

# OHRNET

SHABBAT PARSHAT TOLDOT · 29 CHESHVAN 5774 - NOV. 2, 2013 · VOL. 21 NO. 6

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

### THE RED, RED STUFF

*“Pour into me some of that red, red stuff” (25:30)*

**N**eoteny is the retention of immature characteristics into adulthood. It happens in the animal world. If your dog grew up, it would start to act like a wolf and devour your neighbors' kids. This would not make your neighbor very happy and puppy sales would plummet. So we arrest a dog's development so that it remains ever juvenile.

The same is true of TV sitcoms. The silly plots and sillier characters in which heartbreaks are resolved within minutes (usually just before the commercials) only make sense if they are seen as pubescent children trapped in adult bodies. So much of social and political life only makes sense if one sees in it the influence of neoteny.

The spiritual Masters tell us that the world we live in now is the world of Esav. It is a superficial world where appearance is all. Yaakov, the Jewish People, stands opposed to everything that is superficial. Our job is to teach the world there is reality beyond what you can see with your eyes. There is a G-d and He is One.

Esav and Yaakov (the Jewish People) share a symbiotic adversarial relationship. They are like two ends of a see-saw in a children's playground. When one is up, the other must be down. It can never be that both are up or down at the

same time. We learn this from the verse in this week's Torah portion: *“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.”*

Esav's superficiality is revealed when he bursts in on Yaakov — who is cooking lentils for the funeral meal of his grandfather Avraham — and demands, “Pour me some of that red, red stuff!” Why does Esav repeat the fact that the lentil stew is red? Because Esav is overly interested in the surface, in what things look like.

A small boy once came to visit Rav Shach, *zatzal*. The great sage proceeded to pull out two lollipops. “Which one would you like?” asked Rav Shach, “The red one or the green one?” Rav Shach's personal secretary turned to him and said, “The Rosh Yeshiva will teach him to be Esav!” Rav Shach replied, “He's a young boy. He should be interested in the way things look from the outside. Esav's problem was that he never grew up. He acted like a *yingele* even when he was supposed to be an adult.”

Esav was the prototypical neotenist.

• Source: *Tracate Avoda Zara 11b*

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

After 20 years of marriage, Yitzchak's prayers are answered and Rivka conceives twins. The pregnancy is extremely painful. G-d reveals to Rivka that the suffering is a microcosmic prelude to the worldwide conflict that will rage between the two great nations descended from these twins, Rome and Israel. Esav is born, and then Yaakov, holding onto Esav's heel. They grow and Esav becomes a hunter, a man of the physical world, whereas Yaakov sits in the tents of Torah developing his soul. On the day of their grandfather Avraham's funeral, Yaakov is cooking lentils, the traditional mourner's meal. Esav rushes in, ravenous from a hard day's hunting, and sells his birthright (and its concomitant spiritual responsibilities) for a bowl of lentils, demonstrating his unworthiness for the position of first-born. A famine strikes Canaan and Yitzchak thinks of escaping to Egypt, but G-d tells him that because he was bound as a sacrifice, he has become holy and must remain in

the Holy Land. He relocates to Gerar in the land of the Philistines, where, to protect Rivka, he has to say she is his sister. The Philistines grow jealous of Yitzchak when he becomes immensely wealthy, and Avimelech the king asks him to leave. Yitzchak re-digs three wells dug by his father, prophetically alluding to the three future Temples. Avimelech, seeing that Yitzchak is blessed by G-d, makes a treaty with him. When Yitzchak senses his end approaching, he summons Esav to give him his blessings. Rivka, acting on a prophetic command that the blessings must go to Yaakov, arranges for Yaakov to impersonate Esav and receive the blessings. When Esav in frustration reveals to his father that Yaakov has bought the birthright, Yitzchak realizes that the birthright has been bestowed correctly on Yaakov and confirms the blessings he has given Yaakov. Esav vows to kill Yaakov, so Rivka sends Yaakov to her brother Lavan where he may find a suitable wife.

## TALMUD Tips

ADVICE FOR LIFE

Based on the Talmudic Sages found in the seven pages of the Talmud studied each week in the Daf Yomi cycle

### SHEKALIM 16 - 22

*"The Torah that G-d gave to Moshe was white fire etched with black fire, fire blended with fire, fire extracted from fire and given by G-d with fire from Heaven."*

This statement is made on our *daf* by Rabbi Pinchas in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish. In the Zohar we find a similar statement that the Torah was written with "black fire upon white fire." One explanation of "black fire and white fire" is that black fire denotes Divine Mercy while white fire is Divine Justice. The Maharsha explains that to appreciate G-d one must recognize the fact that both mercy and judgment are Divine attributes.

