lenient. Note also that neither Chayei Adam 21:3 nor Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 17:1 require that l'chatchilah one recite Shema before sunrise.

6 This is the view of Rif, Rambam and Gra, quoted without dissent by Mishnah Berurah 58:3-4, and it is the ruling of the Aruch ha-Shulchan 58:6 and Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (oral ruling quoted in Avnei Yashfei, Tefillah, pg. 103). According to these poskim, one should recite Shema before sunrise even if he is not wearing tefillin and even if he is unable to recite birchos Kerias Shema at that time.

7 See Kaf ha-Chayim 18:18, Rav Y.M. Tikutinsky in Sefer Eretz Yisrael, pg. 18 and Rav Y. E. Henkin in Eidus l'Yisrael, pg. 115.

8 Beir Halachah 89:1, s.v. v'im, quoting the Rambam. But others opinions maintain that alos could be 90, 96 or even 120 minutes before sunrise. When no other possibility exists, some poskim permit reciting Kerias Shema and its blessings as much as 90 minutes before sunrise; see Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:6.

9 O.C. 58:4, provided that this "mistake" takes place infrequently (more than once a month is considered too frequent); Mishnah Berurah 58:19.

10 O.C. 58:3 and Mishnah Berurah 12, 16 and 19.

11 Mishnah Berurah 58:17 and Beir Halachah, s.v. belo. See Emes l'Yaakov, O.C. 58:3.

12 Both views are quoted in Mishnah Berurah 58:4 without a decision. See also Beir Halachah 46:9, s.v. v'yotzei.

13 Aruch ha-Shulchan 58:14; Chazon Ish, O.C. 13:3; Igros Moshe, O.C. 1:24; Y.D. 3:129-3; Minchas Yitzchak 3:71; Yalkut Yosef, pg. 100.

14 See Teshuvos v'Hanhagos 1:56 quoting Rav A. Kotler and Orchos Rabbeinu 1:53 quoting Rav Y.Y. Kaniewsky. Many shuls in Eretz Yisrael conduct themselves in accordance with the first view.

15 O.C. 60:2. See Mishnah Berurah 4 and Aruch ha-Shulchan 2.

16 O.C. 58:6 and Beir Halachah, s.v. kora'ah.

17 O.C. 89:8; Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:6. Tallis and tefillin, however, may not be put on until at least sixty minutes before sunrise.

18 This is the consensus of most poskim. A minority view rules that it is permitted l'chatchilah to daven after the time of misheyakir (Peri Chadash). Beir Halachah 89:1, s.v. yatza, rules that although it is preferable not to do so, (possibly) we should not object to those who are lenient.

19 Mishnah Berurah 89:4.

20 O.C. 89:1. See Mishnah Berurah 6 who recommends davening a tefillas nedavah if his failure to daven until this time was on purpose.

21 Rama, 89:1.

22 See O.C. 108 for details.

23 Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (quoted in Tefillah K'hilchasa, pg. 78 and in Avnei Yashfei, Tefillah, pg. 169).

24 Rav S.Z. Auerbach (Halichos Shelomo 1:5-13).

25 Peri Yitzchak 1:2; Yaskil Avdi 5:10; Minchas Yitzchak 9:10. Chazon Ish is reported (Ishai Yisrael 13, note 21) as ruling like this view.

26 Responsa Sh'eilos Shemuel, O.C. 12; Igros Moshe, O.C. 4:6; Rav Y.S. Elyashiv (oral ruling quoted in Avnei Yashfei, Tefillah, pg. 167); Rav O. Yosef (Yalkut Yosef, pg. 137-139).

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By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Must I Repeat my Tefillah?

By Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff

Because the beginning of the parsha discusses Yitzchak's intense tefillos...

Question: Wanderings of the Mind

Mutti Kulis* calls me with the following predicament:

"Despite my best intentions, my mind sometimes wanders during davening, although I really wish I could focus always on building my relationship with Hashem. I recently discovered that the Mishnah Berurah rules that someone saying Shemoneh Esrei who realizes that he recited the first beracha without kavanah should refrain from proceeding until the chazzan's repetition and be very attentive to the chazzan's davening. I tried this once, but did not find this solution practical. The Mishnah Berurah's suggestion also does not help my wife, who davens at home. Although I am trying hard to think of the meaning of the words of the first beracha of Shemoneh Esrei, is there a different way to resolve the predicament, should I discover at some time in the future that I recited this beracha without kavanah?"

