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PARSHA INSIGHT

BY RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR

Waiting for G-dot

“These are the generations of Yitzchak ben Avraham; Avraham gave birth to Yitzchak.” (25:19)

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch remarks that the universal sign if you want someone to be quiet, if you want them to listen, is to raise your finger to your lips and say “Shh!” The sound of air flowing over lips is the universal sign to be still. The English word “hush” is connected with this sound. The same sound appears in the name of the month we are in this year — *Cheshvan*. The root of the word *Cheshvan* is *chash*, which in Hebrew means quiet.

The very name of the month commands us to be still, to be quiet and reflect.

If you look at the prayers of Rosh Hashana, the overwhelming theme is that exile of the G-d’s majesty. It’s true that we also speak about *teshuva* and mending our ways — but time and time again we pray for the day when the whole world will recognize that the G-d of Israel is the “The King”.

All of the anti-Semitism of the world, whether the BDS of the cultured glitteratus knocking another brick from the wall of Jewish security, or the bloodied kitchen

knife of a fanatic slaughtering a family in their Shabbat peace, or a truck driven down a cycling path mowing down the young and innocent — all of this, at its root, is a denial of the G-d of Israel.

The reflection of the month of *Cheshvan* requires us to think: After praying so hard over the great High Holy Days, how much do our lives reflect that yearning for the coming of Mashiach and the re-establishment of the Kingdom of G-d?

For surely it is at hand.

The last verse of last week’s Torah portion says, *“These were the years of Yishmael’s life... over all his brothers he dwelled.”* This week’s portion begins, *“These are the generations of Yitzchak ben Avraham; Avraham gave birth to Yitzchak.”*

When Yishmael ceases to dwell over all his brothers, when the petro-dollars have dried up, then the sun of Mashiach ben David, the scion of Avraham, will rise.

May it be speedily in our days!

• Source: Based on the *Ba’al HaTurim*

PLEASE JOIN US...

...in saying Tehillim/Psalms and a special prayer to G-d for the safety and security of all of Klal Yisrael in these times of conflict and conclude with the following special prayer:

“Our brothers, the entire family of Israel, who are delivered into distress and captivity, whether they are on sea or dry land – may G-d have mercy on them and remove them from stress to relief, from darkness to light, from subjugation to redemption now, speedily and soon.”

Maccot 2 - 8

Measure for Measure? It Depends...

The first chapter of this Tractate deals with the issue of “*eidim zomemim*” — plotting witnesses — that is taught in the Chumash in Parshat Shoftim. Let’s examine a case of alleged murder. Normally, if there are two sets of witnesses who offer contradictory testimony, the Beit Din does not know which witnesses to believe and therefore dismisses the charges and sends away the suspect and all of the witnesses. However, there is a special case when the second set of witnesses do not testify about whether the murder happened or not, but instead testify that the first witnesses could not possibly have seen what they said they saw (Reuven murders Shimon in a specific place at a specific time, for example) because the first witnesses were *with them at that time* in a completely different location. In this special case the Torah teaches to accept the testimony of the second set of witnesses and states, “And you will do to him (the first set of witnesses) as he intended to do to his fellow person” (Devarim 19:19). This means that just as the first witnesses plotted and attempted to have the defendant Reuven killed as a result of their testimony, “the stone they have cast bounces back at them” (see the Maharal on this verse) and it is the *witnesses* who receive the capital punishment they plotted for the defendant, who is exonerated.

There is, however, one seemingly unusual condition in order for this law to apply: the defendant must not have been killed by the Beit Din when the second set of witnesses testified about the first set. Rashi states this when explaining Ravina’s statement on 2b that *kal v’chomer* reasoning cannot be used in the case of *eidim zomemim*: “The Torah states ‘as he (the witness) plotted’, but not ‘as he did’.” “*K’asher zamam, v’lo k’asher asah.*” This oft-quoted line that Rashi states is not actually found in our *masechta*, but is rather taught by our Sages in the Mechilta. But we indeed find this same idea taught in our *masechta*, although based on a different derivation, in the *mishna* on 5b: “as he plotted to do to his fellow man (*achiv*)” — meaning that his fellow man is *still alive*.