• Shekalim 16b

*"If nine stores sell non-kosher meat and one store sells kosher meat, and one buys from one of the stores but is afterwards in doubt about which store he bought from, there is concern and the meat's status is forbidden due to doubt; if the meat is found on the ground, however, near these stores, it is forbidden due to certainty."*

This *beraita* teaches the well-known principles of "*rov*" and "*kavua*" — following the majority (*rov*) unless our doubt is the nature of the place from which one took the meat (*kavua*).

But does it really make a difference whether the item is forbidden due to "doubt" (*kavua*) or due to certainty (*rov*)? Isn't forbidden always forbidden? Well, it depends. Take the scenario where there are nine groups of chametz and one of matzah, and a piece was taken from one of the groups and moved into a house. Does the house need to be checked on account of that piece? No, since according to Torah law nullification of chametz (*bitul*) is sufficient, and there remains only the rabbinical obligation to check. But since the piece had the status of *doubt* and not certainty — since this is a case of *kavua* — one may be lenient and not check for chametz (*Pri Chadash*).

• Shekalim 19b

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## PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why was it important that Yitzchak look like Avraham?
2. Why does the Torah stress that Rivka was Betuel's daughter and Lavan's sister?
3. What are the two differences between Tamar's pregnancy and Rivka's pregnancy?
4. Why was Esav named Esav?
5. Who gave Yaakov his name?
6. How did Esav deceive his father?
7. Why was Esav faint when he returned from the field?
8. Why are lentils a food for mourners?
9. What was the birthright that Yaakov bought from Esav?
10. Why was Yitzchak not permitted to go to Egypt?
11. Why did the Philistines plug up the wells?
12. Why did Yitzchak lose his sight? (three reasons)
13. At what age should one anticipate his own death?
14. Why did Rivka ask Yaakov to bring two kid goats?
15. Why did Esav leave his special garments with Rivka?
16. What fragrance did Yitzchak detect on Yaakov's garments?
17. What was the "fat of the land" promised to Esav?
18. When will Esav be freed from subjugation to Yaakov?
19. What inspired Esav to marry the daughter of Yishmael?
20. Knowing that Machalat was Yishmael's daughter, it's self-evident that she was the sister of Nevayot. Why, then, does the Torah state that Esav married "Yishmael's daughter, the sister of Nevayot?"

## PARSHA Q&A!

### Answers to This Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 25:19 - So everyone would agree that Avraham was indeed his father.
2. 25:20 - To praise her, that even though her family was evil she was righteous.
3. 25:24 - Rivka gave birth at full term to two children, one righteous and one wicked. Tamar gave birth after seven months to two righteous children.
4. 25:25 - He was born fully developed. The name Esav is based on the Hebrew word for "made".
5. 25:26 - G-d.
6. 25:27 - Esav deceived Yitzchak by asking questions that suggested that he was very strict in mitzvah observance.
7. 25:29 - From having murdered.
8. 25:30 - They are round like a wheel and mourning is like a revolving wheel that eventually touches everyone.
9. 25:31 - The right to bring sacrifices.
10. 26:2 - Through the *akeida* he had attained the status of a *korban* and was forbidden to leave Eretz Canaan.
11. 26:15 - They felt that either marauders would attack to capture the wells, or, if attacking for other reasons, they would use the wells as a water supply.
12. 27:1 - a) From the smoke of the incense offered by Esav's wives to their idols; b) From the angel's tears which fell into Yitzchak's eyes at the time of the *akeida*; c) In order for Yaakov to receive the blessings.
13. 27:2 - When he reaches five years from the age his parents were when they passed away, until five years after.
14. 27:9 - One for Yitzchak and the other to offer as a *korban Pesach*.
15. 27:15 - He suspected that his wives might steal them.
16. 27:27 - The scent of *Gan Eden*.
17. 27:36 - Italy.
18. 27:40 - When the Jewish People transgress the Torah.
19. 28:7 - Seeing that his father despised his current wives, he resolved to take a wife from his father's family.
20. 28:9 - To indicate that Yishmael died between her betrothal and her wedding, and that it was Nevayot who gave his sister in marriage to Esav. Knowing the date of Yishmael's death, we can determine the date of Esav's marriage and thus Yaakov's age, 63, at the time of his flight from Esav.