Answer:

We should certainly be careful to think of the meaning of the words every time we praise Hashem. We should be even more concerned when reciting our daily prayers, since they are called avodah shebelev, service of the heart, which means our emotional attachment to Hashem. Tefillah means talking directly to Hashem, and that when davening we should at least be as attentive as we are when engaging in a casual conversation with a friend. One who does not know the meaning of every word should pray realizing that he/she is speaking to Hashem. The purpose of prayer is to communicate directly with Hashem, and it is rather obvious that davening inattentively does not achieve its purpose. To quote the Shulchan Aruch, "A person who is praying must focus on the meaning of the words that he is saying and imagine that he is facing the Divine Presence. One must dispel all distracting thoughts so that his focus is undisturbed. One should ponder how attentive he would be and how carefully he would choose his words if he were speaking to a king of flesh and blood; certainly, before the King of all kings, the Holy One, blessed is He" (Orach Chayim 98:1).

Yet we all know that, unfortunately, we are often unmindful during our davening. The Gemara itself notes that it is inherently human to become distracted during prayer (Yerushalmi, Berachos 2:4; Rosh Hashanah 16b and Bava Basra 164b, as explained by Rabbeinu Tam). The question that this article will discuss is: Under what circumstances must one pray again because one was inattentive?

Kavanah and Birkas Avos

Although one might think that all the berachos of Shemoneh Esrei should be treated equally, they are not. The first beracha, called "Birkas Avos," has a very special role to play. The Gemara teaches: Someone who is praying must be attentive to the entire prayer. If he is unable to pay attention to the entire prayer, then he should focus minimally on at least one of the berachos. Rabbi Chiya, quoting Rav Safra, in the name of one of the scholars of Rebbe's yeshiva, explained that the beracha requiring attentiveness is Avos (Berachos 34b). Rashi explains that since Avos is the first beracha, failure to concentrate during its recital reveals that the individual is not really interested in davening, in

which case it does not constitute a service. However, someone becoming preoccupied by his thoughts after the first beracha does not demonstrate that he did not want to daven, but simply that humans can easily be distracted. Another reason why attentiveness during Birkas Avos is essential is that Shemoneh Esrei begins with a blessing that focuses on Hashem's greatness, which is the entire purpose of prayer. If this blessing was recited without kavanah, one has failed to pray, thus requiring its repetition (Bach, Orach Chayim 101; Mishnah Berurah 101:3).

Should I not daven?

If the entire purpose of prayer is to focus on Hashem's greatness, what should someone do if he realizes that, because of circumstances beyond his control, he cannot possibly be attentive when he prays? On the one hand, the mitzvah requires him to pray properly, yet this is impossible to achieve.

The Gemara rules that he is exempt from prayer.

Someone whose thoughts are unsettled should not pray... Rabbi Chanina did not pray on a day that he had gotten angry... One who returns from a trip should not pray for three days (Eruvin 65a). Rashi explains that because of the exhaustion of the trip, he is not settled enough to pray properly, until three days have passed. The Rambam codifies this: Any prayer recited inattentively is not a prayer. Someone who prayed without thinking must repeat the prayer attentively. If he finds that he is distracted, it is forbidden for him to pray, until he composes himself. For this reason, someone returning from traveling, who is exhausted or distressed, may not pray until he composes himself. Our Sages said a person should wait three days until he is rested and calm, and only then should he pray (Rambam, Hilchos Tefillah 4:15). Thus, we see that someone who cannot have kavanah because of extenuating circumstances, such as illness or exhaustion, is exempt from davening. Similarly, we find this recorded in another early halachic source, the Semag**:

A person should assess himself. If he is able to focus his prayer at least in Birkas Avos, then he should pray. If he is unable to focus this much, then he should not pray (Positive Mitzvah #19).

Beyond our poor power to add or detract

The Shulchan Aruch modifies this conclusion, ruling as follows:

A person should not pray in a place where something will distract him and not at a time when he is distracted. However, now we are not that meticulous about this, because we do not concentrate that well in our prayers (Orach Chayim 98:2).

Nevertheless, the Shulchan Aruch still rules that one must have a minimum amount of kavanah to fulfill the mitzvah of praying: One who prays must be attentive to all the berachos. If he cannot be, he should at least focus on the beracha of Avos. And if he was inattentive to Avos, even if he recited the rest of the berachos with kavanah, he should repeat the prayer (Orach Chayim 101:1).