Aside from the details of this particular case, there is what seems to be a quite basic question that needs answering. Normally in a case of two witnesses whose testimony is contradictory with the testimony of two other witnesses we say that we don’t know which set of witnesses is telling the truth, and we are therefore left in doubt as to the truth, and we “throw all of the witnesses out”. The case of *eidim zomemim* is also a case of “two versus two”, so why is it that in this case we believe the second set and punish the first set — doing to the first witnesses what they plotted to do to the defendant?

Numerous explanations are offered, with the seemingly most straightforward being that this particular teaching is a “*chidush*” — a novel idea that the Torah *decrees*: to believe the second set and to mete out punishment to the first set “measure for measure”, in accordance with what they plotted to do to the defendant.

Another way to view this case as being different is as follows: Other cases involving contradictory testimony revolve around whether the crime was committed or not, such as testimony that Reuven killed Shimon versus testimony that he did not. Here, however, the second witnesses are not testifying about the crime, but rather about the whereabouts of the first witnesses at the time. The first set said they were in a certain place, whereas the second set said that the first set could not have been in that place since the first set was with them at the time in a different place. The testimony of the first set about where they were is not acceptable, since that constitutes testimony about “a relative” — their closest relatives: themselves. However, the second witnesses are capable of giving acceptable testimony about the first witnesses and their location. Therefore, the set is believed.

There is another explanation, from Rabbi Meir Simcha HaKohen (the “Ohr Somayach”) in his commentary on the Chumash called “Meshech Chochma”. This explanation is based on human nature and behavior, and explains why the second set should be believed due to common sense.

Although normally we would have no way of knowing that the second set is the one that is telling the truth, in the case of *eidim zomemim* where the defendant has not been not yet been executed we can logically understand why we should indeed believe the second set. Granted, if the defendant had *already been executed* we might suspect that the executed defendant’s close relative — a son or father, for example — might very well seek revenge on the witnesses, and they would be suspected of hiring the second set of witnesses to falsely testify that the first are *zomemim* and should likewise be executed. However, if the defendant was sentenced (*gmar din*) *but not yet executed*, it would

Continued on page four

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?"
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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.
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LOVE of the LAND

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

Dalton — Tomb of the Galilee Sage

While most of the Talmudic Sages are identified with the name of their father or simply with their own name, the exception is Rabbi Yosef HaGalili.

This colleague of Talmudic giants such as



Rabbi Akiva earned his surname through spending his early years in Galilee.

Tradition has it that his tomb is located in Moshav Dalton, some three miles north of Tsefat.

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...continued from page two

be a "smarter" and more efficient idea for the defendant or the close relative to hire a second set of witnesses to *contradict* the first set — to say that "Reuven did not kill Shimon" — but *not* to testify that the first set are *zomemim*. Why? When contradicting them, the court will be left in doubt, and this will result in a dismissal for everyone — the witnesses and the *defendant*. The case is over and everyone will go home, with the desired effect of hiring the second set of (false) witnesses having been accomplished. If, however, in this case, the defendant hires a second set who testifies that the first witnesses are *zomemim* — and therefore make the first witnesses obligated to be executed, as they sought to do to the defendant — it is possible, probable or likely that the first set would proceed to hire a *third* set who would testify that the second set are *zomemim*, in order to free themselves of the death penalty. And so on, the second would hire a fourth, etc. — and the defendant is not certain to go free in the end. Therefore, had he hired false witnesses it would have been to his advantage to hire ones who *contradict* the first set but not ones who make them *zomemim*. Thus if a second set comes and says that the first are *zomemim* we can be assured that they were *not* hired. They are *true* witnesses. (See the Meshech Chochma who, with this approach in mind and considering the atonement aspect of a punishment delivered by Beit Din, explains why the Rambam distinguishes between a capital case and a case of lashes involving *eidim zomemim*. The Rambam rules that *eidim zomemim* are punished with lashes even if the defendant they testified against *already* received lashes, and we do not say in that case, "*K'asher zamam, v'lo k'asher asah.*")

• *Sanhedrin 5b*

BY RABBI YIRMIYAHU ULLMAN

Soul's Choice

From: Tamar

*Dear Rabbi,
What determines why any particular soul is placed within a specific person or family? Does the soul have any choice in the matter? Is there any way that parents can somehow choose what soul is placed in their child? Might the placement of souls have anything to do with reincarnation and the set of challenges a person is confronted with regarding family or in life in order to achieve its "tikkun" (rectification)?*

Dear Tamar,

This is a very interesting and stimulating question!