לעילוי נשמות  
מרת אסתר בשה בת ר' משה יחזקאל ע"ה  
אשה יראת ה' ובעלת חסד  
נלב"ע ד' מנחם אב תשע"ג  
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

# Abarbanel

## ON PARSHAT TOLDOT

By Rabbi Pinchas Kasnett

**A**t the end of his life, Yitzchak decides to give a blessing of prosperity and family dominance to his oldest son Esav. His wife Rivka hears of his plan and concocts a charade to enable the younger son Yaakov to surreptitiously 'steal' the blessing from the blind Yitzchak. There are numerous difficulties with this episode. Why does Yitzchak want to bless the morally and spiritually deficient Esav? Why doesn't Rivka share with her husband her clear prophetic knowledge that Esav was destined to be subservient to Yaakov? Finally, how can a blessing intended for Esav end up being fulfilled in Yaakov?

Unlike Avraham, Yitzchak was unclear which of his two sons would take over after his death. He recognized that Yaakov's moral and spiritual commitment surpassed Esav's, but in the end he decided that Esav's first-born status tipped the scales. It is likely that his intense love for Esav blinded him to the truth. The verse that introduces this episode, "...Yitzchak had become old and his eyes dimmed..." should be interpreted both literally and figuratively. However, in order to provide Esav the opportunity for spiritual merit, Yitzchak directed him to prepare a meal from scratch in order to at least demonstrate his commitment to honoring parents.

Rivka had received a clear prophecy before the twins

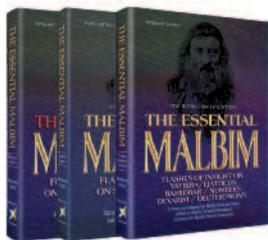
were born: "Two nations are in your womb...the elder shall serve the younger." The reason she did not share this prophecy with Yitzchak initially may have been due to the fact that she had sought out the advice which resulted in the prophecy without Yitzchak's permission. She also may have deferred to his higher spiritual and prophetic level. However, to share the prophecy with him now could actually be counterproductive. Still blinded by his love for Esav, Yitzchak could end up blessing Yaakov begrudgingly or withholding the blessing from both sons, leaving everything in G-d's hands. Rivka wanted Yitzchak to give Yaakov the blessing voluntarily and with a full heart.

In the end, Yaakov successfully passes himself off as Esav and receives a full-hearted blessing from his father. How can a blessing in error take effect? Abarbanel explains that a human being, even a prophet, is only a conduit for a blessing, a blessing which ultimately comes from G-d. The blessing is essentially a prayer, a petition for a desired result. This can be explained metaphorically: A farmer intends to plant barley but accidentally plants wheat instead. His intention has no effect on the outcome. Only wheat will grow. Yitzchak is only a conduit for the will of G-d. The blessing will only 'grow' in Yaakov, just like only wheat will grow in the field.

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## CUTTING OUT CIRCUMCISION

From: Manny

Dear Rabbi,  
Does the decision of the Council of Europe denouncing circumcision have any bearing on religious performance of this mitzvah? Would their recommendation of requiring consent at age 14 be taken into account to delay the brit milah?

Dear Manny,

Absolutely not! G-d commanded the Jewish People to circumcise their male children on the eighth day of life and human beings, no matter how ostensibly well-intended, have no authority to overrule G-d.

While there are circumstances in which brit milah may be postponed according to Torah Law, primarily for reasons pertaining to the well-being of the child, objections by non-Jews, themselves not commanded to circumcise, are not regarded.

However, if such a policy were ever enforced, even though it would have no direct bearing on the actual performance of the mitzvah, it would effectively cause Jews to leave the countries that would adopt it. Perhaps this is in underlying motive for some who are promoting the decision.

In truth, not only does the council have no authority to overrule G-d, as representatives of the European nations and peoples, they have no moral right to make that decision.

For one, the Jewish people have been fulfilling G-d's command to circumcise for thousands of years – much of which time Europe's ancestors were still barbarian, pagan idolaters. A Europe whose morality is founded on the Torah cannot claim G-d's command to the Jews to circumcise to be immoral.

Second, insofar as the concern is based on "unjustified" pain inflicted on Jewish children being circumcised, if this were the only pain ever inflicted on Jews in Europe, the continent should rightly be called "Eutopia". Representatives of peoples who for more than a millennia perpetrated the most horrific and murderous acts against the entire Jewish People, young and old, man and woman, healthy and infirm, have no right to impose empathy for our children.

Finally, the decision is biased and hypocritical. The same Council of Europe espouses religious freedom yet decries Jewish religious circumcision. And how can the same council denounce as a violation of the integrity of the human body a parent's decision to remove his son's foreskin while simultaneously endorsing a parent's decision to abort, thereby completely terminating his child's life?