Is it a prayer if it lacked kavanah?

With this background, we can now tackle our initial question. What is the halacha if a person realizes, after the fact, that he recited the first beracha of Shemoneh Esrei without any kavanah?

The following Talmudic passage discusses our question:

Rabbi Yochanan said: I saw Rabbi Yannai pray, and then pray again (Berachos 30b). Why did Rabbi Yannai pray twice in quick succession? Rabbi Yirmiyah explained that Rabbi Yannai presumably had not prayed the first prayer with proper kavanah and therefore repeated it. Although the Gemara ultimately rejects Rabbi Yirmiyah's interpretation of Rabbi Yannai's actions, the point is still halachically valid: someone who davened without kavanah should repeat the Tefillah. This regulation is codified: If a person prayed without any kavanah when reciting the first beracha, he should repeat his prayers (Hagahos Ashri, Berachos, end of Chapter 5).

Will I be repeating davening forever?

This ruling may lead to the following predicament: If someone davened the first time without kavanah, perhaps he will daven again without kavanah. What will have been accomplished with the second davening? It is because of this concern that the previously cited rule is modified in the following statement: One who davens and did not focus on his prayer, if he knows that he can pray again and focus, he should repeat the prayer, and if not, he should not repeat the prayer (Sefer Hamitzvos Katan***, Mitzvah #11).

This last opinion is expanded upon by the Tur and, in turn, by the Rama (Orach Chayim 101), who rule that should someone fail to have kavanah during the

beracha of Avos, he should not repeat his prayer, because of the likelihood that he will not have kavanah the second time around, either.

This does not absolve us of the requirement to daven with kavanah, but merely explains that someone who davened without kavanah should not repeat the davening, since there is a good chance that the second davening will be no better than the first. For this reason, the Chayei Adam (34:2) rules that we do not repeat the Shemoneh Esrei; however, he notes that if the person realizes that he is not concentrating prior to reciting the name of Hashem at the end of Avos, he should return to the words Elokei Avraham and repeat most of the beracha. In this instance, since the beracha was not yet completed, he should attempt to recite the beracha with proper kavanah.

We cannot concentrate, we cannot hallow...

At this point, let us discuss Mutti's predicament. "Despite my best intentions, my mind sometimes wanders during davening. I recently learned that the Mishnah Berurah rules that one who recited the first beracha without kavanah should refrain from proceeding until the chazzan's repetition, and be very attentive to the chazzan's davening. I tried this once, but did not find this solution practical. Although I am trying hard that this situation not recur, is there a different resolution that I can use, should it happen again?"

Mutti is referring to the following point:

The Mishnah Berurah (in Bi'ur Halacha 101:1 s.v. Veba'dna) asks what one should do if, after completing the beracha of Avos, he realizes that he recited the first beracha without kavanah? How can he continue davening if he did not fulfill his mitzvah of praying?

The Mishnah Berurah is assuming that, without kavanah, the Tefillah had no purpose at all. He therefore feels that the person who is in the middle of davening and realizes that he recited the first beracha without kavanah faces a conundrum. He may not continue davening because this davening is purposeless, and, at the same time, he may not repeat the beracha he has already recited out of concern that the repeated beracha will also be said without kavanah. The Mishnah Berurah therefore suggests that someone in this predicament should wait until the chazzan repeats the Shemoneh Esrei and have in mind to fulfill his prayer requirement by paying careful attention to the chazzan's words.

Notwithstanding this analysis, the Mishnah Berurah notes that the Chayei Adam implies that once one has completed the first beracha of Shemoneh Esrei and realizes that he did not have kavanah, he may continue reciting Shemoneh Esrei. The question is, why? The answer appears to be that, although one is required to pray with kavanah, a prayer recited without kavanah does not have the status of a beracha recited in vain, and that the remaining Tefillah is still considered a Tefillah.

Beyond our poor power...

To resolve this question, the Kehilos Yaakov (Berachos #26; the exact numbering of the piece varies on which edition you see) explains that there are two distinct responsibilities, one to recite prayers and the other to pray with kavanah. One who prayed without kavanah fulfilled one mitzvah, but not the other. Therefore, the prayer recited without kavanah is not in vain, and even fulfills a mitzvah, but does not fulfill the greater mitzvah of praying with kavanah.