The simple, general answer seems to be that in most cases, practically speaking, it is G-d alone who is directly and solely responsible for deciding which souls go to which bodies, thereby determining to a large extent everything that will happen to the soul, based on the context in which G-d, for reasons known only to Him, chooses to place the soul in this world.

That being said, there are some fascinating exceptions that I can think of which relate to your questions.

The soul generally does not choose a body. In fact, in most cases, if the soul could choose, it would choose to remain in the spiritual plane with all its delights and splendor in the presence of G-d, and not be confined to a course and limited body imprisoned in the physical plane. G-d therefore "forces" the soul into a body in this world for its ultimate good. However, G-d does not force "righteous" souls this way, since they do not need this rectification. Nevertheless, such souls "agree" — they choose to be placed in bodies in order to benefit the world in gen-

eral and help others fulfill their potential. In such cases, the soul chooses, at least in general terms, to be in a body.

Parents generally cannot choose the soul of their children. However, parents can have a major influence over what soul G-d decides to place in their charge. Torah sources are replete with teachings indicating that the degree of holiness of the parents, or lack thereof, has a major impact on which souls are placed in their children. This is particularly so regarding a couple's behavior and intentions during their union. In fact, there are stories of particular *tzadikim* who actually engaged in mystical elevations and personally chose the soul to be brought down.

The placement of souls is not dependent on reincarnation, since G-d places "first time" souls in bodies, where reincarnation is not relevant. Nevertheless, because kabbalistic sources teach that nowadays there are no "new" souls, but rather most people are reincarnations, that, practically, would mean reincarnation will be a major factor in determining in what bodies, and into what families, souls will be born. This will obviously have a lot to do with one's familial relationships, their challenges and *tikkun*-rectification.

One very interesting expression of this involves the Torah mitzvah of *yibum*. If a man dies leaving a widow with no children, the deceased brother is required to marry the widow in order that their son perpetuate the deceased brother's lineage. Ramban writes that this happens because the soul of the deceased is reincarnated into the son of the *yibum* couple. Based on this, the author of Pele Yoetz actually remarks that people who knew the deceased brother while he was alive are required to inform the son what he needs to rectify based on what they know of him from his previous reincarnation!

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WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

BY RABBI REUVEN CHAIM KLEIN

The Unaffiliated Nations

When a very pregnant Rivka consulted with the prophets Shem and Ever to find out what is in store for her unborn child, she was informed that she was actually carrying twins. The prophet cryptically spoke about her future sons Jacob and Esau: “Two nations (*goyim*) are in your stomach, and two nations (*leumim*) shall separate from your innards, and one nation (*leom*) will be stronger than the other nation, and the greater will serve the younger” (Gen. 25:23). In this one verse there are three different words used which mean “nation” and, of course, the Hebrew word *am* also means “nation”.

Rashi (to Ps. 2:1) writes in the name of Rabbi Menachem Ibn Saruk (920-970) that *leomim*, *umim*, and *goyim* are all words which bear very similar meanings. Rabbi Wolf Heidenheim (1757-1832) infers from Rashi's comment that these words are not true synonyms that mean the exact same thing; rather, they have slightly different, nuanced meanings. What do all these words for “nation” really mean and what is the difference between their implications?

In his commentary to Psalms, Rabbi Yoel Ibn Shuaib (a 15th century Spanish commentator) writes that *goy* refers to a nation that is not united under one king (like the Phillistines who were ruled by a pentaverate comprised of five leaders, see Josh. 13:3), while the words *umah/leom* refer to a nation united under one king. Similarly, Rabbi Heidenheim explains that the word *goy* refers to a conglomeration of people who are not necessarily united or connected to each other in any concrete way. The word *am*, by contrast, refers specifically to a group of people who are united by way of a singular leader, king, or G-d/god. According to this, every *am* is also a *goy*, but not every *goy* is also an *am*.

Following this basic approach, Malbim further explains that the word *goy* is a more general and vague type of nation, while the word *am* denotes a smaller, more specific type of nation. For this reason the Jewish people are generally referred to as an *am* (*Am Yisrael* is “the Nation of Israel”), while other nations of the world are referred to as *goyim* (“nations”). The only exception, Malbim notes, is that when the Bible wants to focus on the multitudes of the Jewish population it will sometimes use the word *goy* to refer to the Jewish People simply because that word is more associated

with greater numbers than the word *am* is.