Rather, the Council should recommend postponing abortion till 14 when the child can offer his consent.

## LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

## WHEN MORE IS LESS

**"And everything is according to the multitude of the deed." — Pirkei Avot 3:15.**

Lofty levels of development are not reached through the great size of a deed but rather through the great number of deeds. Repeated performance of good deeds gives one a strong hold on the level he aspires to, something that a single major performance alone cannot provide. The classic example is one who gives a thousand gold coins to one person in need but nothing to another. He will not develop the



characteristic of generosity as well as one who gives one coin a thousand times. The latter's repeated acts of generosity gave him a strong hold on this trait, while the former experienced a great single inspiration, which not reinforced and therefore evaporated.

The same is true in regard to the Torah's reward for good deeds. The reward of one who ransomed one captive with a hundred coins or one who gave a poor person a hundred coins is not as great as that of one who ransomed ten captives or gave ten poor people ten coins each.

• Rambam

## THE PRAYERS OF THE RIGHTEOUS

Through the ages the prayers of the righteous have shielded the Jewish people from much harm and have been the source of success and salvation, both for individuals as well as the nation. What is the power behind their prayers? Why are their words so cherished by G-d?

The Sages compare the prayers of the righteous to a pitchfork. They explain that just as a pitchfork turns over the dirt from one side to another, so too the prayers of the righteous turn G-d's attribute of strict judgment into mercy.

What is the difference whether G-d looks at us with eyes of mercy or strict judgment?

Let us imagine a child who has been misbehaving the entire day. Would it be wise for him to mention a toy he wants for his Chanuka present while he is being punished? When G-d's attribute of strict judgment is aroused, a person's flaws and misdeeds are brought to His attention. If, instead, G-d's attribute of mercy is aroused, his flaws will be overlooked and his good deeds will be emphasized.

We find in the beginning of Parshat Toldot that for ten years Yitzchak and Rivka had been trying to have a child. After ten years of fruitless efforts it became clear that Rivka was barren. In fact, Rivka lacked the organs necessary for childbearing (Zohar). Yitzchak began praying to G-d for his wife to conceive.

On the surface this story seems out of order. How many couples have enough trust in G-d to begin praying after finding out that they just wasted ten years trying to accomplish something that was, in reality, impossible? In an era when most people put all their hopes in medical experts, the righteous put their trust in G-d. They know that the words of prayer are real and powerful, and can change things. They know that the key to children, wealth, health and everything else lies in the Almighty's hands. To whom, then, does one turn when something is impossible? To the One Who spoke and created the world. And what did Yitzchak ask of his G-d? He prayed for the Almighty to create within Rivka the necessary organs for childbearing.

The prayers of the righteous are a testimony to the perfect faith they have in G-d. It is a testimony to their unwavering acceptance of G-d's will, even when things do not seem fair and just. It is well-known that G-d relates to us in the same manner in which we relate to Him. G-d, therefore, responds to their prayers favorably, overriding His attribute of strict judgment, and showering them and those whom they pray for with abundant mercy. In the merit of their perfect faith G-d transcends the laws of nature and performs countless miracles for His people.

## @ OHR *Profiles of Ohr Somayach Alumni and Students*

by Daniel Keebler

### *Kibbutznik Becomes Kosher Keeper*

**Gil Harris Age: 27**  
**Maalot Dafna, Jerusalem**  
**Independent Franchise Owner**  
**Center alumnus**

Gil Harris brought two buses of yeshiva guys and seminary girls to make his wedding at the non-religious Kibbutz he grew up on near Eilat. "It was the first time the kibbutz saw such a thing," he recalls with a smile. The whole Center program came, including the rabbis.

During Gil's army service he had started keeping kosher and attending Torah classes on his army base. Once he finished his army service, Gil met his future wife, a kibbutz volunteer from America. The

inspired couple decided to attend yeshiva and seminary for a year before getting married.

Gil returned to the Center program for a second year as a married man and then opened his first business, a bagel chain in Ramat Beit Shemesh. This one-time manager of his kibbutz's entire food industry went from an empty space in a building with no plumbing, lights, staff, or business plan, to a fully operational bagel shop in just four months.

More recently, Gil has started his own car rental business ("Choshen Car") in Ma'alot Dafna. In the evenings he learns Torah in the local synagogue and attends a Shabbat study group that traces the path of Jewish law from the Talmud down to everyday practice. Gil says that the Center rabbis taught him to "serve G-d with who you are, and maintain your uniqueness."