Rav Elyashiv (published in Madrich Hakashrus Glatt, Volume 20, pg. 143) objects to this approach, contending that we do not find anywhere that there are two distinct different mitzvos involved in prayer. He therefore suggests an alternative approach: someone who prayed without kavanah fulfilled one's responsibility to daven, but the importance of praying with kavanah allows one who can do so to pray again. Rav Elyashiv compares this to praying a voluntary prayer, a tefilas nedavah, and says that in the time of the Gemara, when people usually prayed with kavanah, one who prayed without kavanah was strongly advised to repeat the prayer, this time with kavanah. The Tur and Rama are explaining that when there is a good chance that the subsequent prayer will also be without proper kavanah, one should not pray a second time, because the voluntary prayer is only in order to pray with kavanah, which we cannot guarantee will result.

Praying when unsettled

However, both the Kehilos Yaakov and Rav Elyashiv's approaches are difficult to sustain in light of the following passage of Gemara, which we mentioned above:

Someone whose thoughts are unsettled should not pray... Rabbi Chanina did not pray on a day that he had gotten angry... One who returns from a trip should not pray for three days (Eruvin 65a).

According to both the Kehilos Yaakov and Rav Elyashiv, how can the Gemara rule that someone who is unsettled should not pray? One who fails to pray abrogates the mitzvah of prayer, which they hold one fulfills even if the prayer lacks kavanah? The above Gemara implies that there is no point to pray if he will not have kavanah.

These unsuccessful prayers shall not be berachos in vain

Rav Shelomo Zalman Auerbach (Halichos Shelomoh, Tefillah I pg. 99) presents a different approach that explains the Chayei Adam's ruling beautifully. Indeed, one who prayed without the minimum kavanah did not fulfill the mitzvah of Tefillah. However, these berachos are still praises to Hashem and are therefore not considered to be in vain, notwithstanding that one did not fulfill the mitzvah of Tefillah. According to this analysis, reciting Shemoneh Esrei without any kavanah at all did not fulfill the mitzvah of Tefillah, but the nineteen berachos recited were all "kosher" berachos. Rav Shelomo Zalman supports his approach with the fact that we train children to daven, knowing full well that they are not going to have kavanah. If indeed this is considered a beracha levatalah, how could we do this?

He therefore concludes that although a prayer without kavanah does not fulfill the mitzvah of Tefillah, it is nevertheless a valid beracha. It will count towards one's requirement to recite 100 berachos every day, which would certainly not be so if the beracha were in vain.

Now, what happens if someone finds himself in Mutti's predicament? After completing the first beracha of Shemoneh Esrei, he realizes that he failed to have kavanah. The poskim rule that he should not repeat the davening. However, following the ruling implied by the Chayei Adam, he may continue his Tefillah, and the berachos do not have the status of berachos levatalah, notwithstanding the fact that he will not fulfill the mitzvah of Tefillah. Although the Kehilos Yaakov and Rav Elyashiv proposed different approaches to resolve the question at hand, they also agree with the conclusion that Mutti may complete his Tefillah.

Conclusion

Certainly, one should do whatever one can to focus on the words of one's Tefillah, and particularly when reciting the first beracha of Shemoneh Esrei. Nevertheless, according to the Kehilos Yaakov, Rav Elyashiv and Rav Shelomoh Zalman Auerbach, one who failed to have kavanah in his first beracha may continue with his Tefillah.

* The name has been changed to protect his privacy.

** The author of this last statement is one of the Baalei Tosafos, Rabbi Moshe of Coucy, in his magnum opus, the Sefer Mitzvos Hagadol, which is usually called by its Hebrew acronym Semag. Although this work is not used today as one of the primary sources in deciding halacha, for a period of several hundred years, this was one of the main sources, if not the primary source, for halacha among Ashkenazic Jewry. It is one of the sources in halacha footnotes in the margin of the Gemara by the annotator Ein Mishpat. Although in the course of time, the Rosh and the Tur (and then later the Rama) supplanted the Semag as the main halachic source for Ashkenazi Jewry, it is still quoted frequently by the Beis Yosef and later commentaries.

*** The Semag's work, encompassing all the halachos that the Gemara teaches, is organized according to the 613 mitzvos. Shortly after this work was completed, a different Baal Tosafos, Rav Yitzchak of Corveille, authored a briefer work that summarizes the halachos of the mitzvos that we can observe during the time of the churban when living outside Eretz Yisrael. His work is called Sefer Hamitzvos Katan and is usually referred by the acronym Semak to distinguish it from the monumental work of the Semag.