Malbim further explains that the word *goy* is related to the word *gviah* (body), and in its crudest form refers to simply a collection of “bodies” who are joined together as one unit. There are four possible reasons why these individuals might unite: geographical considerations, linguistic affinities, genealogical realities, or simply the desire to enter a political union. Each of these types of groups — people who live together, people who speak the same language, people who are descendants of the same tribal patriarch, and people who agreed to unite — is called a *goy*. They are united by a “marriage of convenience”, as no other goals or values really unify them. The word *am*, on the other hand, is specifically related to the concept of sovereignty and authority. Thus, a nation described as an *am* can only be a nation that is united under a singular king — not a group of people who join together for any other reason.

Based on this, Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865) and Malbim explain why the Bible almost never conjugates the word *goy* in the possessive form, but does do so for the word *am*. The word *goy* is simply a loose confederation of people who decided to join together, but cannot be attributed to one specific leader/king. In contrast, the word *am* by definition refers to a group of people ruled by one king. Therefore, the word *am* can and does appear numerous times in the Bible in the possessive form as belonging to its king (*amcha* is “your nation”, *ami* is “my nation”, *amo* is “his nation”, etc.). In the case of the Jewish People, that possession almost always belongs to G-d.

Rabbi Wertheimer argues that an *am* is a group of like-minded individuals who act similarly. For this reason, the Bible says about the day the Jews accepted the Torah “On this day, you became a nation (*am*) to the L-rd, your G-d” (Deut. 27:9). This also explains how a swarm of grasshoppers can be called an *am* (Joel 2:2), even though locusts are not united under a single king, as explicitly noted in Proverbs 30:7. (Nonetheless, see *Biur HaGra* to Isa. 1:4 who writes that *goy* denotes people who share a common manner and *am* simply denotes a mass of individuals.)

Rabbi Heidenheim approvingly cites an interesting point made by Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814): the word *am* is spelled the same as the

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PRAYER Essentials

BY RABBI YITZCHAK BOTTON

Laws of *Barchu*

Before the blessings of Shema, the shliach tzibur (congregation leader) recites in a loud voice and in the presence of at least ten men, “Bless G-d, the blessed One,” and the tzibur (congregation) responds, “Blessed is G-d, the blessed One, for all eternity.” After calling upon the tzibur to bless G-d, the leader must repeat after them, so as not to give the appearance that he is excluding himself from the obligation to bless G-d. (Tur and Shulchan Aruch O.C. 57:1)

It is very important to make sure to say *Barchu* with a *minyan* each day, for it is taught in Midrash Ruth that the soul does not fully settle in the body until one answers to the *Barchu* prayer... thus one must make an effort to pray with a *minyan* (Kaf HaChaim in the name of Shalmi Tzibur). It is also written in the name of the Arizal that even one who rises early to learn Torah does not fully “receive” his soul until he prays and answers to *Barchu*, at which point the soul settles within the person. This is the reason that the response to *Barchu* has five words in it — corresponding to the five names of the soul: *Nefesh, Ruach, Neshama, Chaiyah* and *Yechida*. (Kaf

HaChaim)

Reciting *Barchu* is so important for one’s soul that it is the custom in some places to say it at the end of the morning prayers for those that missed it. We also find in the early writings (Rokeach, mentioned in the Beit Yosef) a remedy for someone who prayed without a *minyan*: to say a *beraita* of Rabbi Akiva which mentions the *Barchu* praise in it. One should not say it in the middle of the prayers so as not to cause an interruption. Rather, it should be said at the end of prayers before *Aleinu*. Yet there are some who are of the opinion that G-d’s name should not be recited when reading the *beraita*, and therefore each person should consult a rabbi to determine the proper custom for him (see Ben Ish Chai and Piskei Tshuvot).

The custom is to bow when saying *Barchu*, and there is a source for this in the Rishonim. However, one should not bow as deeply as is done for the Shemoneh Esrei, but rather should bow slightly. One should take care to be in the upright position when saying G-d’s name, and to be facing the *Aron Kodesh* (East) when bowing (Piskei Teshuvot).

What’s In a Word...continued from page six

word *im* (“with”), as both are spelled AYIN-MEM. This indicates that the word *am* represents a stronger connection between the members of the nation than does the word *goy* because the word *am* is related to the word for “with”.

Based on the Midrash (*Bereishet Rabbah* §63:27), Malbim explains that the word *leom* refers to a group of people joined by a common religion. He explains that the term *leom* can be more inclusive than the word *am* because sometimes multiple kingdoms might share the same religion. Rabbi Wertheimer says a *leom* is united by either a common king (as Rashi and Targum to Gen. 25:23 translate *leom* as kingdom) or a common religion. Rabbi Yehuda Leib Edelman (1760-1828) writes that the word *leom* or *om* (as it is used by some post-Biblical poets) refers to a family or tribe within a greater nation.

It is thus probably related to the Hebrew word *em* and the Aramaic word *imma* which mean “mother”.

Interestingly, Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrahi (to Gen. 20:4) writes that the word *goy* can only refer to a nation and not an individual, while Rabbi Shlomo Ibn Melech (*Michlal Yofi* to Gen. 20:4) and Radak (*Sefer HaShorashim*) cite in the name of Rabbeinu Yonah that *goy* can also refer to an individual. Ultimately, Rabbi Mecklenburg proves from Exodus 21:8 that the word *am* or *goy* does not just refer to a national group as a whole, but could also be used to refer to any individual within such a group. This, of course, is the basis of the colloquial usage of the word *goy* to refer to a single gentile, even though the word *goy* literally means “nation”.

Lilyu Nishmat my mother Bracha bat R’ Dovid
and my grandmother Shprintza bat R’ Meir

Letter & Spirit

Insights based on the writings of Rav S. R. Hirsch

BY RABBI YOSEF HERSHMAN

Misleading Deception

The blessing ruse recorded in this week's *parsha* unsettles us with a barrage of questions. To review the story: Yitzchak, blind in his old age, calls for his son Eisav in order to bless him. He instructs Eisav to prepare food according to his liking so that he may bless him. Rivka overhears the conversation and instructs Yaakov to pose as Eisav. She assuages Yaakov's concerns that he will be discovered and that the sham will only bring curse upon him, and she accepts full responsibility, including any curse. Upon Rivka's bidding, Yaakov brings her the animals and she prepares them. She dresses him in Eisav's clothing, and adorns his neck and arms with goat skin, so that Yitzchak may perceive him as the hairy Eisav.

Yaakov beats Eisav to the scene and presents the dish to his father. Yitzchak is confused — his senses give him different clues: it is the voice of Yaakov, the language of Yaakov, but the hands and smell of Eisav. Ultimately, he gives the blessing to the son before him, a blessing of material bounty and political strength.

Moments later, Eisav returns, eager to accept his blessing. When Yitzchak realized he was duped, a very great terror seizes him. When Eisav understands what happened, he shrieks a loud and bitter cry, and begs his father for any blessing that has been reserved for him. But Yitzchak can no longer bless him — he has already blessed Yaakov to be a master over Eisav with all the necessary material provisions. With more prodding, Yitzchak carves out a new blessing for Eisav: he too will enjoy the fat of the land and material blessing, but gaining political advantage will depend on Yaakov's spiritual strength and Eisav's submissive spirit. Raging with fury, Eisav plots to kill Yaakov. Rivka instructs Yaakov to flee to the house of Lavan. Only then does Yitzchak bless Yaakov with the spiritual blessing of Avraham — to be a fruitful nation and inherit the Land.

Rav Hirsch prefaces his discussion with two qualifications: he does not see his role as an apologetic, but will not refrain from conclusions that may appear to others as apologetic. Further, he plainly concedes that even after analysis, much may still appear unjustified, especially when measured by the nation whose name of honor — “*yeshurun*” — attests to the virtue of straightforward integrity.

Of the three main actors, Yaakov's behavior is the most clear and transparent. He obeys his mother's command. She never expects him to act for his own interest — Rivka knows that he will resist the ruse. She silences

objection by taking full responsibility and appealing to his duty to obey her.

But what could Rivka have been thinking? How could a blessing won by wile bring any true benefit from the G-d of Truth? And if she had in mind some concrete benefit such as priority in inheritance, then such grant would be null and void after the deception was inevitably discovered! Moreover, the whole masquerade seems rather clumsy. Who would really be fooled by goatskins wrapped around neck and hands?

The only thing she could have hoped to achieve was the masquerade itself! She hoped, and knew, that that the truth would be discovered. Eisav, a “hunter with his mouth,” knew well how to disguise his true character. He had succeeded — despite his marriage to two idolatrous Hittite women — in convincing his father that he was a befitting heir to guide the House of Avraham. Until now, Rivka had stalled Yitzchak from blessing Eisav, hoping to bring about his disillusionment. But when all else failed, her plan was this: *Demonstrate to Yitzchak how easily he can be deceived!* If even Yaakov, the wholesome one (*ish tam*), could pose before him as the warrior, how much easier could Eisav pose before him as righteous. She succeeded. When Yitzchak understood what happened, our Sages describe his terror as seeing Gehenom open before him — he saw how his whole life he had been deceived. Now aware, he affirmed the blessing to Yaakov, “*he shall be blessed.*”

As for Yitzchak, his intention was to bless Eisav materially and Yaakov spiritually. When Eisav pleads for any “reserved blessing,” he understands that two blessings were considered, and asks for the one intended for Yaakov. But this blessing for spiritual power is inappropriate for Eisav, and indeed Yaakov receives this blessing as he sets off to Lavan's house to marry. Yitzchak envisioned a partnership where Eisav, with his material power, and Yaakov, with his spiritual power, would, in harmony, build the House of Avraham. But Rivka understood, from her own childhood, that material things only bring blessing when guided by the spirit of Avraham, and that the blessings must be bestowed on the one son so moved by that spirit.

Misleading Yitzchak, in fact, led to the correction of a grave deception, and ensured that material and spiritual might be entrusted to the only son capable of forming a nation who would lead to world to the service of G-d.

• Source: Commentary, Bereishet 26:1

BY RABBI ZE'EV KRAINES

The Right Recipe

The mysterious recipes for making the special ink used in the writing of *mezuzot*, tefillin and Torah scrolls sound like they come from one of the dusty old tomes of Potions Master Horace Slughorn, of Hogwarts renown. One might ask, “What’s wrong with using a Bic retractable ball-point goose quill?”

What’s clear in our tradition is that Moshe was told by G-d at Sinai that these holy items must be written with an ink called *de’yo*. It’s also clear that this *de’yo* must be black and must have staying power. The Zohar indicates that ideally its ingredients must derive from plants. Over millennia the technology used to achieve these outcomes has changed, but the principles remain the same.

From the Dead Sea scrolls and ancient tefillin analyzed using a cyclotron at UC Davis we can see that originally scribal ink was carbon-based. Soot was gathered from burning vegetable fats, mostly olive oil. Charcoal dust was produced by burning vegetable matter such as beech trees or cedars. Often, a glass plate was suspended over the burning materials, and the gathered soot was scraped off for use.

Durability was achieved by adding oak gall-nut powder, a substance rich in tannic acid, to “bite” into the parchment. The galls are formed when a gall wasp lays eggs on the leaves of oak trees. The hatched larvae feed upon the tree, secreting an irritant that prompts the tree to create a growth “nut” around the larva. This substance is still an important part of scribal ink today.

A gummy substance (now, gum arabic) was also added to keep all the ingredients evenly suspended in solution, improve the ink’s even flow from the reed or quill, and keep it from bleeding into the surface of the parchment. It also increases the brilliancy and gloss of the ink. Unfortunately, with time this substance dries and may cause the letters to crack.

Over the centuries the secret of producing a durable ink made from carbon black has been lost. The Talmud records a halachic controversy regarding adding a chemical blackening agent (vitriol: ferrous sulfate) into the mix. Although the classic halachic sources recommend refraining from adding this ingredient, contemporary authorities have allowed its use, as carbon-based ink alone is not a practical option.

Scribal ink is not holy, but all the ingredients involved in the production of *mezuzot* and other holy items must be kosher, even though they are not consumed. Some researchers have asserted that commercial inks may contain problematic ingredients such as glycerin or shellac and are not an alternative to a traditionally made product for that reason alone. So, make sure your retractable goose quill is preloaded with the right stuff.

• Sources: *Shulchan Aruch* O.C. 32:3 and Y.D. 271:6

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